

WEDNESDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 1929.

FREDERICK CARR ROLLETT further examined. (No. 5.)

*Witness:* Mr. Chairman, I was giving the Committee a description of the character of the land which will be opened up by the railway. From Waiotapu southward it is as level as this table, and therefore it will be very easy to make a railway there, and there are no big bridges to be made. I say that it is easy country, and there is a tremendous amount of level or easily ploughable country on each side of the railway. There is Maori settlement on one side, and a lot of that is decent country, and highly suitable for cutting up into small farms. By intensive cultivation that land can be made tremendously and permanently productive. The land on the east side of the lake goes back in rolling hills, covered with scrub at the present time. There are also numerous valleys. Some of these valleys are twelve or fourteen miles long, with a considerable amount of easy country on each side, all offering scope for farming in the future. When you get down to the Waiohke Valley you can see what has been done by the Prisons Department. They have instituted two farms in that district; the first one is at Hautu. These are in valleys that run back from the eastward of Lake Taupo. Their approach is along the road from Taupo to Tokaanu.

1. *Mr. Massey.*] How far are they away from the Tokaanu Township?—Twelve or fourteen miles.

2. And about fifty miles from the railway?—Yes. That is quite easy country all the way. That Hautu Valley, which has been handled by the Prisons Department, is a sample of the other valleys. It happens to be cultivated by the Prisons Department, which has shown what that land can do. In the floor of the valley the land is better than the average pumice soil, because originally there was a certain amount of swamp on each side of the river, and there have also been washings down from the Kaimanawa Ranges. When I was there, there were oats 6 ft. high. They have broken in some thousands of acres, so that it is not a mere pocket experiment: they have done it on a large-enough scale to show what can be done with that country. But one of the great values of that work is to show what has been done in the hilly lands on each side of the valley. That is typical of all this vast extent of pumice country. The floor of the valley might be exceptional, but the sides of the valley are just like the other country. They have several thousands of acres under cultivation, and they are turning off each year large quantities of live-stock, and they are making as good farms as any one could wish to see. The intention, I believe, is later to dispose of these ready-made farms to settlers when there are sufficient of them to warrant forming settlement. Farther south from there, up the Tongariro Valley, is the Rangipo Prison Farm. There are 10,000 acres there that the Prisons Department are breaking in, and they are getting just as good results in grass and crops in that Tongariro Valley as they are getting in the Hautu Valley. How far settlement could be carried up the Tongariro Valley I do not know, but I cannot see why it should not be carried right up to Waiouru because that is the same class of land; and even there, although the extent of easy country is not so great as on the other end of Taupo, yet from that valley backwards there are a certain number of valleys capable of making good farms so long as they are properly worked. When you get farther to the south from Hautu you strike some swamp land on the shores of Lake Taupo. Whether that can be drained I cannot say, although I do not doubt that by pumping and banking you could drain a large proportion of that area. Anyhow, the Maori owners are deeply impressed with the value of those thousands of acres of swamp land on the south side of Lake Taupo.

3. Is there plenty of fall to the Waikato River?—Yes, plenty of fall. When you get down to the south of Lake Taupo you open up big plains that lead out to the National Park. There is a lot of easy country on each side, and the comparatively level country runs towards Waimarino. That, of course, will have access from the Main Trunk line, when you get farther to the westward, and therefore we are less interested in that country. All out to the west of Lake Rotoaira there is a great extent of easy country, some of which is easily drained swamp land, draining into Lake Rotoaira, and capable of being made into good little farms. You might think that all this is rough, broken country on the west side of Lake Taupo, but it is only rough near the edges of the lake. As you go to the westward it is nice easy country, mostly in tussock, with plenty of totara forest, like park land. You can enter the forest and see big totara-trees 7 ft. or 8 ft. in diameter. This large sheet of water, Lake Taupo, will tap a large area of good country. The Maoris have a dairy-factory at Waihi, and most of the produce is brought from the west side of the lake. Apart from the land available for farming purposes, there are good forests of valuable timber—the most valuable timber left in the whole of New Zealand.

4. What area is there?—It is a big area. It is open land and forest land that runs into 200,000 or 300,000 acres, I do not know what area the Tongariro Company has options over, but it is sufficiently large to cause them to propose to build a costly railway to open up the timber area, and no company with common-sense would expend a large sum of money in putting in a railway from Kakahi to the shores of Lake Taupo, as is their proposal, unless they had very large resources to warrant it. This is a very important question. Farther up on the west side of Taupo, there I have not been, but I have climbed one of the peaks not very far from the lake, which gives you a commanding view of the country roundabout, and from which you can see the country going in easy waves back towards the Main Trunk line, it is hilly and undulating country, alternating with valuable forests and scrub country and tussock plains. You can ride through there to the Main Trunk line, but the products of the nearer lands will come into Lake Taupo or be brought to this proposed railway. I have only given you a bird's-eye view of this country according to my observation of it, having ridden and walked through it at different times during the last twenty-five years, and I think you could not get it more quickly or more readily from anybody who had not been through it so often. Before concluding I would like to say that my opinion, as I expressed it when introducing my evidence, was that I look upon practically all this country as a gift to the nation. It is in the power of the Government of this country