

53. You consider that the railway would be for developmental purposes mainly?—That is the idea I have had in my mind, but I have been disappointed that so much of the arable land should be cut up and put into forests, but that stroke of the pen which gave the State Department 300,000 acres for State forests cannot cut it up and turn it into farms.

54. *Mr. Massey.*] Have you any idea of the cost of bringing this land into grass?—Well, there are various estimates, but I have talked to a large number of settlers on the subject, and from what they say it depends upon how it is done. I have seen country there where the tractor has been used and they have ploughed the small scrub under. There they have put the land into first rough pasture for between £3 and £4 an acre; but I should say that to put the land into decent pasture with a fair amount of manure, and to make the land worthy of your labour, it would cost you from £4 10s. to £6 10s. per acre, and then it would be cheap pasture, providing you have not to pay too much for the land.

55. What is the carrying-capacity of it?—It is generally estimated that that class of land will carry a dairy cow well to 3 acres—that is, roughly speaking, £15 or £20 per cow.

56. But this £6 10s. per acre does not include the cost of fencing?—No, I should say that £1 10s. per acre would have to be added for fencing. They used to reckon £1 an acre for fencing, but I should estimate it at from £1 10s. to £2 for fencing—and you would get your value even then.

57. What about buildings?—When you come to buildings you cannot give a comparative value, because it depends upon the class of buildings you put there. You might put up a palatial house and a small milking-shed, or a poor house and a big milk-shed. It means a variation in the cost, but you know that a house costs as much as the owner desires to spend upon it. If he is short of money and willing to live simply he can put up a shanty for £100 or £150, and many good farmers and their wives have lived in shanties costing less than that. Of course, you could put up a house costing £1,000, and that would affect the capital value of your holding; but if the State were going to take a hand, as it should do, in helping a settler to establish himself on the land, £250 or £300 or £400 per house would not be too much. The family would start in moderate comfort, and the capital cost would be more than represented in the satisfaction of the wife and the family in living under decent conditions “from the jump.”

58. Can you give any idea of the production per cow on that land?—I have seen records of herds going up to 300 lb. butterfat in the Rotorua district. In the Reporeia district they have pretty good herds; though they have not been there long enough to fine down their herds to the best quality, there are certainly good herds there. At Wharepaina there are good herds; the Hancocks have good herds there. If you had that land worked up to a good condition it would compare in butterfat-production with most of the land in the Waikato. Good cows, good grass, and a proper system of rotation is all that is required.

59. And you think it would be necessary to build the railway before the district could be served profitably?—I think so, if you are going to do it on a large scale. When you say that it is absolutely essential, it depends on how you are going to settle the country. If the State did take a hand in settling, under this new scheme, a large number of small farmers on a particular block of land, it could, by the use of motor-lorries and getting a full load down every time, send manure and other materials down there at a much lower cost than the individual could; but you might have to take a quarter-load one day and half a load another under ordinary conditions. It depends upon how it is done. It would be a factor in the use of motor-lorries instead of State railways. But theoretically, to my mind, there is no comparison between the work of the railway and the work of the motor, as a means of opening up the district. You cannot carry timber by road. That railway has got to be built for carrying timber. You cannot possibly settle the country without a railway. The railway has got to be built. If you figure out the capital value of that area of State land over on the Kaingaroa Plains when put under forest—300,000 acres—capitalized until the forests are mature, it amounts to over £20,000,000. There will be £20,000,000 locked up in that country, and you will not get anything out of it unless you have a railway there. Are you going to waste £20,000,000? You have the evidence of an expert timberman who told you in this room that unless these oldest planted areas are worked and the thinnings used, the forests will be hampered. He said that these thinnings could not be used unless you had a railway. He said also that if you had a railway, or even if the State consented to build a railway, there would not be any difficulty in raising capital to put up a pulping plant for the purpose of using the thinnings. That was the evidence of the timber authorities. But you can see what vast interests the State already has in this country, and to hesitate about putting in a railway is to raise a great national question when everybody should say, “Let us get it through.”

60. You know the Tokoroa country: how does this land compare with the Tokoroa land?—This land is better than the land from Putaruru onwards. I have visited it because I have relatives there. I say that the virgin country between Rotorua and Taupo is better than the land between Putaruru and Ongaroto.

61. And how about the Matamata land?—If you take the superior country about Matamata it is a better class of country than is to be found except in some of the regions of the Rotorua-Taupo district. I would compare the two and say that Matamata, in its original state when I saw it thirty years ago, was not so good as a great part of the Taupo country through which I have taken you with my description. That 50,000 acres about Rerewhakaaitu, a few miles away from the route of this railway, is better than any land there was in Matamata before the farmer improved the Matamata land. I am glad you mentioned Matamata, because if there is any example which can show what can be made of this land by this railway, it is what has been done at Matamata. They have taken up the poor scrub land there, and by intelligent farming they have made it into some of the finest dairy country in the world; and I say you could do exactly the same thing with 2,000,000 or 3,000,000