

143. You think it would be possible to settle that land and to get the necessary results from it, to pay the nation and to pay the men who settle there, and that it would be absolutely impossible to get those results without a railway?—That is my idea.

144. You are convinced of that, after all your years of experience?—I am firmly convinced of it.

145. You think it would be a good thing for this country, and for the hundreds of men out of employment, if the Government constructed that railway, and settled people on the land there?—Yes.

146. You think that it would be of great benefit to the nation?—Certainly, a great benefit.

147. And you realize that if you made a statement of that nature, and tried to persuade the Government to spend £700,000 for a “white elephant,” it would be committing a national crime?—Yes, I feel that.

148. A man may get two years in gaol for forging a cheque for £3. You ask the Committee to recommend the Government to spend £700,000 to complete a railway: unless you were convinced in your own mind that you are right, you should get twenty-five years in gaol?—Twenty-five years at my time of life?

149. That would fix you for good?—It is only the enthusiasm that I have in connection with this matter that has enabled me to carry on this battle for twenty years.

150. You are recognized as a prominent and good citizen and a pioneer of the country: it is not likely at your time of life that you would come here and try to do something for the Dominion unless you were convinced of the benefit that would accrue to the Dominion?—That is my reason for advocating this railway, and that is why I am prepared to divest myself of any personal profit whatever.

151. Your advocacy of this railway is solely in the interests of New Zealand?—Yes, to be my monument.

152. A good deal has been said during these Committee proceedings about sickness of stock, which is a very serious thing, and frightens many would-be settlers from coming to settle in that part of the country. Do you think that is so?—Yes.

153. Do you think that close settlement resulting from the building of this railway would minimize that trouble, and eventually wipe it out?—Cultivation is a remedy for it, although in that area the only class of animals affected by it is lambs.

154. To what do you attribute that?—I have never been able to solve that. The top lambs are first class, but the tail of the mob suffers from it. Mr. Aston attributes it to the lack of iron in the soil, but the Fields Division attributes it to two small worms. I have followed the advice of the Department, but without result. A great deal of country in New Zealand will not breed lambs. In the early days, even in Hawke's Bay, lambs died by thousands.

155. But if we went in for close settlement on that pumice land the industry would be dairying, would it not?—Yes. A few sheep would do fairly well there, but the country is best suited for dairying.

156. The principal value of the land is for dairying purposes?—Absolutely.

157. You could not go in for sheep-farms on small areas?—No.

158. After all, it is more suitable for dairying?—Yes.

159. How would this land grow fruit in orchards?—Some fruits, such as apricots and peaches, do not do well there, but apples, pears, and all bush fruits do very well. You could fill a wagon with cherries grown there. They grow wild there.

160. And strawberries grow well there?—Yes. The land and the climate are most suitable for that class of fruit. Raspberries and gooseberries, and currants, do exceptionally well there too, though they do not do well in Auckland, so that there would be a great market for them.

161. How does timber grow there as compared with other parts of the country?—The growth of timber is remarkable. I have myself erected a building of timber which I grew from the seed in fourteen years.

162. Were the figures you gave in connection with transport Government figures?—Yes.

163. You are not relying upon your own figures?—I allowed £1 a ton for the lorry from Rotorua to Reporoa, but I find they are paying £1 7s. 6d.

164. Questions have been asked you in connection with the progress you have made on your land, as to the area you have brought into cultivation during the twenty years you have been there. I suppose in common with other undertakings, the amount of progress made is determined by the amount of money you are prepared to spend?—Yes, to a very large extent. Except during the war, when I loaded myself up with war bonds, I have gone on the principle of keeping out of deep debt. In my judgment the payment of interest will sink any man in the long-run.

165. *Mr. Massey.*] In view of the statement made in the report of the Commission of 1922, how can you make out that the Commission unanimously approved of the construction of the railway as far as Reporoa?—I am very glad to have the opportunity of explaining that. Now, among the extracts from the report which the Chairman read was the minority report of Mr. Munro. There were five members on the Commission, and of course Mr. Munro composed one-fifth of it. He would not have made a minority report if the other members had not approved of the railway. If, as has been contended, the railway had been turned down, why should Mr. Munro write that minority report? He wrote it well knowing that the Commission had approved of the railway. The report of the Commission is that the railway will not pay 4 per cent.; but, notwithstanding that, the Commission recommended its immediate construction. The Commission reported that the net revenue, after paying all working-expenses, would be £9,000 per annum, and that on the estimated cost of construction it would pay 1·2 per cent., a higher rate of interest than all the railways in the South Island. I would like to read this portion of the report: “Should it be decided to assist settlement in the district under the provisions of section 11 of the Land Laws Amendment Act, 1919, a railway would be necessary. In the report dated 15th December, 1920, of the Taupo Tramways and Timber Commission