

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER, 1929.

EDWARD EARLE VAILE examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Mr. Vaile?—A farmer, residing at Waiotapu.

2. Will you just make your statement first?—Yes. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, first of all I would like to refer to the offer made by the Government to construct a road instead of this railway, and I would ask for the Public Works Department's estimate of the cost of the road, and some rough specification of it—that is to say, the width of formation, the width of bitumen, and what load will be permitted to be carried on it.

The Chairman: I am afraid we cannot supply you with that. It has nothing to do with the petition—you are petitioning for the completion of the railway.

Witness: Then, in the second place, I would ask that all witnesses be sworn.

The Chairman: We do not swear the witnesses. Why do you ask for that?

Witness: Because all my witnesses are quite willing to be sworn, and what we desire in connection with this matter is to have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

The Chairman: I would like to point out to you that you have come here before a properly constituted parliamentary Committee, and you must abide by our rules. You cannot come here and dictate as to how we should run the affairs of the Committee. Of course, you have the right as ask it, but I only want to put the position before you—the proceedings here must be carried out according to parliamentary procedure.

Witness: I merely asked that question that witnesses be sworn without any idea of dictating to the Committee; I am ignorant of your procedure, and I merely wished to indicate that we were willing to be sworn if it were desired. Now, sir, I come before your Committee with some feeling of diffidence because I am fully aware of the forces that are arrayed against me. It is a very serious thing to be up against the Government of any country. In the past the timber interests have been very much against the construction of this railway, because it happens to be by far the greatest area of timber in the Dominion, and upon every previous occasion I have been opposed by no less a person than Sir John Findlay, K.C.; but notwithstanding that, upon every previous occasion—and the subject has been before two parliamentary Committees and two Royal Commissions—a unanimous verdict has been given in favour of the railway from Rotorua to Reporoa. Upon three occasions it was unanimously recommended that the railway be constructed to Taupo, but upon one occasion one particular Commission found that it should go only as far as Reporoa. And, gentlemen, I should not venture to appear before you unless I honestly and firmly believed in my own mind that right and truth and justice are on my side. I have a feeling also of my great responsibility, and that I represent a very great and promising district. The pumice area contains 5,000,000 acres of land, which is by far the largest area in New Zealand of cultivable and habitable land yet to be settled, and the opening-up of this area is worthy of attention not only for a few minutes, but is worthy of the attention of the first intellects in this Dominion for an extended period. It is one of the greatest problems before New Zealand—the settlement of the question of whether we are going to make use of it or leave it there as a reserve for noxious weeds, rabbits, wild dogs, and deer. In connection with this matter we have never had anything to offer—we have no votes, we have no money, we have no influence; and I am afraid that past Governments have looked at the matter from that point of view—that here was £700,000 to be spent, and no vote to be gained by that expenditure. They looked upon it as a waste of public funds to spend money in that direction. But I stand before you as an advocate of the development of these desert and wild waste places. I appeal to you upon that well-known principle of the British Constitution, that every member of Parliament represents, in the first place, the interests of the whole Kingdom, and only in the second place the interests of his particular parliamentary constituency. As for myself, I have devoted the best twenty years of my life and a considerable fortune to this problem; and not only that, but I have done a vast amount of experimental work which should have been done by the Government. I have also a confession to make in connection with this matter: I am the owner of 10,000 acres of land, not on the route of the railway to Reporoa, but on the extension to Taupo, which is inevitable. If I fail to prove to you that the construction of this railway will be of benefit to that district—indeed, if I fail to prove that it will be of benefit to the whole of the Dominion—I confess that I shall have failed. But I want to relieve myself of any suggestion of personal interest, and I will hand to you an offer in writing to sell to the Government my land at its present value, so that if they choose to take that area for closer settlement the payment which they will have to make to me is only the value of the land to-day, and not the value after the construction of the railway. I hope by that means to discharge myself from any implication that I have any personal financial interest in this railway. In connection with this matter I really do not think that I am called upon to make such a sacrifice, because I think I can justly claim that if anybody in this Dominion deserves the construction of a railway I do. I have fought for it for twenty years, and there are people who own much larger tracts of land in the district who have never contributed anything to the railway. Now, gentlemen, I am not going to detain you with a long speech, but I hope that I may be allowed in conclusion to sum up the evidence and to reply to anything that may be said. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the petition, although in my name, is the petition of the Rotorua County Council, the