

87. And you said that that line, if constructed in accordance with Mr. Holmes's suggestion, would be in the interests of the country?—The reason for it is this: it goes through country which is much more level than the country through which our line goes. It would not be an easy proposition to run an expensive Government railway through the hills through which our line goes.

88. I cannot understand your point of view. You say that Mr. Holmes was right?—He did not say the line should be made at any particular time.

89. When you supported Mr. Holmes's contention that a line there was necessary, surely you had some idea when it would be advisable to put that railway through—or was it a blind guess?—The country through which it went was the easiest country, and if you are going to have a permanent Government standard line, then the line with the best grade is that line.

90. But it does not necessarily follow that it is going to be profitable because it goes through the easiest route?—Apart from the timber, the Rotorua-Taupo line goes through at least as good country as ours.

91. Then you are opposed to the present proposed route?—I would rather have my statement as given put in.

92. I want to get it from you whether you are in favour of this line or not. We are here to find out what support this line has got, and I want to know from you as a witness whether you are definitely opposed to this railway-line or whether you are not. If you are opposed to it, I want to know your reasons?—May I suggest that when you have read my evidence, if it does not cover your point, then you can ask me a further question.

93. Surely it is easy for you to answer that question?—I have done so several times.

94. But not to my satisfaction. I want to know whether you are opposed to this railway or not—that is a plain question?—No, it is not a plain question. You cannot answer questions of this kind "Yes" or "No." I say that is a foolish way; at any rate, I cannot give a foolish answer.

95. You are opposed to the construction of any railway-line there?—I say, let us find out. I am a business man.

96. Business men make mistakes sometimes?—Yes; I have made a few, but fortunately they have been balanced on the other side.

97. You said that you put your land into grass and that you had difficulty with it because you found it impossible to get farmers to go away back there?—Yes.

98. You have had no success, and you found that the difficulty was to get a farmer to go into the backblocks there?—Yes.

99. Is that an argument in favour of the railway?—There is a railway there.

100. Your private railway?—Yes; and there is a road there.

101. Where is the difficulty?—I do not know, but there is a prejudice: at any rate, that was our experience.

102. How much more bush have you got to cut out?—About 90 million feet.

103. How much have you cut out?—About 140 million feet.

104. In how many years?—We have been working since 1905.

105. What is the life of the present bush at your present rate?—We are cutting about 6 million feet a year—that will be about fifteen years.

106. And then the business will be finished?—Our timber will be finished then.

107. Your line will be useless then—unless you can persuade the Government to take it over?—They will never take it over. It is a question whether other timber-owners will hold their timber up for fifteen years in order to get our railway at a cheaper cost than the real value.

108. Did you ever cart timber for other companies?—Yes, for Mr. Cox.

109. The Cox company is out of business now?—Yes; when the slump came the price we could offer did not pay.

110. Is it not a fact that the conditions you laid down to the Cox company were so hard that they were frozen out of the business?—I want to know where you got that information from: what conditions do you suggest?

111. The freights and your conditions regarding roads made the position so hard that you froze them out?—This is what actually happened: At the present time we have only sufficient rolling-stock to carry our own timber. If we carry the timber of other owners we will need more rolling-stock. Now, who is going to invest the capital necessary to get that rolling-stock? We said to them, "You cannot do it because you have not the capital. We will do it if you will guarantee us the traffic. If you will support your guarantee with some tangible security we will provide the rolling-stock to carry your timber." These negotiations were going on for years. I said to Mr. Cox, "Why do not you timber-owners get together, and let us all join together, and let all the timber be worked in the most efficient way and carried at the same price? We will join you in any proposition of that kind." Mr. Cox is now helping us to go before the Prime Minister and get this question settled.

112. He is out of the business now?—Yes, but he is a member of the County Council, and he is one of the leaders of the movement. They are trying to get the Government to determine what it is going to do with this timber, on the understanding that all the timbers should be worked together.

113. Is Mr. Cox a supporter of the continuation of the Rotorua-Taupo line?—No; it does not help him at all.

114. You said that you believed that all the farmers in the Taupo district should be assisted: you mean, right throughout the pumice country?—Yes.

115. I want to know what policy you would propose to help the farmers there?—From my point of view, from wide experience of business, it is just a question of getting the settlers together and determining upon some efficient method of handling their lands, and it is for the Government Departments to finance the settlers so long as they show they are "playing the game" with their farms.