

116. That is, as far as money is concerned—financial assistance?—Not only finance, but with Agriculture Department experts—chemists and so on.

117. In light country such as pumice country, success depends upon the amount and constant supply of fertilizers?—That is so. Mind you, I am not a chemist or a farmer, but I understand that all the evidence is to that effect.

118. We will be guided by men who know; but that is a fact, is it not?—Yes.

119. How would you propose to reduce the cost of fertilizers and to give the farmers more fertilizers than they are getting at the present time?—Perhaps you were not in the room when I dealt with this matter. We have done it on our own line by charging them only 6d. for nineteen miles instead of 10s. 6d. What we have offered to do is this: our proposal is that the whole of the goods of the settlers on our line should be carried along that line at the cost of handling only, as back loading.

120. But I am asking the question in connection with the pumice country generally—your line will only serve a small section of the present settlers?—No, the bigger section.

121. But there are others to be served. You admit that your line will not serve the people on the east. Now, I want to know what policy you have to help all the farmers, apart from what you have said as to the assistance to be given by agricultural experts. Seeing that success depends upon the amount of fertilizers to be got on to the land at the earliest possible time and at small cost, how would you propose to do that—I am speaking not of the farmers in close proximity to your line?—No, you mean on the proposed Rotorua-Taupo line. I have suggested that if they do what we have done they can do it very much more cheaply and just as efficiently at a smaller expense than by constructing the Rotorua-Taupo line. My suggestion is that Mr. Vaile should use his eloquence and influence in supporting a small bush tram-line such as ours, which the engineers say is very good of its kind. If they concentrate upon that they will help the settlers more than in any other way.

122. Are you convinced that the pumice country right throughout that district could be profitably used for closer-settlement purposes?—All the evidence I have been able to collect is in the affirmative.

123. We are not dealing with the farmers who are at present on the line. Evidence has been given before this Committee that there are great possibilities before that district?—Wonderful possibilities.

124. Is that from a dairying point of view or from a timber point of view?—Both.

125. You are convinced that there are great opportunities of success there, and that evidence is backed up by the success of some men under very bad conditions?—Yes.

126. Do you not think that the construction of that line through that country would add to the possibilities of success of close settlement and speedy development, so that we could solve, or partly solve, the unemployment problem?—Unquestionably; but I always look at the obvious difficulties: these are that there is only a certain amount of money to go round, and there are other districts in New Zealand which can be quite as profitably worked.

127. Where are they?—Well, there are claims from all parts of New Zealand. I cannot give you evidence upon that point.

128. A good deal of this land is Crown land and a good deal of it is Native land?—About half and half, I should think.

129. Some of us are anxious to find employment for men who are walking the streets, especially the young men. What we are anxious to do is to settle them on the land on terms and conditions which would assure to them success at the start. We do not want a repetition of the soldier-settlement failures. We think that this land could be brought into cultivation cheaper than purchasing land at a high price?—That is the object.

130. Do you not think that, in view of the fact that there are not many areas in New Zealand where land could be secured at such a low cost, it would be better to start now upon large-scale settlement there—group settlement?—Yes, provided you have got the capital.

131. You think that would be a good thing for the country?—Yes.

132. Could that country be opened without a railway?—No, it must have cheap transport.

133. The point I want to emphasize is this: If the Government decide, on the evidence given to this Committee, that the pumice country could be successfully farmed on the group system, do you think that a large scheme of closer settlement could be carried out on that pumice land without a railway-line?—Not without some means of transport.

134. Without a railway-line?—I am not an expert transport officer. I have had no experience of road transport. I think the question is up for consideration now. It depends upon circumstances. If you are going to raise a sum of money which will justify the construction of a railway such as the Rotorua-Taupo Railway, surely you would advise that before you spend that money you should make the very closest possible investigation as to where in the pumice country it could be most economically used.

135. It is a question of road *versus* railway. Do you know anything about road-construction?—I have had to pay for that, or my company has.

136. Do you know what it would cost to construct a bitumen road through pumice country?—I have never had to pay for a bitumen road. Ours have all been country roads.

137. The idea is to put down a bitumen road in place of a railway: have you any idea of the cost?—I have never gone into it at all.

138. You have no idea of the stability of a bitumen road on a pumice foundation?—I think they tried something of the kind in Taupo. Some Government Department—probably the Public Works Department—can give an opinion on that matter. So far as I know it has not been a success.

139. The experiments carried out in most countries in the world with bitumen have proved conclusively that bitumen is useless unless it has a very irresistible foundation?—One can understand that.