

TUESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 1929.

MICHAEL JOSEPH GALVIN examined (No 12).

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation, Mr. Galvin?—I am one of the senior Fields Inspectors of the Lands and Survey Department.

2. I understand that you know something about this country through which this Rotorua-Taupo Railway was to run—the railway which was commenced and subsequently stopped. You have some evidence to give in regard to that country. Will you just give it in your own way?—I propose to give the Committee a brief outline of my knowledge of the district.

3. The question before the Committee is whether the railway that was started, between Rotorua and Taupo, should be continued: this is a petition to have that railway continued?—My duties include the reporting on all Crown lands, and also the supervision of soldier settlements, whether they require loans or revaluations, and it is my duty to report to the Land Board. In the course of my ten years' experience my work has carried me through North Taranaki and the Bay of Plenty. During the past two years and a half I have had to concentrate on the Taupo lands. I may say that I have not only made frequent inspections of this country in the course of my duty, but, realizing how much controversy there has been in regard to this railway and the country through which it is to pass, I have made more or less of a hobby of it, and all my spare time—holidays and so on—have been spent on the Taupo lands from the Main Trunk through to Rotorua. In the first place, I would like to say that as a result of my close association with the district I consider that many of the statements made during the past two or three years in regard to the quantity and quality of the farmable land in the Taupo district, have been very grossly exaggerated. I say that you can get no better criterion as to the quality of the land than from the farmers already farming in that vicinity. The main settlement of the Taupo district is Reporoa, and I agree with the statement which has been already made here that Reporoa is the oasis of the whole lot. Reporoa, when acquired, comprised 29,000 acres. What with the land sold for only afforestation purposes, and set aside for reserves, the present occupied area comprises 7,800 acres, on which are thirty-four or thirty-five settlers. Of these, twelve or thirteen settlers have been placed there within the past twelve months. A lot of the land remained unoccupied for years. Now, before proceeding further, I would like to refer to the topographical features. Coming from Rotorua to Taupo the route travels through a series of hills, which terminate at the north of the Reporoa Settlement. Reporoa had been farmed for over twenty years before it was acquired by the Crown, and it comprises a lot of swamp country which has been drained by the Lands Department. That swamp country cannot be compared for productivity with any other portion of the Taupo country—it is far better than the rest—and we have found that where settlers have that combination of swamp country with dry punice country they achieve success in more or less degree. But nevertheless, despite the fact that the Reporoa settlers are as fine a crowd of settlers as you will find anywhere, and despite the fact that they have the pick of the country in the area, they have experienced great difficulty, and the Land Board has tried to adjust their difficulties by revaluation. The main difficulties there are in the form of sickness and unseasonable frosts, which come at all seasons of the year, and they never know when to prepare for them. The result is that they have quite a short dairying season there. I have not heard the cause of these unseasonable frosts explained. It appears to me to be due to the fact that the valley wherein Reporoa is situated, and through which the proposed railway would traverse, is bounded on the east and west by high country rising sharply from an elevation of 1,000 ft. or 1,100 ft. to 2,500 ft. The valley runs right down to the lake and then across the plains to the mountains, and the result is that you have continual cold winds coming from the mountains, up this gigantic furrow represented by the road up the Taupo Valley. In regard to the climatic conditions, I would like to read to the Committee an extract from the evidence given before the Auckland Land Board by a settler named Mr. Alexander, who said: "Concerning the climate, if we can get a good spell of decent weather it is really marvellous, with the top-dressing, what a response we get. The climate is very very hard and we get unseasonable frosts. Of course, in the summer-time we have made provision to withstand the long winter, but when you get these unseasonable frosts in December and January it makes things very difficult. In December of the year before last the pasture was just coming nicely, and we got our crops—turnips and one thing and another—in early in December, and the second week of that month we had six really hard frosts, and they absolutely cleaned up everything that was above the surface. It is quite a common occurrence in the summer to register eleven degrees of frost, and it plays havoc with the crops. Our spring does not start until well into October. We can safely reckon that we are six weeks behind the Waikato, and even then with an early spring year the pasture does not start to come away until the beginning of October; and then again, about Easter-time we get the changeable autumn weather. We have come to the definite conclusion that the dairying season is from the beginning of October until Easter. As soon as the frosts come in the autumn, that is the end of our dairying season. We contend that it is really the climate that is our drawback. We can perhaps fight against the deficiencies in the soil by experimenting and applying manures and so overcome this difficulty in the future, but these unseasonable frosts we cannot see what we can do to overcome them at all. One year they come early and one year they come late, and we do not know where we are."

4. We would prefer to get your own evidence rather than the evidence of any one else, but, as you say, this is merely in regard to the climate of the area?—Very well. Now, in regard to the area affected by the railway, it has been said that there are from 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 acres of land available. On this map [indicated] we have drawn a radius of twenty miles on either side of the line, east and west, and I am quite convinced that none of the country beyond that radius can be affected by the railway-line.

5. *Mr. Lye.*] How far back from the railway-line is that limit on the east?—Twenty miles—and the same on the west side. In the Rotorua County the total area of land affected will be 314,808 acres,