

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

CHRISTCHURCH, WEDNESDAY, 25TH APRIL, 1883.

Mr. W. CHRYSTALL, Merchant, and Chairman of the Railway League, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] If you will give us a statement of what you have done up to this time, and the special object you have in view, you will be able to put concisely before us more information than we could extract by questions. Will you please do that?—I am conversant with the subject from one point of view. I have not been over the routes, and have simply gathered information as to the necessity of making a railway rather than as to what its cost will be. We have got some reports that we have made up from time to time. If you want anything more than that, I shall be pleased to give it.

2. Your position is chairman of the Railway League?—Yes.

3. And may I ask what the views of the Railway League are? Are you in favour of a particular line, or simply the desirability of connection with the West Coast?—Yes. We have decided not to advocate any particular line until the Commission has sent in its report. Some of the members were disposed to favour one route and some another; and, rather than have any conflict of feeling, we determined on the necessity of connection between Canterbury and the West Coast, and decided to wait until after the Commission had sent in its report before deciding which line the League would advocate. This is the last report we brought up, dated the 21st March, 1883, and presented to a general meeting of the League:—

Your Committee has now to report as follows with respect to its action since the formation of the League on 6th November last:—

*Proposed Extension, Middle Island Trunk Line.*—The first resolution of the League was to the effect that any expenditure on the proposed extension to Blenheim by way of the East Coast would be a waste of public money and detrimental to the interests of Canterbury and the colony at large. In pursuance of this unanimous conclusion of the League, your Committee has in the meantime adopted every likely means with the view of inducing the Government to abandon the proposed extension. When the Commissioners that were appointed by the Government to report on the advisableness or otherwise of the scheme were in Christchurch, your Committee appointed a deputation to wait upon them, for the purpose of urging upon their consideration the many important reasons against the construction of any portion of the proposed line to Blenheim. Deputations from the Committee also waited successively upon the Hon. the Minister for Public Works and the Hon. the Premier; and your Committee has some reason to hope that the arguments which its delegates advanced at these interviews, together with its action in other ways, will have the effect of moving the Government in the direction of finally abandoning the proposed East Coast line. If only the abandonment of this manifestly unwise extension of the Middle Island trunk line should be accomplished by the operations of the League, a most important public benefit will have been secured. The Committee has been informed by the Premier that the Commissioners had completed their report, and that the same will be made public at an early date. Under this head your Committee would only add that, the more the features of the route and the surrounding facts are investigated and considered, the more does it become apparent that any expenditure upon any part of the proposed extension by way of the East Coast would be, in the words of the resolution of the League, "a waste of public money, and a work detrimental both to the interests of Canterbury and the Colony."

*Connection between Canterbury and the West Coast.*—Your Committee has devoted a large amount of time to the consideration of this question, and to the carrying-out of the unanimous resolution of the League affirming the desirableness of the said connection being made as soon as possible. A report setting forth numerous important grounds that call for the construction of this line, and embodying a detailed estimate of traffic receipts, was presented to the Commissioners at the interview before referred to, and at the succeeding interviews with the Hon. the Minister for Public Works and the Hon. the Premier similar views were advanced. In response to the repeated representations made by your Committee in these ways, as well as by direct correspondence, the Government at first proposed that the Commissioners for the Middle Island trunk line (who had already completed their travels and investigations) should incidentally furnish the Government with information on the subject. But your Committee at once took exception to such an incidental and necessarily incomplete report as this promised to be, in view, more particularly, of the fact that the Commissioners had not had the opportunity, as your Committee concluded, of gathering the requisite data to enable them to do justice to the question. The Government therefore ultimately promised unconditionally, in a letter dated the 20th December, "that full inquiry as to the West Coast routes would be made either by the existing Commission or by another." At the interview with the Hon. the Premier on the 23rd February he, however, began by stating that the Government intended only to collect information from surveyors and other sources; but, the deputation having respectfully insisted that the promise made in the letter of the 20th December should be literally fulfilled, the Premier, in the end, assured the deputation that this would be done; and at his request the Committee furnished him with the following outline of the duties of the promised Commission: 1. That the said Commission should be appointed for the purpose of making inquiry into the comparative probable cost and economical or commercial value and other merits of the several lines specified in the accompanying tabular statement, dated January, 1883, or any other line proposed for the connection of the Provincial District of Canterbury with the West Coast of the Middle Island; and also for making inquiry into the mineral and other resources of the districts or lands which the respective proposed lines would traverse, it being the desire of this League that the said Commission should make inquiry in the most ample and complete manner into all the facts and circumstances necessary and proper to be considered in determining the best line to connect Canterbury with the West Coast. (2.) That, in the opinion of this Committee, if the Commissioners who reported on the proposed extension of the Middle Island trunk line northwards by the East Coast and Tophouse routes could be induced to undertake the work, it is desirable that they should be appointed to make the promised report on the several proposed lines to connect Canterbury with the West Coast.

*Routes.*—After full consideration, the Committee has decided that it will not be advisable to take any action in the direction of reporting to the League on the comparative merits of the several routes, so far as they are known, until after the promised Commission shall have published its report. Survey parties, appointed by the Government, are now at work on one of the proposed routes. The Committee has not yet received any intimation from the Government as to the appointment of the Commission.

*Correspondence.*—In a circular letter, dated the 7th December last, the Committee addressed all the local bodies in Canterbury and the electoral districts of Westland and Nelson, suggesting that they should form branch leagues, and urging upon their attention the importance of taking steps to secure the desired connection by railway with the West Coast, and at the same time to use every endeavour to induce the Government to abandon the palpably unwise proposal to extend the Middle Island grand trunk line northwards by way of the East Coast.

*Parliamentary Influence.*—The various local bodies referred to were also invited to bring, in a constitutional manner, the necessary influence to bear upon their respective representatives, with the view of securing the due consideration in Parliament of the claims and merits of a railway to connect Canterbury with the West Coast. Your Committee regard it as of special importance that the Canterbury constituencies should confer and have a clear