

*The Chairman* : It being understood that it is entirely without our province to report specially upon it.

*Mr. Reese* : The question is, whether the latter part of your Commission does not give you that right. The answer that we received from a member of the Government here leads us to believe that you would be prepared to report upon the advisability or otherwise of a railway to the West Coast.

*The Chairman* : Nothing is clearer, from the terms of the Commission, than that our duties are confined to examining and reporting on the routes for a main trunk line northwards.

*Mr. Reese* : I think the latter part of the Commission refers to any other line that would be beneficial to the interests of the country.

*The Chairman* : No ; the instructions are very plain, that the line must be carried northwards. It means any other trunk line in that direction.

*Mr. Reese* : Mr. Foy reported on a main trunk line northwards going from Amberley to Brunnerton, and from Brunnerton to Nelson. Does that not come within your province to consider as a main trunk line northwards ?

*The Chairman* : No ; a line going south-west can hardly be said to be a line northwards. The object is by the shortest main route to connect the ports of the North Island with the ports of the South Island.

*Mr. Reese* : The whole object of the Canterbury people here has been to try if possible to get connection with the West Coast in preference to having the East Coast railway. There cannot be a necessity for the East Coast railway and a necessity for the West Coast railway. I might give you a few statistics that would be the means of showing that Canterbury is a great producing province. Last year Canterbury exported more than all the other provinces of New Zealand ; and, consequently, we want consuming power. Possibly, if we had communication with the West Coast, we would be able to get minerals to supply our local industries in and around Christchurch. That is really what we want, to a certain extent, to be able to encourage local industries in and around Christchurch, and at the same time to increase population on the unexplored portions of the West Coast. We want the West Coast railway to get direct communication if possible. We are quite prepared to leave the route with the Government if they will only go into the question of a West Coast railway.

*The Chairman* : That is a question for the Government and the Legislature, and not for the Commission. All we have to do is to follow the directions and use the authority which have been given to us. These are very definite, as you can see.

*Mr. Reese* : Then anything we could do would not have the effect of getting you to report on the West Coast railway ?

*The Chairman* : Of giving us authority to make a special report on the West Coast railway, clearly not. I put it plainly to you that it is outside our jurisdiction. I would point out that there is another way in which the interests of the West Coast might be very greatly forwarded—namely, by the deflection of the line to the west side of the main range. In that sense I think it would be well for you not to give up the further prosecution of the inquiries you have begun.

*Mr. Reese* : Mr. Foy's No. 3 route is an extension northwards, and goes over what is known as the Amuri Pass, up the Wairau and up the Hope River, and down to Brunnerton. Anything like that would satisfy the greatest population on the West Coast. The population on the West Coast is 15,000 as against 7,000 on the Nelson side of the Grey on the Reefton Gold Fields, and there is an unexplored portion of the West Coast extending for 150 miles from Hokitika to Jackson's Bay. What we want is, if possible, to divert the money for the construction of the East Coast railway to the construction of the West Coast railway, and give Canterbury as direct communication with the West Coast as possible.

*The Chairman* : That the Commission of course have no power to do.

*Mr. Pavitt* : The deputation now find that your duties are strictly limited to the extension of the Northern Trunk Railway. It has been decided that we as a body should come here and represent the necessity of the construction of the West Coast railway, but as far as I can form an opinion any information that we might give would be almost valueless for the object we have in view. I take it that unless we can bring a certain amount of argument to prove to you that the construction of a line to the West Coast would form a portion of the main trunk line to the north, whether to Blenheim or Nelson ultimately, our business is simply at an end, and we have occupied your time this afternoon almost uselessly. We were led to think, from remarks made by the Minister for Public Works the other day, that you were in a position to receive information regarding the construction of this particular West Coast railway as well as to hear what we had to say in favour of delaying the construction of the East Coast railway. There can be no question that the whole body of the Canterbury people are very clear as to the uselessness of the construction of the one and the importance of the construction of the other. I am sorry that our duties seem to be valueless so far.

*The Mayor* : I would add to what Mr. Pavitt has stated, that as you have no power to consider the West Coast line, the best plan would be for us to endeavour to get the Government to amend your instructions, so as to enable you to consider the advisability of examining the West Coast line as one of the main trunk lines. Of course Canterbury will not be satisfied with any other recommendation, and it might be satisfactory to the people of the province, while there is time, if we were to make representations to the Government to enlarge your instructions, so that you could consider the advisability of the trunk line going *viâ* the West Coast.

*Mr. Weston* : After what you have said, Mr. Chairman, perhaps I need hardly ask you whether you would be prepared to inspect any of the routes connecting the East and West Coasts.

*The Chairman* : That will depend altogether upon the evidence as to the practicability of the routes and the advantages that would be derivable from the deflection of the line in that way. It was upon that point we expected to receive information and assistance from the deputation. I find from the terms of their resolution that they were "to collect statistics and information regarding the different routes northward, and West Coast." We do not refuse to receive any information on the subject of the West Coast proper, but it is outside our jurisdiction to report upon it. Our duties are strictly confined to the main trunk line—not going west but going north ; that is, the main trunk line connecting Canterbury with some part of Cook Strait,