

150. Why was it diverted—was it to give others the benefit?—I should not like to be personal, but I believe it was to benefit Mr. Wright.

151. But surely that line does not serve any one person only?—The river is very bad to cross, and therefore the present line is not of much general service.

152. What is the distance you have to go to reach the new terminus on the south side of the river?—It would be about three and a half miles.

153. Good roads?—Not very good roads.

154. Up hill?—Yes.

155. Have you any further information to give?—There has been a counter-petition to take the railway on the south side of the river. Several gentlemen, representing sixty-five thousand acres, signed the petition to take it to its present terminus. There is only one gentleman who would be benefited by that, namely, Mr. Peter, with the exception of Mr. Wright, who did not sign the petition.

156. What was the object of the petition?—To carry the railway further up on the south side of the river beyond Anama, and there is hardly one of those gentlemen who use it even at Anama, with the exception of Mr. Peter. Had it not been for that petition it would have crossed the river and come by my place.

157. Was the petition to the Government?—Yes; and we were kept in the dark about it.

158. When was the petition sent in?—About two years ago.

159. Before the railway was built?—Before it was built beyond Anama.

160. Mr. Triphook's original crossing is nearer Ashburton than Anama?—Yes; it was somewhere between Valetta and Westerfield.

161. Have you anything further to tell me?—No, except that I believe the district would be very materially benefited if the line were extended to Bowyer's Stream. It would be only scant justice if we could get it so far.

162. When was the original proposal to make the line in the direction you have just been speaking of: it appears that you have all expected the line to come to the centre of the district—when was that proposal made?—About six years ago.

163. And was any publicity given to that proposed route?—Yes, it was understood that it would go there. Our member promised to support it, and then told us that anything we did would only retard its progress, and that it would cross the river higher up.

164. Was the route not determined by the General Government?—Originally; but he was a member of the Royal Commission, and he reported favourably on the extension of the line: but we have reason to believe that he was the means of its being taken south. He proposed Triphook's survey first: at least he told us so when he was standing for election.

165. Do you think that any extension towards the south would benefit people towards the south?—It would benefit Mr. Wright and Mr. Peter, but I do not know of any one else.

166. It would benefit any lands towards which it was carried?—It would benefit the stone quarries. Mr. Wright and Mr. Peter have both got stone quarries. Mr. Wright did the best for himself, but we do not think he did the best for the district.

The Hon. W. S. PETER, M.L.C., examined.

167. *The Commissioner.*] Have you any information to give us?—The only thing I have to say is, that I oppose any extension of the railway whatever. The Methven line is bound to be carried further, because before many years are over it will fall into the hands of the Government; and I believe it would have been carried further in this direction, to Gough's Crossing, but for the dispute between the company and the Government as to who was to build the bridge.

168. Where is Gough's Crossing?—It is at Rural Section No. 34143. The idea of the company was that this bridge would be utilized for the main central line. I believe that was one of the original obstacles, and latterly the company found considerable difficulty in collecting rates—in fact, they could not do so at all—and that prevented them extending the line into this district.

169. And do you think that extension would be advantageous to the district?—Most decidedly. It would save about twenty-three miles of railway carriage.

170. That is carriage on the main line?—Yes.

171. Would it be longer on the branch line?—The distance from Rakaia to Methven is twenty-three miles, and from Methven to Gough's Crossing nine miles.

172. It is twenty-one miles from Ashburton to Anama?—Yes.

173. And two and a half miles from Anama to the terminus at Cavendish, making twenty-three and a half miles in all?—Yes; I believe the Methven line has been surveyed towards Mount Somers Township.

174. What are your ideas as to that extension?—I think there cannot be two opinions, and that the Methven line should be extended; and, as far as I am concerned, I should not object to the Government applying the balance in hand for the south branch extension towards that purpose.

175. Do you see any obstacle in the way of applying the money for that purpose?—I do not know whether the Government have power to do it or not without a fresh vote.

176. The amount appears to be about £6,000?—Some one said at a meeting that there was £10,000 still available, but I do not think there is so much.

177. It has been stated that there is about £9,000: that will not make many miles of line?—No; but, eventually, when the Methven line is extended, there will be very little traffic on the Tinwald line.

178. Why do you think so?—Because there is no traffic, and it is nearer to the port of shipment to go by way of Methven.

179. That is provided the produce is for shipment?—Yes.