

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 15TH JUNE, 1886. (Mr. E. MITCHELSON, Chairman.)

Present: The Chairman, Hon. Major Atkinson, Messrs. Gore, Hatch, O'Connor, Walker, Whyte, and Hon. Mr. Richardson.

Mr. SAMUEL VAILE examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Vaile, the Committee would like you now to give a general explanation of the proposals set forth in your statement?—The reason I propose to abolish the mileage system and differential rating is that I believe these are the chief agencies at work in massing up the population in a few large centres, and drawing it from the country districts. That I hold to be a great commercial and social evil. Probably the evil social influences at work are greater than the commercial; but I am satisfied that our present railway system has this tendency of drawing the population from the country and massing it up in a few large centres. I am certain that when we get the census returns for this year, it will be apparent that settlement in the country has not progressed in anything like the same rate as in the towns. I think that is a very great social evil. Now, the reason that it acts in this manner appears to me to be this. Suppose we take a large centre—any of our chief seaport towns: If a man wishes to establish any industry, the greater distance he goes out from the centre the more he will have to pay on every ton of goods he has to move. This must of necessity have the effect of crushing him down on the centre. The same law applies to the people themselves: every mile they move out adds to the cost of their living, and they also must crush down on the centre.] And then, again, to add to this evil there is probably a differential rate on one portion of the line as against another. In England, for instance, they will often carry goods to the terminal point at a less charge than for half or, sometimes, a third of the way. In a recent number of *Truth* you will find an illustration of that. Bacup is a town twenty miles north of Manchester, and the shopkeepers there, if they send to London to buy a ton of sugar, can save 10d. per ton if they have it shipped to New York, reshipped to Liverpool, and thence to Bacup, instead of having it sent direct from London. To illustrate what is done here: If a man wishes to send produce from Te Awamutu to any place within a seven-miles radius round Auckland, it would be cheaper to send this produce to Auckland, and then pass it back along the lines, than it would be to have it delivered direct at the station for which it was intended. The consequence is that people must be there, in Auckland, to handle and deal with these goods; and if you consider the traffic carried on in a city like London, you will see how the principle of differential rating must operate in massing up the people. Now, it is manifest that, if a man can get his goods carried along the whole or any portion of a stage for the same price, he might just as well be at the end of the stage as at any particular point upon it; and if he were a wise man he would locate himself at the end of the stage, and thus have a full stage of seven miles on either side. The consequence would be that people would be distributed over fourteen or fifteen or more miles, instead of a one- or two-mile radius. It must lead to a better distribution of population and wealth. And when we consider that all wealth is the result of the application of labour to land, it is apparent how important it is to distribute the people over the land. Then, I propose, instead of this mileage system, to fix the stages at distances of seven miles. [Explains by means of diagram.]

2. *Mr. O'Connor.*] I would ask Mr. Vaile why he draws the line at seven miles?—I do not fix the distance arbitrarily at seven miles, but propose to have the stages at the nearest distributing-points about seven miles from each other. It may in some cases be eight miles, or even nine miles, but generally I propose to cover the first thirty miles from the capital town by four stages, and then, if no town of two thousand or more inhabitants intervenes, to place the stages at fifty-mile distances. Then, I propose, as each inland town reaches two thousand inhabitants, to place a stage on either side of it; outside towns of four thousand inhabitants, two stages on either side; and to treat towns of six thousand inhabitants as capital towns; and so on until the whole lines are filled up with seven-mile stages.

3. *Mr. Whyte.*] By that process of adding to the number of stages you would greatly increase the cost of freight over the whole line?—Not necessarily, because as you got the stages filled up you would be able to reduce the freight all round and charge less for each stage, and then ultimately to remove certain stages in the manner described in the paper already laid before the Committee. Men generally travel for three objects—for business, pleasure, or for health. A man travelling on business clearly can afford to pay more in travelling through a populous country than in one thinly populated, because he has a greater chance of doing business; a man travelling for pleasure could also afford to pay more; and a man travelling for health would probably not have to travel so far as he does now.

4. *Mr. Hatch.*] I should like to ask Mr. Vaile whether he is looking at this question from a financial aspect, or as regards the settlement of the land, to obviate the so-called social evil of massing the population in the towns?—I maintain that both go together. If I were asked my private opinion I should say that the most important is the social aspect—the settlement of the country; but the financial result will also be better. The two points are intimately associated. We can get no freight if we do not settle the country. We cannot have products unless we have producers. Therefore the first point is to put the people on the land. I have often in my lectures been asked, "Why do you place so much importance on the passenger traffic?" It is because the whole thing begins there—before you get any products you must have producers. Then, as regards the differential rating, there is a great deal of difference between our railways, which are national property, and lines belonging to private companies. People who invest their money in any private concern look for interest on their capital, and a great many things are allowable under private