

## MR. WILLIAM JOHNSTON, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you, Mr. Johnston, state your position in connection with this Company?  
—I am a shareholder.

2. You are also Chairman of the County Council, I believe?—Yes; I have been living nearly 18 years in the neighbourhood.

3. Will you be good enough to give the Committee any information you can as to the public advantage to be derived from the Government taking over this line?—Yes; I can state that it is the outlet to a large quantity of agricultural land fit for settlement. There are some 60 settlers there who hold about 12,000 acres of agricultural land; their allotments run from 120 to 320 acres. There are also some very large sheep farming stations in the district; I think they hold about 40,000 acres of freehold and 120,000 acres of pastoral country. All the produce from these holdings comes to the Nightcaps station.

4. Anything further?—I might state that the County Council have expended considerable sums of money in making roads to these settlers. But there is not sufficient accommodation for them either as regards goodsheds, passengers platform; and the people are always entreating the Company to do something for them such as building sheds to protect their grain. The quantity of grain will largely increase for the future because some of the new settlers have not all their land cultivated as yet.

5. *Mr. Cowan.*] This line is offered at a price that will mean £280 or £300 to be paid by the Government in the way of interest; suppose they get the money at 4 per cent. which they can do, do you think this as a branch line would be worth that amount of money to the Government?—I could only make a guess as to the returns of traffic; I know there is a very large amount of building material and fencing material up the lines. There is a considerable passenger traffic independently of the coal and grain traffic.

6. Do you know anything about the permanence of the coalfield?—Yes; there has been a great deal of expense incurred in prospecting. I believe that the coal over the 500 acres which the Company owns the top seam, is nine feet thick, the middle seam is three-and-half feet, in others there is a three feet seam; there is another seam below that which I believe has never been prospected. There is coal also over the whole of the Nightcaps block. I believe the supply of coal to be practically unlimited.

7. Suppose they were to close the coalfield would this line still be of consequence to that district?—Yes; it would be of the greatest consequence to the district; it would be a very great draw back to the district if they had no such line. They could hardly work their places without it; there are between 50,000 and 60,000 acres of agricultural land which is dependent upon the line for the carriage of its produce.

8. We have returns of the traffic to the extent of 355 tons, and 462 bale of wool, do you think that these quantities are likely to increase or diminish?—I think they will increase; the grain I should say will very much increase in quantity. I should suppose that in two or three years the quantity of grain will be trebled. I think a thousand bales of wool went from the Nightcaps station during the last season.

9. Are the returns made up to date?—They are made up to January, the 6th—that is January 1886.

10. Then this large quantity of wool would have been carried after January?—Yes; most all of it after January. The Mine Manager told me there was over a thousand bales went away during the past season.

11. Supposing it were to be extended, could it be fitted by extension to a large country beyond?—Yes; but since the Mararoa railway is extended to Mossburn the Nightcaps station draws all the agricultural land in the district until you come within the reach of Mararoa line.

12. Is the line of equal weight with Government lines in construction?—I believe it was made on the same gauge and with the same weight of rails as the line from Otauto to the terminus line.

13. Are you aware that the Government have given any promise to take over this line?—No; I am not.

14. What is that quality of the district as regards settlement; is it a district likely to maintain a considerable population?—Yes; it is of the average of the country in Southland; the land along the rivers is very good; the ridges are pretty much the same as the ridges over the rest of the country. It gives from 40 to 60 bushels of oats to the acre on some farms; I know that in some years the yield is as high as 70 bushels of oats to the acre.

15. *Dr. Newman.*] Does this line run in the middle of a plain or near a hill or where?—There is a low hill to the north of it; there is miles on both east and west of the line of good agricultural land.

## WILLIAM HANDYSIDE, Managing Partner of the Nightcaps Coal Mine Company, Invercargill, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] The Committee will be glad to receive any information you have to give as to the Nightcaps Coal Company's line besides that in your letter of May, 1885. Will you state the ground upon which you consider it advisable that it should be made a public line?—When I was coming up here the settlers got up a petition for a goods-shed and passenger station. The petition was got up hurriedly but it was signed by 190 settlers who use the Nightcaps as a terminus; I think it was presented to the House last night. The line of railway is even now a public benefit outside of the Company altogether. The railway was built in 1882 virtually to open up the coalfield. The Government went to the extent of 10½ miles. To carry it on to the coalfield required 2½ miles; it required that to reach it. I may state that the agricultural land tapped by the Nightcaps line is in round numbers 50,000 acres, consisting of four or five very large holders from four or five to six thousand acres each; I cannot be sure as to the exact acreage; there are fifty-five or sixty holders of from 120 to 320 acres; there is a number of holders from 15 to 20 of ten-acre allotments, besides from 25 to 30 storekeepers, blacksmiths, and others in Nightcaps township. In round numbers I should say, this represents 50,000 acres of agricultural land, a considerable portion of which is being brought into cultivation. Seeing that the line