

THURSDAY, 9TH DECEMBER, 1897.

Prior to proceeding with the general examination of witnesses a discussion took place with regard to the statement of claim of the petitioners, in the course of which—

*Mr. Blow* asked whether the petitioners had put in any such claim, and, if so, whether he might be favoured with a copy of the same.

*The Chairman* replied that a claim had been put in, and that *Mr. Blow* could receive a copy of it at the first opportunity.

*Mr. Graham*: A specific claim was made on the Public Works Department, part of which they have admitted: what is the balance now?

*The Chairman*: The claim as submitted was for the sum of about £7,000. (Cries of "No—£5,000.")

*Mr. Graham*: I wanted to know what was the amount of the claim made upon the Public Works Department, and how much has been paid since the claim has been made?

*The Chairman*: I do not think it is possible to answer that question specifically; we do not ourselves know the exact amount that has been paid since.

*Mr. Graham*: But *Mr. Blow* should be able to tell us what this balance was.

*The Chairman*: *Mr. McLean* can tell us the actual amount. (To *Mr. Blow*): But you, *Mr. Blow*, can tell us accurately the proportion of that that has been admitted and paid; and I want to know what the balance is.

*Mr. Murdoch McLean*: £5,371 16s. 3d. is the balance claimed. *Mr. Blow* can produce the total of the claim.

*The Chairman* (referring to a paper handed to him): The total given here is £5,371 16s. 3d.

*Mr. Blow*: The claim sent in was for £5,637 16s. 9d.

*Mr. Graham*: And the amount of that that has been admitted and paid?

*The Chairman*: The difference is £266.

*Mr. Blow*: This would be for a number of items not separately moneyed out. I can work out the difference for you.

*Mr. Graham*: So that out of a claim of £5,637 only £266 have been admitted and paid, so that the balance that *Mr. McLean* considers due is £5,371.

*The Chairman* (to *Mr. McLean*): Do you admit that the claim now alleged is for £5,371 16s. 3d?

*Mr. Holland* (interrupting): This is the money he has lost, and he asked the Government to assist him to that extent because of these losses. Therefore he comes before the Committee to see if the Government can assist him over these losses: he cannot make the claim.

*The Chairman*: It has been handed in, and has been printed here as a claim for extras—that is, a claim lodged with Public Works Department, but not a claim lodged before this Committee.

*Mr. McLean*: No; it is not a claim lodged before this Committee.

*The Chairman*: Then, it is brought here as a statement of your claim against the department?

*Mr. McLean*: Yes.

*Mr. R. McKenzie*: We heard what *Mr. Blow* said, that for a long time after this claim was made on the department they refused to pay a shilling of it. Until the petition was brought before Parliament the department did not admit a shilling of this claim.

*Mr. Blow*: The amount was paid at once—well, before the petition was presented to Parliament.

*Mr. Flatman*: I understood *Mr. McLean* to say he did not understand what was being paid into his bank account before he left Auckland. Has this £266 been paid in?

*Mr. McLean*: The final payment of something over £3,000, I understand from *Mr. Blow*, has been paid into our bank-account in Auckland since we left there, and this £266, which I understand is the amount that the department has allowed us for our claim.

*Mr. Blow*: No, it is not all that; part of the claim you have abandoned.

*Mr. McLean*: One or two small items, but with these exceptions that has been the amount that has been paid in.

*Mr. Blow*: The amount paid in, I believe, is £101; the rest has been abandoned by the petitioners.

Mr. JAMES STEWART, Civil Engineer, Auckland, examined.

1. *Mr. McLean*.] You have had considerable experience in tunnelling, *Mr. Stewart*?—Yes, I have considerable experience in tunnelling, including the Makarau Tunnel, when in rather an advanced state during construction.

2. It has been stated in the report from the department that it is cheaper to build a tunnel through soft ground than it would be through firm ground. Now, I want you to answer, is it cheaper to build a tunnel in firm or hard ground—we will say a tunnel that would only require a lining, as described in the specification—than through soft ground, such as you know the Makarau Tunnel to be?—Well, as a rule there is no question about it. In hard, firm ground the cheaper is the work of tunnelling through it. In soft ground it costs more, and it might cost a very great deal if the ground is very soft.

3. Ground requiring such lining as described in the specification you would consider to be moderately firm ground, and cheaper to work than what you saw yourself in the Makarau Tunnel?—Yes; in the amount of brickwork specified and shown as in the contract, I should say that that was intended for firm ground.

4. In the specification there is no mention made of an invert—it is just the side walls and the arch?—I believe that is so.

5. Do you consider it safe in ground such as the Makarau Tunnel was driven through to remove the sills or even to cut off the end of the sills until the lining was sufficiently advanced?—I