

for what Mr. Mander calls fixing the line to a certain point. It was Mr. Hall-Jones who stopped further progress of the work when he heard the arguments of the deputation last year and saw their map. Then Mr. McNab went through the country. He strongly favoured the line going to Young's Point to touch the deep waters of the Kaipara, stating that in America lines were made to touch the water, for the benefit of the revenue of the railways. Other Ministers have been there. The Premier has been over the districts. Later than that, Mr. Fowlds went north. He met the settlers at different points, and heard their arguments. And then Mr. McKenzie, at the request of the Whangarei North Auckland Railway League, went through the district, heard deputations, and made the trip through the western country through which it was asked the line should pass. All the Ministers named having been in the locality and having heard the settlers, the matter came before Cabinet, and the Cabinet, by unanimous resolution—so we were informed—decided that the western route was the better, and adopted it. It is most unreasonable to suppose that a body of men such as the Cabinet would come to a decision of that sort without having facts and figures before them. We have had some of those facts stated in the House. The Hon. Mr. McKenzie has stated that the bridging is shorter on the western route, the tunnelling shorter, the grades better, and the maintenance would also be less. Then Mr. Mander took exception to the Minister, in the instructions he gave about the preparation of the figures regarding population, &c., and in directing the Department to leave out the district to the east of Kawakawa Railway. Mr. Mander says, twenty-three miles from the coast. The Minister's position was correct: we already have the Kawakawa line, and this line will become connected with the North Auckland Trunk Railway. Mr. Mander referred to Mr. Knorpp's survey. Mr. Knorpp was instructed to survey a line from Auckland to Whangarei. To keep on talking about Mr. Knorpp's survey is beside the question, for to-day we are seeking a main trunk line: we are not making a line to Whangarei. Mr. Knorpp's survey was not for a main trunk line; and, too, it was made many years ago, when the country was covered with bush. Mr. Mander has referred to engineer's reports. He read an extract from a Public Works Statement, quoting from Mr. Hales's and Mr. Holmes's reports. I put a question afterwards, and elicited the fact that Mr. Holmes, when he made this report in 1907, had not been over the western route: he had only viewed a portion of it from a mountain-top. Mr. Holmes also said that if they went to Young's Point or to sea-level there they would have a ridge of 700 ft. to climb afterwards, and that it would be necessary to make a very long tunnel to get out of that level. Now, the disproof of that is what the Minister has said, that the tunnelling and the grades on the western route would be less than those on the eastern side. So that Mr. Holmes is wrong there. When Mr. Fowlds was looking over the route the surveyor who was surveying the western route under instructions from the Minister accompanied us. When we came to the top of the ridge we stopped, and I asked the surveyor, "Did you find any difficulty in bringing the line up to this point?" and he said, "No." I asked again, "Did you meet with anything that would cause you to say that there was any extra difficulty in getting to this point?" and he answered, "No." I remarked, "Mr. Fowlds needs to take notice of that, because Mr. Holmes had said it would be impossible to get up the ridge if the line went down to Young's Point." The surveyor came to me afterwards and asked, "Did the engineers say that?" "Yes," I said. "Well," he said, "they must mean something further on." One thing that has caused a good deal of misconception has been with regard to McCarroll's Gap, and this misled Mr. Hall-Jones and also Mr. McKenzie for a while. It has always been recognised that the line must go to McCarroll's Gap. We were puzzled for some time to find out how the eastern line was to get to McCarroll's Gap, but we found out that the engineers had stretched the term "McCarroll's Gap." The Gap is a well-defined place. There is a plainly visible gap between the hills there, but McCarroll's Gap has been made by the engineers to reach some three miles further to the east—

*Mr. Mander:* Two miles.

*Witness:* It is more than that—and that has deceived in a great measure the people who were looking forward to McCarroll's Gap being the point the line would get to. Now, with regard to Mr. Stewart's report. Mr. Mander and those supporting the eastern route came to Wellington and interviewed the Premier and Mr. McKenzie together only some three weeks ago. The latter cross-examined Mr. Stewart, who is held up to you as an authority. He asked, "What length of tunnelling do you make at Ross's Hill?" "Twenty-eight chains," was the reply. "Well," the Minister said, "you are wrong there. The length is only 16 chains." So that Mr. Stewart's report, which says that the western route would cost £93,000 more than the other, is proved wrong at the very outset. Another question the Minister asked was, "What length of bridging do you reckon at Young's Point?" Mr. Stewart made a very long bridge. The Minister said, "You are wrong there also. There is only a little more of half of what you put down needed." And in other respects Mr. Stewart's figures, when tested by the figures which the Minister had, and which could only have been got from his engineers, showed Mr. Stewart to be out on very many important points. Mr. Mitchelson's name has been mentioned, and it carries some weight, because Mr. Mitchelson was once Minister for Public Works. Mr. Mitchelson was responsible in the old days for the line that was surveyed up to Maungatapere; and we know that naturally when a man has once decided on a certain thing it is very difficult to shift him. I saw Mr. Mitchelson when he was down here. I told him he was wrong in his statements, and he said he did not intend to discuss the line, and was going to say no more in reference to the railway route. He was also before Mr. McKenzie, and I was then with him, and he declined at that time to discuss the railway question any further. In a letter to the Press, when the Minister gave his decision, he said he still believed it was best to take the line to Maungatapere, but he thought it better not to retard the work: it would not matter so much as between the two. We have had the eastern called a central route, and it is most unfair for Mr. Mander and persons on the other side to talk of it as a central route. They ignore a good deal of the country on the western side because we happen to have a river there. But the railway on the east ought not to be considered. The Minister, in