

private sales. Why, then, have these land-seekers not coveted Taupo lands, and why has not a great protest been raised against the Crown locking up 350,000 acres of reputedly fertile lands in the Taupo district? Why have the landless men with some capital and much experience not dealt directly with the Natives, seeing that practically unlimited areas are available at comparatively nominal prices? We say that the keen practical farmers of this country by their attitude towards the Taupo lands offer a tacit and weighty opinion which is opposed to the petitioners' optimistic estimate of the value of the lands for ordinary close settlement. Absence of railway communication cannot possibly be accepted as an all-sufficient reason for non-development, seeing that fifty miles of the present railway has been open for six years, and that the proposed extension, which is to revolutionize matters, is only twenty miles in length. Even people who own land in this district appear to emphatically doubt its capabilities in regard to profitable occupation. As an instance, an estate of over 1,000 acres at Wairakei, in the heart of the district, and through which the proposed line would pass, has been held by one family for many years—about a quarter of a century—who also conduct a large hotel on the estate, and have been more or less engaged in coaching and transport business. Despite the fact that their business calls for considerable consumption of farm and dairy produce, they have not evinced sufficient faith in the capabilities of their land to induce them to cultivate it, even to the extent of providing for the requirements of their business on the spot. Surely the expense of carriage by road should, in this instance, encourage rather than retard development of cultivation at least to the extent mentioned. Nevertheless this land still remains practically in its original state. The realization or otherwise of the beneficent effects of the construction of the proposed extension of the tramway would not be of material interest to the company, seeing that it is their intention to dispose of their tramway, together with all the concessions, options, &c., to outside capitalists. (2.) "That a State-owned line from Rotorua to Taupo, connecting with the East Coast and Main Trunk lines, would be more advantageous in every respect than a privately owned Putaruru-Taupo line, and would form an integral part of the general railway scheme of the Dominion, at a cost of approximately £100,000 less than any other route": It has been urged that we as a community are opposing the Taupo Totara Timber Company because we fear the competition of Taupo and Wairakei as opposed to Rotorua. We wish now definitely to give all such and similar statements an emphatic denial. Taupo and Rotorua are naturally and inseparably linked together, inasmuch as they are the recognized centres of thermal activity in the Dominion; and experience has shown that tourists and visitors go as a matter of course from one place to the other, thus obtaining a thorough acquaintance with the various features of New Zealand thermal action. We have previously urged that, as part of the general scheme of State railways, a railway should connect Rotorua and Taupo. At the present time the East Coast line is about to pass within twenty-two miles of Rotorua. The trial survey of this line has now been completed, and we can presume that the promise of the late Minister of Public Works that the connection between Rotorua and the East Coast Railway will be in the field of actuality within a very limited period. Such will give us connection with one of the finest harbours on the east coast of the North Island, Tauranga, which is destined by its position to play an important part in the near future in the development of the Bay of Plenty and Rotorua-Taupo district. A glance at the map will convince any unbiased person that this is the natural port for the whole of the districts mentioned. It has water deep enough to float deep-sea-going vessels, and it is the centre of a large agricultural and pastoral district, where it is proposed to build freezing-works and other adjuncts of a deep-water port. The effect of this would be to bring Taupo within a hundred miles of deep water over one continuous State-owned line, against two hundred miles partly per medium of a private trust line running on to a State line. It would have the advantage of long-distance fares and freights against the two separates fares to be paid, partly State and trust. It would mean eight hours for stock against sixteen as at present proposed. The difference which the trust line can charge as per their charter and the charges that are in operation at the present time are matters of grave importance, irrespective of the big advantage of distance in favour of the coast line. From what we have already stated it must be admitted that we are not opposed to the progress of the district or in any way opposed to the development of the Taupo district; but we urge that if a railway is countenanced or constructed it should be one that will conform to the general scheme we have here outlined—from the present railhead at Rotorua, and thence on through Waio tapu to Wairakei and Taupo by a connection across the lake to the nearest point on the Main Trunk line, which is, we believe, Kakahi. Such a route would make one of the finest tourist routes in the world. It would shorten the distance by nearly a hundred miles for travellers leaving Wellington, passing through the thermal regions and on to Auckland, or *vice versa*. As an asset the two places are of incalculable value to this Dominion, and it is obvious that facility of transit from one place to the other will rapidly bring this region within the reach of an ever-increasing class of people. At present during the season there is a continuous stream of traffic from one place to the other, notwithstanding the delays and inconveniences incidental to coaching, and there can be no doubt that were there a railway between the two places traffic would be at once enormously increased. The knowledge that the whole of the thermal region of New Zealand was made so accessible to visitors from Australia and overseas would alone induce them to come in ever-increasing numbers. As a business proposition, therefore, it is absolutely clear that direct access by the quickest route from one place to the other is an imperative necessity. A glance at the map will again show that from this point of view the Mokai scheme is an impossible one. It severs Rotorua from Taupo, and it creates a conflict between the interests of the two places where community of interest should exist. On the other hand, a line through Waio tapu *via* Wairakei to Taupo would be through the heart of the thermal district. It would bring Waio tapu within easy reach of Taupo or Rotorua, and it would conserve the national interests of the thermal regions. (3.) "That if the present petition is granted the possibilities of a State-owned connec-