

Mr. Luckie: The 24th August, 1910. On the motion to have the proceedings printed it was talked out in the House and was never heard of any more, so I have been to some trouble to get a copy of the evidence.

The Chairman: Do you object, Mr. Myers?

Mr. Myers: I apprehend I cannot object to my learned friend putting this in for what it is worth, but, of course, any expression of opinion that Mr. Millar may have used is also to be put in for what it is worth. In fact, I am obliged to my friend for putting it in, because it shows what I have always understood, that they disputed that the Foxton Harbour question is almost indissolubly intertwined with the other questions that this Commission has to consider.

Mr. Luckie: We do not say anything of the kind so far as that is concerned. The Hon. Mr. Millar said so, and he gives his reasons for it, and the sole reason given was to prevent any trade going through the Port of Foxton by sea. That is what he says himself. There are one or two statements in his evidence which are of considerable importance. It reads:—

PUBLIC PETITIONS M TO Z COMMITTEE.

(Mr. CRAIGIE, Chairman.)

WEDNESDAY, 24TH AUGUST, 1910.

Petition of Bull's Town Board in re connecting Sanson Tramway with Government Railway-line at Greatford.

Hon. Mr. Millar: This matter of the Sanson Railway has been going on for some years. Lately there has been an agitation for the line, commencing with the creation of the Foxton Harbour Board and their endeavour to get the Government to find them funds to open up Foxton Harbour. We have no objection to working by agreement. They have got a large portion of our rolling-stock, and by agreement we gave them the running-right over a portion of our line. Now, we do not object to that at all, but the Government object *in toto* to a county that is already well served with railways and roads making a tramway that is going to come into direct competition with the railway, and that is their object, and I prove it. Supposing this tramway were got up to Greatford as they ask, they would tap the whole trade from Marton into Foxton, because if it only came on to their tram-line at Greatford they would take the whole thing down to Foxton and ship. We in New Zealand, as in other countries, have been forced by a railway policy to make a specially low rate to compete with the water. The Manawatu County ratepayers are only a portion of the owners of the railway-lines of New Zealand, and have no more right to get special favours because they are in a wealthy county than any other place. Let me take the first line of argument they are going on. They can do nothing until they get the Port of Foxton properly opened up. We have seen that when the Manawatu Company had their line they had a specially low rate to Foxton, but when the Government took over the Manawatu line it made one classified rate for the whole railway. If they think that the Railway Department is going to sit down and allow their tram-line to take away the whole of the trade from Wellington to Palmerston, or very nearly so, they will very soon find a rate made on the railways to shut the Port of Foxton up. Now, I want to show you some figures. Take Class A, merchandise. The timber that Mr. McKenzie talks about is done. I do not think there is a stick of timber in the district now. Timber has to go in only for building and fencing purposes, and it is chiefly white-pine. Take merchandise: From Foxton to Feilding, via Palmerston North, it is £1 3s. 4d. by train. By the tramway route to Greatford it would be £1 7s. 6d. Greatford is forty-nine miles from Foxton, and the cost is £1 11s. 10d. It would be 18s. 8d. by tramway. Foxton to Marton is fifty-two miles, and the cost is £1 12s. 6d.; by the tramway route, £1 0s. 3d. Now, you see the object of the whole concern. They would take the whole of their stock by rail through from our main line, because the distance is so much shorter, and that is why the Government opposed the thing. They are well served with railways now. There is another branch line to Palmerston North. We have no money to spend on the connection. There are places in the country where the people have hundreds of miles to go.

Mr. Newman: They are not asking you to pay money.

Hon. Mr. Millar: We are not asking the settlers to pay a penny more than any other settlers. You want the Government to make a railway to make Foxton Harbour. Without Foxton Harbour they cannot create trade, and the two are not going to be separated so far as the Government is concerned.

Mr. Newman: That is not so.

Hon. Mr. Millar: The Government is not going to grant a right to any person to construct a private railway. With reference to the siding that one of the gentlemen mentioned, if he knew anything about it he would know that you cannot make a quarter of a mile of railway in New Zealand without an authority by Parliament, and yet this line to Greatford must be eight or nine miles long. You call that a private siding. As far as the Railway Department is concerned we will not give you the connection, and I am speaking now on behalf of the Government. You have heard already the reply of the Prime Minister. We have to conserve the rights of the people of the whole Dominion.

Mr. Nosworthy: Would it pay the Government to take over the tram-line entirely if they could make a good bargain with the County Council?

Hon. Mr. Millar: No. We would lose the whole of our haulage from Wellington. The stuff would go through Foxton, because the ships can compete more cheaply than the railway, and they would only have to pick up the stuff at Foxton. If the Railway Department took the whole line over it would only have to relay it from beginning to end. The present line is all right for light traffic, but the only thing we would have would be the route.

Mr. Nosworthy: Supposing they gave a guarantee that they would not develop the Port of Foxton?

Hon. Mr. Millar: We could not do it then. The tramway would be valueless then: it would never do for our through traffic at all.

Mr. Pearce: You said that if this tramway were connected the Marton produce would go to Foxton. Does not a lot of that traffic go to Foxton now?

Hon. Mr. Millar: I do not believe any produce goes from Marton into Foxton.

Mr. Pearce: Another question I should like to ask you, as Minister of Railways and as a member of the Government, is: It has been shown that the timber trade goes down the Main Trunk, and that the produce of the district, which consists chiefly of oats and grass-seed, goes on to the Main Trunk. Do you think, as a member of the Government, it is right to force these settlers to send this traffic round another sixty miles?

Hon. Mr. Millar: Why cannot they send it to Greatford? They have eight miles cartage to Greatford, where the Main Trunk line is there to pick it up now.

Mr. Pearce: If you have to handle timber two or three times it is a very expensive matter.

Hon. Mr. Millar: I say that, as a private member and as a member of the Government, I will oppose *in toto* the granting of any private rights for railway-construction.

Mr. Newman: We are not asking for that.

Hon. Mr. Millar: You have been asking us to be allowed to put the revenue of the Crown into your own pockets.

Mr. Pearce: 838,000 ft. of timber, without including that for fencing, in one year is a big thing.

Hon. Mr. Millar: Granting it is, do you think the State is going to sacrifice the people as a whole for the sake of that 838,000 ft. of timber? Grass-seed is a very light thing to cart: there are men carting it miles. There is no better district for carting than yours.