

result from such a tremendous change in the railway system by the removal of one of the most important railway centres a distance such as is proposed, is a matter which ought to be taken into consideration by the Commission in view of the fact that we say that the work can be done at materially less cost at or about the present site than would be the case in the proposed deviation. In all questions of estimates of cost you gentlemen know much better than any of us could urge upon you how little reliance can be placed upon even the best of them, because so much depends upon the price of the material, which we cannot control, and the cost of labour, which is always increasing in New Zealand and, unfortunately, becoming less efficient. There is one other matter I desire to mention, and that is the question that ought not to be called a deviation—namely, the Levin-Marton link line. As the members of the Commission are aware, those persons who are supporting the proposal of the Levin-Marton line are not urging the Commission at the present time to report that that is a matter for present consideration. The reason for the question being added to the order of reference was that, in the event of the Commission being satisfied that the proposed deviation was more expensive by comparison with another method that might be adopted to drastically improve the conditions at Palmerston North than was justified at the present time, it would therefore be an unjustifiable expenditure of the excess which might very well be expended in a link line which would open up a large amount of other territory. The one is purely a matter of railway administration, while the other is a question of national importance, and, we suggest, on its general principles, ought to be regarded not merely from the point of view of railway-construction and railway-management, but from the point of view of the enormous convenience to the travelling public, and the carriage of stock, merchandise, and material which would be the result by the saving of distance and consequent saving of what is so important commercially—the question of time. I wish to reiterate, as was mentioned by Mr. Skerrett at the conclusion of the Commission that sat in 1916, that it was not now a matter for consideration, but it was one which, when any further improvements in the railway service were to be dealt with, ought to be taken into consideration. It is not desired to press that matter at this stage and under the existing conditions. Sir James Wilson, I think, intended to make that clear when he addressed the Commission; and I have the authority of those persons whom I represent to put it to the Commission in that way—that while we are not urging that the Commission should suggest that this matter is of any immediate consequence, it is of sufficient consequence to justify the Commission in saying that in the early future a proper detailed survey should be made and estimates arrived at, so that when the matter comes to be considered in the future it will be fairly considered as a matter of importance not only to the railway system of the Dominion but to the convenience of the general public of the Dominion. It is a matter which, when considering the development of the railways throughout the Dominion, warrants the serious and favourable consideration of the Railway Department. With reference to the other questions as to which evidence has been adduced before the Commission, it seems to me, gentlemen, that I cannot add anything further. You are experts much better trained than we are to consider the evidence placed before you and your own knowledge of the service will enable you to pass judgment in the matter.

*Mr. Myers:* Gentlemen, I do not intend to take up more than a moment or two of the time of the Commission. I would point out that I have called very little evidence with regard to the question asked in the second or extended Commission—I refer to the question of the consideration of a deviation of the Main Trunk line. I called little or no evidence for the reason that I regarded the matter as one which, up to the end of 1916, is concluded by the report of the Commission of that year. Consequently, therefore, the onus of showing that the position has altered since then is upon those who urge, if they do urge it, that the time has arrived when the question of a deviation from Levin to Greatford should be further considered. If my friend Mr. Luckie says it is not suggested that the time has arrived for the further consideration of that matter, then it seems to me that on this point the Commission will have quite a simple task. It is not suggested by Mr. Luckie, nor is it suggested by any of the witnesses who have been called by him, that there is any alteration between the present position and the position as it existed at the time when the last Commission made its report. That being so, I assume that the report of the last Commission stands, and that the answer so far as the second or extended Commission is concerned is quite a simple one. I venture to say that we should not have heard a word at the present time about the deviation from Levin to Greatford or Marton were it not for the fact that a slight deviation is proposed at Palmerston North. I also venture to say this: that if the proposal of the Railway Department had been to retain the railway-station at Palmerston North in its present site, or in the neighbourhood of its present site, no matter what the expense, we should not have heard a single word from Sir James Wilson and those associated with him, and it was for that reason and that reason alone that I ventured to ask Mr. Fulton by whom he had been instructed in connection with this matter. The Commission, of course, will understand that I do not for a moment suggest that anything that Mr. Fulton has said he does not believe to be correct, and it was not in any way with a view of attacking his credibility that I asked him by whom he was instructed. The importance of the matter is this: that it is not Mr. Thomson's league, or Mr. Clausen's league, or the league of so-many gentlemen we have heard from Palmerston that are really fighting this question.

*Mr. Luckie:* Excuse me—my friend is not right.

*Mr. Myers:* One moment. What I say is that it is really not they who are fighting the question, because if they had been you may well assume that before they could suggest to the Railway Department or to the Government that the course advised by the Railway Engineers was wrong they would have had something in the nature of expert reports to back up their opinion, or the view they endeavour to press upon the Government; but they have done nothing of the kind, and it was not until the league of Sir James Wilson came upon the scene that we have any endeavour made to question the views of the Railway Department by means of the opinions of any engineer or engineers.