

SESS. II.—1879.
NEW ZEALAND.

PETITION OF INHABITANTS OF THE COUNTIES OF
BULLER, INANGAHUA, AND GREY.

Presented by Mr. Reeves, 8th October, and ordered to be printed, 13th November, 1879.

To the Honorable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
of New Zealand in Parliament assembled.

THE PETITION OF THE UNDERSIGNED

HUMBLY SHOWETH,—

THAT your petitioners are inhabitants of the Buller, Inangahua, and Grey Valleys, in the Counties of Buller, Inangahua, and Grey respectively.

2. That the majority of those whose signatures are hereto appended are the pioneers of this portion of New Zealand, who, in the fulfilment of the common obligation of colonists of this young country, have devoted the best years of their lifetime to the high purposes of colonization. Their active labours during the past fifteen years have resulted in the development of the extensive alluvial and quartz gold, coal, and other mineral fields of this portion of the colony; in the opening up, for permanent settlement, of a vast area of the estate of the colony; in the establishment and gradual expansion of innumerable labour-absorbing industries; and, so far as the isolated position of the communities, and the absence of adequate means of communication, trade, and commercial interchange, would permit, in all the advantages both to themselves and the colony generally which can result from the active industry of an enterprising population.

3. That in "The Immigration and Public Works Act, 1870," your petitioners recognized the honorable desire of Parliament to extend to all the chief districts of the colony alike the important advantages of railway communication, and the enormous increment to the wealth of the State which has resulted from the settlement of these communities, not less than their matchless natural resources, gave your petitioners reason to believe that the very earliest consideration would be bestowed upon our most pressing need for railway communication with the rest of the colony. Notwithstanding, however, that a period of eight years has since elapsed, during which public works have been vigorously proceeded with in many other and perhaps less productive settlements of New Zealand, your petitioners are still excluded from the advantages of railway connection.

4. That up to the present time your petitioners, although in proportion to numbers the largest contributors to the wealth of the colony, have been denied almost all participation in the benefits accruing from the expenditure of borrowed money upon public works, and, in addition to their share of the extra colonial charge arising under the provisions of the loan policy, have during the past six years borne a not inconsiderable burden of local taxation for the formation of roads, bridges, and tracks, which were indispensable to the profitable pursuit of their labours.

5. That your petitioners, believing the fundamental principle of the public works policy to be the construction of the main trunk lines of railway, have in this respect a paramount claim upon the favourable consideration of your honorable House. These communities include a very considerable area of the Middle Island; have been proved to be the seat of the great mineral wealth of the colony; and the necessity of opening them up by means of an arterial line of railway has already been affirmed by successive Governments.

6. That, in the opinion of your petitioners, the only system of railway capable of securing to these districts and the colony the very highest attainable advantages is that which would start from Foxhill, Nelson, thence follow the Valleys of the Buller, Inangahua, and Grey, to Ahaura, and there connect with the midland line from Christchurch to Brunnerton. This route would at once open up the whole of the northern parts of this Island, and bring the important Districts of Westport and Charleston within easy access of the line.

7. That your petitioners, as permanent settlers in the country, are thoroughly convinced the time has come when it is absolutely imperative that the State should, by railway construction, not only give additional stimulus to the internal development and productiveness of these valuable fields, but unlock their vast and varied resources to the labour and enterprise of the whole colony. This your petitioners would respectfully urge as a duty which, in their humble opinion, the State owes, not only to an isolated and long-overlooked section of the colonists, but one which the exigencies of public policy and the commercial and industrial well-being of New Zealand at large alike demand.

8. In proof of the immense wealth of the gold fields of this portion of the colony, your petitioners refer with some degree of confidence to the splendid results achieved within the past few years from the quartz-mining industry at Inangahua and Lyell, from which places gold approaching to the aggregate value of £700,000 sterling has been obtained, of which nearly a quarter of a million has been paid in dividends. The number of registered quartz-mining companies in the Inangahua and Lyell is shown to be sixty-four, having a nominal capital of nearly a million and a half. The total amount expended upon mining works in the Inangahua is £546,000 sterling. The number of stampers employed is one hundred and ninety, while the estimated value of the different mining properties is £241,000 sterling. The area occupied under mineral leases is one thousand acres. The average gold yield obtained from stone in the Inangahua is 17 dwt. 7 gr. per ton, which is rather more than 85 per cent. higher than the average yield per ton obtained from quartz-mining in the adjacent colonies. The cost of crushing shows the disproportionately high average of 18s. 9d. per ton—an amount of nearly 96 per cent. over the average cost of crushing in Victoria. When it is considered that in Victoria firewood for steam-driving purposes has to be purchased and transmitted long distances, while here it is procurable on the spot at the mere cost of cutting it, and that abundance of coal is also available for the same purpose, the great excess of cost of crushing here can alone be attributed to the high price of labour in the Inangahua; and, as the price of labour is ruled entirely by the cost of living, until the keep of the miner is cheapened it is quite impossible to effect any serviceable reduction in the rate of wages. The immediate consequence of this is that numberless mining undertakings, capable with cheapened labour of employing large numbers of hands and yielding a fair profit upon the capital invested, are lying idle and unproductive, to the great loss and disadvantage of the district and the serious detriment of the colony generally. The enormous cost of the carriage of machinery and supplies from the seaboard is the one crowning evil of these districts, and thus a field, capable of being made to yield tenfold its present wealth, and of affording profitable employment to many thousands of miners and others, has been limited to a population ranging from eight hundred to one thousand two hundred—the average yield of gold per ton of quartz being nearly double here than what it is in Victoria. This of itself must point to the fact that, with proper facilities for carriage and communication, and cheapened labour, these districts will, before long, attain a rank of productiveness far beyond that yet reached in any of the sister colonies; and that, when these quartz-mining and coal fields are fairly opened up, they will maintain a permanent population of many thousands of persons, and provide an opening for capital and enterprise such as New Zealand has not yet seen.

9. That your petitioners feel assured that, rich beyond comparison as these fields unquestionably are, possessing, as they do, a larger number of distinct gold-bearing lodes than any other region in Australasia, the development of their wealth can never be otherwise than fitful and languishing until the country is opened up by means of an arterial railway giving access to the chief centres of population, which would at once cheapen and enormously widen the field of labour, give life and vigour to the work of settlement, and provide an immediate outlet for thousands of the industrious population of the colony.

10. The vast area of the coal deposits of this part of New Zealand, embracing, as it does, the valuable Westport fields, furnishes another all-important argument in favour of the prayer of your petitioners. Throughout the entire line of the proposed railway from Hampden to Reefton coal is to be seen in the greatest abundance, while in the Inangahua proper the magnitude of the deposits appears to be inestimable; but in the absence of railway communication this boundless store of wealth lies unutilized and unproductive.

11. The breadth of land which the railway in question would open up for settlement, agriculture, and pasturage within the limits of the three counties named is a further important argument in favour of the work. Your petitioners find, from a report furnished to the General Government in the year 1873 by the Nelson Inland Railway Communication Committee, that the area of good land which would thus be rendered available was estimated at nine hundred thousand acres, and that, as the great bulk of that land is at present a worthless estate in the hands of the Crown, the value which would be immediately given to it by the construction of the railway adds additional strength to the claim of your petitioners.

12. In the year 1877 the Conservator of State Forests traversed from Greymouth to Nelson, *via* the Grey, Inangahua, and Buller Valleys, and his report shows that there is no portion of the Middle Island which possesses so rich a natural endowment of timbers, the valley forests being especially valuable to commerce.

13. For further and more detailed information as to the numerous other valuable mineral products which have been proved to exist in this portion of the colony, your petitioners beg respectfully to refer you to the accompanying carefully-compiled tables, feeling assured, as they do, that the statistics therein contained will impress your honorable House with a just sense of the high obligation which awaits you to speed the work of colonization in these remote but prolific communities, not merely as a reward to those whose persevering energy has proved them to be such, but as a sure and enduring means of contributing to their commercial and industrial progress, and adding to the material prosperity of the colony at large.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honorable House will authorize the adoption of the Buller, Inangahua, and Grey Valley's route for such railway, and make the necessary appropriations in order to enable the work to be proceeded with immediately at Reefton, in the direction of Lyell, in order thereby to establish the confidence of your petitioners in the certainty of the undertaking, and also from both the Brunnerton and Foxhill ends; or grant your petitioners such other relief as in the wisdom of your honorable House may seem most expedient.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, &c.

P. Q. CAPLES,
(And upwards of 2,000 others.)