

push the line on from Heriot's thought they would try Moea Flat as a lever to force the hand of the Government. With that end in view the petition was got up. I am still of the opinion that if the Government can purchase the estate at a price at which they can let it to the people, all good and well; and if the railway can be taken through Moea Flat at a cost which would not be enormous, then let it be done. If the Government could see its way to do that, then, as I said, we would withdraw all opposition. But we want the Government to clearly understand that they must not pay too big a price for Moea Flat, as it is not fit for close settlement. There are 64,300 acres, of which only 7,000 acres are fit for close settlement. By close settlement I mean for farms up to about 400 acres each. The rest of the land is fit only for runs. There is a great deal of Crown land to the west of the Moea Flat Estate, and that would have to be dealt with by the Government in some way if the estate was cut up into small runs. You can see by the plan here produced that the country as a whole is not fit for close settlement. If the Government are merely making a railway to Eddievale for the benefit of the Eddie community, then I say let them stop it at once. I myself have gone over the plan of the railway route urged, and, speaking as a surveyor, I am perfectly satisfied that it is utterly impracticable to take the line through Moea Flat. There are no places there where stations could be erected except at a very excessive cost. A railway by way of Rae's Junction would be much more convenient, and would enable coal to be carried at low cost and the dredges along the river to be supplied much easier.

65. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*—How many ploughable acres are there on the Moea Flat?—About 7,000.

66. Would that ploughable land be of good quality?—It is of fair quality. I think it would yield 60 or 70 bushels of oats on an average to the acre easily.

67. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] You said you are not opposed to the Government purchasing the Moea Flat Estate at a price?—Yes, at a price.

68. What do you think the land is worth?—My outside estimate is that it is worth from £1 to £1 2s. 6d. per acre. The Government valuation is 18s. 9d. per acre.

69. *The Chairman.*] You know this district?—Yes.

70. Do you think a railway from Lawrence to Roxburgh would serve the upper end?—Yes.

71. Would it serve it to better advantage than the other route, do you think?—I do not know about that. I do not know if that route is feasible.

JOHN BENNETTS, Fruit-grower, of Roxburgh, examined on oath.

Witness read the following copy of a letter:—

DEAR SIR,—

Roxburgh, 20th July, 1901.

A very representative and enthusiastic meeting of the Roxburgh Railway League was held here last evening, when the following prominent settlers and business people of Roxburgh, Coal Creek, and Teviot district were present: Messrs. John Inglis (president), A. Birch, J. Bennets, R. Smith, D. Parker, W. Manuel, T. Michelle, Jabez Burton, H. Veale, S. Wren, J. H. Waight, Joseph Tamblin, E. Hart, S. Toms, R. Wilson, R. Glendinning, James Parker, M. Campbell, Thomas Andrew, E. Bennett, and W. P. Matthews (secretary).

The following motions were proposed and carried unanimously:—

(1.) That the Minister for Public Works be notified by wire that the Roxburgh Railway League repudiate the representations made to the Government by the Dunrobin people *re* arresting or stopping the present extension of the Heriot Railway towards Eddievale *via* Rae's Junction to Roxburgh.

(2.) That a deputation be sent to Wellington from this league to urge the Government to push on the line towards Roxburgh with all possible speed, and to give rebutting evidence, if necessary, and that Mr. John Bennets be the deputation.

(3.) That a letter be sent to the Minister for Public Works setting forth the position fully as to why we are sending a deputation, and authorising Mr. John Bennets to give evidence on behalf of the league.

We desire to draw your attention to the fact that the petition which has been presented by the Dunrobin people, asking for the construction of the line to be stopped until the Government acquired the Moea Flat Estate, emanated from people who are within five or six miles of a line at present; also, that the headings to the petition represent them as coming from the residents of Roxburgh, Coal Creek, &c. This is a matter which we take strong exception to, as the residents about here had nothing whatever to do with the getting-up of those petitions. There was no public meeting called here, and the Roxburgh Railway League was not consulted in the matter at all. Yet the headings to the petitions imply that they originated here. Even those people who signed the petition in this district did so under a misapprehension, as they were told that it was for the opening of the Moea Flat Estate and the bringing of the line through it, which is misleading, seeing that the Government are asked to stop the work until they purchase the estate, which may be never. And, as you are doubtless aware, few people take the trouble to carefully read the heading to a petition of that sort.

What we want here is a railway, and having been told by the Government (through our member) that they will not purchase the estate, and will not bring a line through it to enhance the value of private property, we simply fall in with the Government's proposal to bring the line in the direction they think will be most suitable—*viz.*, *via* Eddie's and Rae's Junction.

Yours, &c,

Hon. W. Hall-Jones,
Minister for Public Works, Wellington.

WM. P. MATTHEWS,
Secretary Roxburgh Railway League.

72. *Mr. Flatman.*] Was your league definitely informed that the Government would not buy the Moea Flat Estate?—We were making inquiries and were given to understand that the Government would not buy, and therefore we had no hope of the railway through it. We have been agitating for many years to get railway communication, and were exceedingly pleased to find that Government had voted money for the purpose of constructing six miles and a half in the direction of Roxburgh. Then we were very much surprised to find that there was this agitation to stop the work. I take it that it is the people in the back blocks whom the Government intend and wish to benefit. This present agitation has arisen amongst people who already have a railway close at hand, and it would be most unfair for them to stop a railway which would greatly benefit those who have no line at all. As a fruit-grower, I may say that as things are now we have to travel forty miles by road, which is very tedious and expensive, and is the cause of our produce being often considerably damaged in transit. Furthermore, this sort of thing greatly handicaps us in competing with other growers nearer to the seaboard. And now, seeing that we are about to have a line constructed, I for one would exceedingly regret to see the work of construction stopped in the manner now attempted. I know the Moea Flat Estate well, having been all over it. We have no