

111. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] Do you not think it would be better for the selector if his land could not be taken by an outside creditor for ordinary debt?—I can hardly answer that question without some further consideration; but, speaking hurriedly, my impression is, that the land should not be capable of being assigned for any debt whatever until it is actually Crown granted and the property of the selector. The nineteenth clause is as follows:—"That your petitioners beg humbly and respectfully to direct the attention of your honorable House to a bill prepared by John Aitken Connell to amend the Land Act, a copy of which, they have been informed, has been sent to each member of your honorable House, which provides, in the opinion of your petitioners, a fair and practical remedy for the grievances under which your petitioners suffer, and which, if passed into law, would, in the opinion of your petitioners, prevent the recurrence of complications alike hurtful to the settlers in the community." I have a copy of Mr. Connell's Bill, but I have not read it through. I believe, however, that its main feature is the capitalisation of the unpaid instalments, to which reference has already been made. I think its object is to give relief to deferred payment settlers. The twentieth clause says:—"That your petitioners approve of all the provisions of the said Bill in so far as the same relate to deferred-payment land, excepting that the words 'at auction' should be struck out of clause 34, and that personal residence on pastoral deferred-payment land should, in the opinion of your petitioners, be retained, and that the words 'less the amount of the sum of the instalments already paid' should be added to clause 41." This clause raises the question whether land should be disposed of by auction, by tender, or by ballot. I watched the operation of the ballot system for some time, and it seemed to me to have many objections. The main objection was, that a rush was made for the best sections—in fact, I have seen as many as forty or fifty persons going in for one section—and it was a regular lottery. I have known of men going round the country and inspecting the blocks, and when they had made their choice and the ballot took place they did not draw a lucky ticket, but always a blank, and consequently they never got what they wanted. The consequence was that these men were disappointed, and, after losing their time and their money, they gave up the thing in disgust. I also observed that the sort of men who would make the best settlers, taking observation of this, determined not to waste their time on such a wild goose chase as they would be taking part in if they tried to get a section by ballot.

112. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] Would not more careful valuation and higher prices rectify that?—Yes, to a considerable extent. Had the land been valued, there would have been less competition, and the evils I have referred to would have been much lessened. Some people would not lose their self-respect by gambling for land under the ballot system, and others would not do so on conscientious grounds. Moreover many persons, it is said, went in for the ground with the object of being bought off.

113. Are you not aware that the same thing has occurred under the auction system?—Yes; but not to the same extent. I think the auction system is a fair one, though under it people may often get excited and give more than the land is worth. I think a combination of the systems of auction and ballot,—that is, the tender system,—would be the best. Under it there would be no excitement; the land would be surveyed and mapped off; and a man would know exactly what he was buying. Should it happen that two or more persons offered the same amount for the same land, it might then be decided by lottery.

114. *The Chairman.*] Supposing that a case of this kind happened: Two persons tendered for the same block,—one the upset price, and the other double the upset price,—do you think it would make the man who had given the larger amount contented to know that he had given so much more than he need have done?—He might feel a sense of grudge; but he would only have himself to blame for anything that had happened.

115. *Mr. Macandrew.*] Do you not think that many of these petitioners have got just as good a claim for relief as the 200 who petitioned some years ago, when Donald Reid was appointed to revalue?—Yes; I think they have.

116. *Mr. Stevens.*] Have there been complaints from any other parts of New Zealand that selectors have paid too much for their land under the deferred-payment system?—I cannot remember any. There have been applications made to the Wellington and Taranaki Land Boards for an extension of time; but I do not think there have been any complaints that the land was too highly priced.

117. With regard to legislating for the relief of these people, who are all in Otago: do you not think it would be better that they should be dealt with by the department, or by the Government, instead of by special legislation?—I am not sure that the department could help them, because if we were to put the law in operation, we would have to evict three or four hundred people at once. The Land Boards have assumed a discretionary power in the matter, but they have no right to do so; nor do I think the measure of relief should be left to the discretion of the Lands Board and the Minister for Lands, it should be according to a definite plan fixed by law. I may say that the best land is invariably set aside for the deferred-payment selectors.

118. Did many of them pay as much as £5 per acre for their land?—No; very few paid so much.

119. *Mr. Macandrew.*] You, of course, know the deferred payment lands set apart in the Dalhousie Hundred?—Yes.

120. And you know that a large quantity of land in Otago has been sold at a fixed price of £1 10s. per acre?—Yes.

121. In your opinion, was the land set apart in the Dalhousie Hundred superior or inferior to the land taken up in Otago, at £1 10s. per acre?—I do not think that the land set apart in the Dalhousie Hundred was over estimated in value, when £3 per acre was asked for it on deferred payments.

122. What is the difference in the merits of the petitioners in this case, and in that of the 200 who petitioned some time ago?—I think the two cases are analogous, with this difference: That when the first petition came before the House, the colony was in a depressed state, and the prices of the produce were low; and, in fact, it was considered impossible that the selectors could pay their instalments. The Committee, therefore, felt that a desperate case required a desperate remedy. But