

205. *Mr. Macandrew.*] I gather from you, instead of one uniform block for all of them, the cases would be met if the Government had discretionary power to deal with individual cases within the limits of the law?—Yes; but the law wants altering. I may say the Land Board only put in the market what land they like. These people cannot apply for any but these lands. These little local arrangements, as I have pointed out, have not worked well.

Captain MACKENZIE, M.H.R., examined.

206. *The Chairman.*] Your name is Francis Wallace Mackenzie, and you are a member of the House of Representatives?—Yes.

207. You have presented a petition from some deferred-payment settlers, asking for relief?—They ask for many things. The petition is the same as the printed petition. I have not a copy with me.

208. Those are the petitions we are considering; would you be good enough to make any statement?—I am not at all prepared in any way to make a statement. I would like the Committee to elicit anything required from me. Speaking generally on the matter, I wish to say this, that there are a great number of those deferred-payment settlers in my district, from end to end, and I have had ample opportunity of observing how the system works. The first deferred-payment settlers were placed in my district under the system, and although settled in a remote corner of the country, and without almost any communication by roads or other public works, those people have done very well. They have been successful settlers. I believe one great reason of that was, they got the land at a reasonable price under the ballot system.

209. And the land was exceptionally good, was it not?—No, not exceptionally. It was good land. I believe all the trouble the deferred-payment settlers complain of, is caused by giving up the ballot system.

210. Were there no complaints under the ballot system when in existence?—I will come to that by and by. Under the ballot system as it is practised, applicants had personally to attend, and I believe there was a lot of complaints that they lost a lot of time, some of them lost time in going about seeking to get land. I do not think there was any reason to complain of going to look at the land, because that is a thing any prudent man would do in any case; and I believe, if more land had been put in the market, that the difficulty as to the ballot would not have arisen. I have also this to say in regard to some evidence given by Mr. McKerrow. As to the difficulty of putting land in the market, so far as my district is concerned, there has been no difficulty whatever. There were no roads made for those settlers, and no assistance whatever was given to them. And yet almost without exception the first settlers have done well. It was only after the auction system was introduced that complaints began to be made. I may also state that to my knowledge, owing to the great difficulty of getting produce to market from want of roads, and also owing to the low price they got for the produce, that there were no doubt other causes as well as high prices promised for the land, inducing an unsatisfactory state of things. I may say this also that a great number of those settlers, who have completed the payments and acquired the freehold of the land, have done so by borrowing money. And the fact of their doing so, does not in my mind in any way prove that they are in a good financial position. Neither does it prove, to any great extent, the success of the system. There was a measure of relief given to these people by having their land valued and their improvements valued, and the land was then sold by auction, subject to the value put on the improvements, and the men were invited to consent to this arrangement, and some did. But that meant that all the payments made previously were forfeited—payments not of rent, but of money in purchase of the fee simple had to be forfeited. It so happened that those, who had done their best and paid up as well as they could to within one or two instalments, had no consideration whatever, whereas a man, who had never paid anything at all, except the first instalment, derived a great deal of benefit from that arrangement, inasmuch as he was enabled to spend his money in improvements, thereby increasing the value of the land, and, when put up to auction, he got it at a low figure. By that means the deferred-payment settlers, who had honestly done their best to fulfil their engagements, suffered, whereas those who did not do so, who never paid any instalments, came off best and made a very good thing out of it. Then as to those men who had complied in full with the law, and purchased the land after occupation for three years, it seems to me rather hard that they should buy that land on long credit, and then pay cash for it, as it were, they have no consideration whatever for that. They have by that means paid to the Government interest for the whole term of ten years, and now are obliged to pay interest to the money lender for seven years, so that they are paying double interest.

211. *Mr. Macandrew.*] So that their allegation is correct as to that?—Yes.

212. Of course you are speaking from personal knowledge of some of the petitioners?—Yes.

213. *Mr. Pearson.*] They get no rebate?—No; I see by this petition that some of the petitioners have got small farms—less than 300 acres—less even than 200 acres originally authorized to be taken up. It appears that the law debars them from taking up more land. I do not see why a man should not take up the balance if he chooses. I think he ought to be allowed to do it.

214. *Mr. Rolleston.*—Notwithstanding the inequality of the value of the land?—I do not understand what you mean.

215. Is not 100 acres of some land better than 200 acres of other land?—The reason why smaller allotments were taken up was simply this—the land was surveyed originally not for the deferred-payment system but for sale, and then bits of it to go under the deferred-payment system were arbitrarily selected by the surveyor, and in some cases there was no more land for a man to get in the neighbourhood, and he just took the land he could get, without reference to the quality.

216. If a block of land is sufficient as a foothold in the country for a man, and is good land, do you think that the State is bound to go beyond that in carrying out the deferred-payment system?—No, perhaps not, if the land was strictly surveyed as to quality. I have seen that system in Victoria, where the better quality of land was surveyed into smaller blocks, and the worst quality of land into larger blocks. I think that is an excellent system, but here the land is surveyed without reference to the quality.