

that I bought a section 33 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$ chains, in the very centre of the block, at £70, I believe that is nearer than anything else the value of property there. Clause 7 says, "That the scale of rents fixed upon by the Government is greatly in excess of the value of the land, and though it is true there are several instances where high ground rents have been given for private lands, and the Government have cited these cases as justifying the rents fixed by them." I may say that the case of this land, which was leased at £1 7s. 6d. per foot, was cited by Mr. Mackay why the Colliery Reserve tenants had been fairly treated; but the man who did that has had to abandon it to the landlord, who has accepted the property and discharged the tenant from further liability. In clause 8 it says, "That at a sale of the land held by the Government on the 9th January, 1879, of lands immediately opposite the Colliery Reserve, in the centre of the town, sixteen sections of 1 rood each brought at auction £1,042, equal to an average of £64." They paid £64 for quarter of an acre. I may explain that this portion of the town is further up from the place where I bought the section. These freehold sections, which were 66 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$ chains, and were very nearly in the centre of the Colliery Reserve, the freehold was sold by the Government, and realized £64 per quarter acre. There are twenty of those sections in an acre, therefore they are paying £25 per quarter acre. And freehold sections on the other side of the road, sold by the Government, only brought £64.

11. *The Chairman.*] How long is it since these freehold sections were sold?—In 1879; after the leases were arranged.

12. *Mr Pearson.*] Westport in 1879 was not in such a prosperous condition as when these leases were taken up?—It was equally prosperous, but the prospects were not so good.

13. *Mr Stevens.*] In 1877 the diggings were at their height there?—Business was just in its ordinary state, but the expectations were so great. There was the railway, and three or four coal companies were expected to be in operation. It is a wonder to me now that I did not accept even higher terms from the Government.

14. Was not there a depression in town property between 1877 and 1879?—There has been a depression since 1877. I believe since 1877 the townships along the coast have gone back. I believe there is no increase in the value of town property, but if anything it has gone back. I have had an opportunity of judging, because I have been auctioneering at Westport for fifteen years. Clause 9 says, "That the land occupied by your petitioners is unlikely to be required by the Government for railway purposes, ample reserves being available for any probable increase in the coal trade of the port." The railway yard of the Westport line is acknowledged to be the largest in the colony. The sections occupied by these section-holders is the margin of the reserve, fronting Main Street, and they have only 66 feet back. [Witness indicated on a plan the position of the railway yard and that of the Colliery Reserve sections.]

15. *The Chairman.*] Then we are to understand that these sections have a frontage to the street and also to the yard?—The back of the sections fronts the railway yard.

16. So that they have a double frontage?—No, they would be trespassers if they went there.

17. *Mr. Stevens.*] How many hotels are there on this property?—I think there are seven or eight hotels along the whole frontage.

18. How many stores—wholesale and retail?—I could not tell, but all the principal business places are on it.

19. *Mr. Pearson.*] How many people are there altogether on this block?—I could not say. But there are only five people in business occupying the freehold side of the town, all the other people are on the Colliery Reserve, and hence it is of such public importance. I believe that three-fourths of the people are resident on the Colliery Reserve.

20. Do they want to purchase the freehold?—Yes; they want either to get the freehold or to have the terms agreed upon before 1877.

21. Will any further portion of the reserve be required for railway purposes?—I believe not, but that is a fair subject of argument.

22. *The Chairman.*] That is your opinion?—Yes. My own impression is that the area of land still further available is more than sufficient for the next hundred years, because it stretches away for a mile. As to clause 11, I do not understand why they put that in, and have no remarks to make on it. What is stated in clause 12 is correct.

23. *Mr. Pearson.*] Would you consider the rents were too high if a compensation clause were inserted?—Even then they would be; but there is no compensation whatever at the end of twenty-one years, and the holders must take away their buildings or leave them.

24. *Mr. Stevens.*] Do you think £40 a year is too much to pay for ground rent for a large hotel under reasonably favourable circumstances?—It is very heavy ground rent under any circumstances.

25. *Mr. Pearson.*] For Westport?—Yes, it is too much. During the next term they will have to pay a third more, and during the last term they will have to pay double.

26. *The Chairman.*] There are three classes of sections?—Yes; there are front sections, outside sections, and back sections. The back sections are in the bush, and £1 per annum is paid for them; the £2 10s. ones are in the cross streets nearer the centre of population. As to clause 13, the Provincial Government thought they were simply doing justice to these unfortunate people, who were washed out by river and sea, by allowing them these sections. In 1872 it was not thought that the reserve would be required for colliery purposes; therefore in 1872 they were allowed to occupy this land. That was done before the abolition of the provinces, and the General Government, instead of ratifying the arrangements of the Provincial Government, appointed a Commission to inquire into the merits of the case.

27. Were the leases not signed?—There were no leases at all: it was not in writing.

28. *Mr. Stevens.*] It would in the records of the proceedings of the Provincial Council?—Yes; there was a resolution of the Council. What was given as a measure of compensation has actually turned out to be a source of loss, because people who have got sections in the bush they can never occupy are being forced to their bargains. The rents have not been collected for something like four or five years, until they have accumulated to large sums, varying from £50 to £100, now payable by these