

76. Have you a knowledge of the value of land in that district?—Yes—an ordinary business-knowledge.

77. Has there been any land sold there at the rate of £600 per acre?—No, I think not.

78. Or anywhere near it?—No.

79. What is the highest rate you know of actual sales being made at anywhere near there?—I do not know of any land being sold there of late years by the acre at all—only by the foot; and any land sold by the foot was far above that price.

80. You know Stark's property yourself?—Yes, well.

81. How much of it is level?—It is all tolerably level.

82. Some of it is on the cliff?—Yes, it is on the cliff, and slopes gradually from the shore.

83. *Mr. Gore.*] Has land there increased very much in value since 1881, the time of Stark's purchase?—I should think it did increase between 1881 and 1883, or up to about the middle of 1883; since then it has been depreciating.

84. *Mr. Peacock.*] Do you consider that property has depreciated, or has it increased in value since the date referred to by you—May, 1884?—Since the end of 1884 property round Auckland has depreciated considerably, and this property has certainly not increased in value, except from the fact that it was required by the Government for defence purposes. I have been informed by an authority on whom I can rely that the furniture offered for sale by Mr. Stark to the Government, and refused by them, has since been divided between the Allison brothers as a present. There is great dissatisfaction at Mr. Allison's appointment as Reviewer in the district; because I understand that prior to this purchase being made a great many people in the district who had objections to the valuations placed upon their property, when they heard of Mr. Allison's appointment as Reviewer, refused to state their objections.

85. Was it because of Mr. Stark having put a large valuation on this property that they thought it was hopeless to get the Reviewer to reduce theirs?—Yes.

86. *Hon. Sir J. Vogel.*] I believe Mr. Brewer has been in the service some time?—Yes.

87. Do you know anything of him?—No, nothing personally.

88. Has he not been engaged in large purchases for the Public Works Department?—Yes. I was always led to believe when I was in office that he was a very reliable and efficient officer.

89. Did he occupy the same position in the North Island as Mr. Calcutt does in the Middle Island?—I think exactly the same.

90. Do I understand that the hints thrown out in the letters which you have read apply to him as well as to Mr. Seaman, or more especially to Mr. Seaman?—To Mr. Seaman only, I should think. My opinion is that Mr. Brewer arrived at his valuation in conjunction with Mr. Seaman.

91. You think this applies more to Mr. Seaman than to Mr. Brewer?—I think so. My impression is—and it is the general impression in Auckland—that the whole matter was a conspiracy got up to defraud the Government.

92. And that Mr. Seaman was in it?—I do not know; I will not say that.

93. *Mr. Barron.*] From your experience as a Minister, and from your local knowledge, would you be able to express an opinion as to whether this land might have been purchased for the Government to better advantage by taking it under the Public Works Act rather than by private negotiation?—Yes; I have no hesitation in saying that it could have been purchased at much less cost by arbitration—at least half the cost.

94. You say that, from your local knowledge and from your experience as Minister for Public Works, the cost is high?—Yes; and, further, I have no hesitation in saying that, if the purchase had not been so hurried and rushed, it might have been had for considerably less even by private negotiation.

95. Have you any opinion why the purchase was hurried?—No, I have not. In my experience these things were not generally hurried.

96. The Minister for Public Works was in Auckland at the time that this purchase was made?—Yes.

97. Do you know was it the object of his visit to Auckland?—I cannot say that it was.

98. Did you hear that Mr. Stark was probably a candidate for election to Parliament?—Yes.

99. A candidate for Mr. Hurst's seat?—Yes. I should like to state, Mr. Chairman, that my sole desire in giving evidence before the Committee is not to cavil at the action of the Government so much as to object to the undue haste with which the purchase of the property was made, and also to bring before the Committee what I think was clearly a conspiracy to defraud the colony.

THURSDAY, 1ST JULY, 1886.

Hon. E. RICHARDSON examined.

100. *The Chairman.*] The Committee is inquiring into the purchase of Stark's property, and among the papers have received a telegram from the Land Purchase officer in Auckland in which he states that the purchase was settled between Mr. Stark and a Minister: will you tell the Committee if you are the Minister he refers to?—Presumably so; but it is absolutely incorrect to say that he had nothing to do with it. The history of the matter is this: Immediately on my arrival in Auckland I was informed by one of our engineers that there was a heavy claim going to be made against the Government for damage done to this property at Takapuna. Before taking any action I made it my business to go out, unknown to the Land Purchase officer or anybody else, to look at the place and see what the position was. Next day, or within a day or two, I had a visit from Mr. Stark, who was a stranger to me. He stated that his property had been interfered with, and wanted to know what the intentions of the Government were—whether they were going to take the whole or a part of the property; at the same time he stated that the claim would be nearly