

2250. There were three of them that were agreeable?—Yes.
2251. Did the others, besides these, offer any opposition?—No; they never came forward. There was an old man who came forward, but he was an objector. After Rangiwhehu gave his evidence this old man became very angry.
2252. Rangiwhehu was in company with Bailey?—Bailey was the interpreter.
2253. Was not Bailey acting with Rangiwhehu?—I do not think so.
2254. Did you take any evidence of the improvements made by the Natives—as to whether there was any grass on these two reserves?—No: whatever had been there in the shape of native grass had been ploughed up again, generally speaking.
2255. Did you take into consideration what would be the cost of ploughing the land and laying it down in grass?—The cost of ploughing—yes. In some cases we could not consider that, where it had been ploughed two or three times.
2256. This is very good land?—A portion of it. Okahu is very good land, equal to any in the district. So is the land next the Waingongoro—very fair land, but not to be compared with top portion. The ground is fenced. There is a lease outside of fence over it of 8s. an acre.
2257. That is European land?—European land.
2258. What do you think Okahu and Ruatumoko would bring for cash under the hammer?—Eight or nine pounds—certainly not ten pounds. The adjoining land was, with a good dwelling and wool-shed on it, stockyards, and other houses, sold for £9 5s.
2259. *Mr. Wilson.*] What memorandum do you say that Nolan had?—I do not know whether Nolan had it, or what it was.
2260. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What is that?—
2261. *Mr. Wilson.*] There is an implication that Mr. Nolan had a memorandum of some kind of instruction, and that it came from the Public Trust Office. Have you any idea who supplied it?—I have not. I never had it.
2262. Did it influence you in any way?—Not at all.
2263. Did you think the Public Trust Office had anything to do with it?—No, I did not. I did not think of it at all as emanating from the Public Trust Office, or that it was an instruction at all.
2264. *Mr. Bell.*] Are you a member of the Land Board of Taranaki?—Yes, and am now.
2265. You had something to do with the Land Selectors Bill of last session?—Yes.
2266. Do you not hear complaints up there very like those that we are considering here?—The complaint that is made against the Bill of last session is just the same as is made here about the reduction of leases on the west side of the Waingongoro River.
2267. It is a fact—is it not—that there has been a great fall in the value of property on the West Coast?—Yes. At one time I was offered £20 an acre for my farm; now I could not get more than £10 an acre for it, or £11 extreme value.
2268. Your farm is highly-improved land, is it not?—Yes.
2269. When was that that you were offered £20 an acre for your farm?—About fifteen or sixteen years ago.
2270. *Hon. Mr. Acland.*] About fifteen years ago there was a rush for land?—Yes; and rents were given for land that were considered fair at the time: but things have altered terribly since then.
2271. *Hon. the Chairman.*] As I understand, you considered that the arbitrators had very wide powers—something to this effect: that you had the option of fixing the rent for one year if you pleased?—Yes—according to my reading of the regulations.
2272. Did you consider that it would have been in the power of the arbitrators to fix the rents for different periods of the thirty years?—I think we could have fixed the rent for any term within the regulations.
2273. I understood you to say that the rents fixed were fair “for the present”—that was the term you used: now, what would alter that view in the future in the case of leases where all the improvements were practically reserved to the lessee? what circumstances could alter the rent, in your judgment?—Any increase in the value of wool, mutton, or stock: that is the only way that it could be effected.
2274. You stated that you had power to fix the terms also. Take, for instance, the case of Riddiford; he was liable till the year 1897 to a progressive rent at £60, £80, £100 for each period respectively: did you assess the rent for the whole period at £28 13s.?—Yes.
2275. You see the manifest advantage that he gets by surrendering his lease; because he gets his rent reduced from £100 to £28 13s. for seven years to come?—But possibly, if he had not got his rent reduced he would have thrown up the lease altogether. The rents were excessive rents in all cases except Mr. Lysaght's.
2276. Did the fact that the Maoris were protesting against these leases not weigh with you in making the leases shorter?—The Maoris protested against any dealing with the land whatever.
2277. You disregarded that and gave the lease; but then you say the regulations or the Act gave you a discretion?—Yes; that is the way I read it.
- Mr. GEORGE McLEAN examined.
- 2275a. *Mr. Bell.*] What are you?—I am a farmer.
- 2276b. How long have you been on the west coast of this Island?—About seventeen years.
- 2277c. Before that where were you?—I was on the South Island—at Kaikouras.
2278. You managed Mr. Bullen's estate?—Yes; I managed a station for Mr. Bullen.
2279. While you have been on the west coast of this Island you have been farming the greater part of the time?—All the time.
2280. What is the size of your holding?—I farm altogether about 1,400 acres.