

*Mr. Smith* : I shall be only too glad to communicate with the different local bodies and have such a representation made. There is a gentleman here named Haigh, who has land bounded by Native land, and he will tell you enough to convince you that something should be done so as to avert a dispersion of these settlers.

*Mr. Rees* : We should like to get evidence of that sort, because it would strengthen the report.

*Mr. Smith* : Mr. Rennell states that he was told by the Government to go down amongst the Natives to whom I previously referred, in order to see if anything could be done in respect of these matters, and that on going there he found that some of the Natives were willing to deal, but that the remainder were not willing. A lot of the settlers assure me that there would be no difficulty if they were approached from a certain quarter. Whether they are correct I am not able to say. The settlers about Tikorangi have large families, which, as you know, is the rule in Taranaki, and the young men are imbued with the desire to take up land for themselves; but they do not wish to be too far off from the girls on the other side of the river. That is why they are anxious to see these Native lands thrown open for settlement.

*Mr. Rees*.] The young generation want to make new homes?—Yes.

*Mr. Rees* : We shall be glad if any gentleman present who has anything to say on any one of these subjects will lay his views before us. Any of those who suffer from any of these inconveniences, and who is in a position to speak for neighbours as well as for himself, is invited to address us.

*Mr. Haigh* : I hold a lease under the Native Reserves Act of 1882.

*Mr. Rees*.] What is your full name?—George Bates Haigh. I first took up the land in 1862, on a twenty-one years' lease. On the expiration of that term I renewed for ten years, which will expire in about a year and nine months from the present time. I find it to be a great hardship that, after making all the improvements I have done, I am to be obliged at the end of my term to go out or to compete in public competition for the land with my improvements upon it. After I have spent all these years upon the land, and made these improvements upon it, I feel a little entitled to some compensation.

Have you been improving the land to any extent more than merely using it?—As to that, I should like to refer you to Mr. Rennell.

What sort of improvements have you made?—The holding is a 75-acre section. It is all down in grass, fenced, and buildings and outbuildings erected upon it.

The whole of the improvements have been done by yourself at your own cost and trouble?—Yes.

What do you value your improvements at? What do you think it would cost to bring the land into that condition from a state of nature?—More than the prairie-cost. It was all bush when I took it up.

What would be the unimproved value of your land in the first instance?—About £2 an acre.

What do you suppose would be the fair value of it with the improvements as they stand to-day?—From £4 to £5 an acre.

Then, it has somewhat more than doubled in value?—Yes.

Then, under the present law you have no power either to get an allowance for your improvements in a new lease or payment for them?—No.

You are in the position of the Irish tenants before the recent Acts came into force, and you want to be put in the same position as they now occupy—that is to say, you want tenant right?—I should like to see it.

So far as you know, is what you state the rule which obtains in respect of all these leases?—I believe so—those under the Act of 1882.

Then, you are not speaking of your own case only, although you give evidence about it: it would apply to all those who are similarly situated under the same Act?—Yes, those that I am acquainted with.

Then, under the present Act you have absolutely to go and pay for your improvements?

*Mr. Rennell* : He would lose the improvements.

*Mr. Rees* : Unless he leased again.

*Mr. Rennell* : In these cases I can positively say there would be no new leases. The Natives see that these lands are so much improved, and they would not re-lease. There is an instance of it in the case of Mr. Haigh's next-door neighbour. He held one of these leases, and at the end of his term the Natives would not relet, and the property therefore fell into their hands. I am sorry to say it is in very bad order now.

*Mr. Rees*.] Would you be satisfied, Mr. Haigh, with the privilege which is contained in the perpetual-lease system, without any power to purchase, but the full value of your improvements to be guaranteed to you; and, in default of a renewal of lease, the value of those improvements to be paid you by the incoming tenant?—Yes.

Do you think that others in like position would be similarly satisfied?—I think that is their wish.

As a matter of choice, you would sooner have the lease renewed?—I would, sir.

If the Native lessor claimed to exercise his right to re-enter and take possession, you would say, "Very well, pay for my improvements"?—Yes.

*Mr. Mackay*.] How far is your land from town?—A little over four miles.

In which direction?—Waitara way.

Between that and Sentry Hill?—Yes.

Mr. Oliver Samuel, barrister and solicitor, then gave evidence at some length. [See Minutes of Evidence.]

*Mr. Mackay* : I suppose Mr. Haigh represents the case of the other gentlemen who are here?

*Mr. Smith* : Yes.