

was not included in the right to purchase, but the bulk was. The remainder had been temporarily let and was rough or bush-land, and was included in the B 1 block, and therefore the company had to take that if they took the other piece. Then there are two other pieces of Amuri land, containing 19,000 and 7,000 acres, respectively, which were also sold to the tenant, who had the right to buy at prices to be fixed by the Nelson Land Board.

90. What is, to your knowledge, the largest-sized block sold privately to any single person?—The 44,000 acres sold to Messrs. Wharton and Co.

91. Are you aware that Mr. Wilson said he was not prepared to deny that you had sold one block of 58,000 acres?—I do not think he said that, though aware that he said the company might do so, but it is not done yet.

92–93. Are you in negotiation with a gentleman in Canterbury for the purchase of 58,000 acres?—Some negotiations are going on as to various blocks.

94. What is the total amount parted with to any single person, whether in one block or more, contiguous?—The 44,000 acres is the largest. Under the Nelson Land Acts the tenants I spoke of have the absolute right to buy their holdings at a price to be fixed by the Nelson Land Board. In the three cases that we dealt with, the tenants had the option of saying whether they would buy or not.

95. *Sir John Hall.*] With reference to the right of purchase possessed by the Nelson leaseholders, is it a mere pre-emptive right to buy before anybody else, or is it an absolute right to purchase the land whenever they desire to do so?—The tenants have the absolute right to buy their land at prices to be fixed by the Nelson Land Board.

96. Do you know at what time they exercise this right?—They are fifteen-years leases, with the right of renewal. [Statutes referred to: Section 31 of “The Nelson Crown Land Leasing Act, 1867;” section 77 of “The Nelson Waste Lands Act, 1874.”]

97. Then, under these circumstances, could the Crown or the company have sold the land to anybody else?—No.

98. *Mr. Tanner.*] Are you aware that the bulk of the land sold on the eastern slope in the company's selection has been purchased by men already some of the largest owners of land in the two Provincial Districts of Nelson and Canterbury?—As to Messrs. Wharton and Co., who bought the 44,000 acres, they hold a leasehold from the Government of a further piece, up above in the rough country. That, I believe, is all they own in the place.

99. When I speak of landowners, I do not speak of leaseholders?—They had also about 20,000 acres of freehold intersecting these 44,000 acres which they bought from us. Then there were the two other Amuri blocks, which, with the exception of 5,000 acres or so, were sold to Mr. Dalgety on his private account. I do not know that he has any other land in the colony.

100. Is he not a member of a firm?—Yes, of Dalgety and Co., Limited.

101. Does that firm own land?—It is a public company, and I believe they are large leaseholders in Otago, but hold very little in Canterbury. Mr. George Rutherford bought a considerable portion of the land offered by auction, also Mr. Deans. These are practically all. The pieces Messrs. G. Rutherford and Deans bought were those offered by auction in small sections.

102. They bought a number, and so acquired a large area?—Yes.

103. Are you aware that the population within that district where the land was sold is now slightly less than it was before the company came into existence?—I should not think it can possibly have affected it one way or the other.

104. But if the population is decreasing, does that bear out the statement with regard to settlement going on?—The company endeavoured, and it was particularly my wish, to get settlement there as much as possible, and we tried our best to do it. We went round the district to try and induce the people to buy these lands, and we cut them up into such sizes as the people said they wanted. Then we offered them by auction; but, with the exception of about nine lots—I speak from memory—none of those who said they would buy turned up. There was comparatively little competition, though there was a good sale.

105. They were all bought for cash?—No. Two-thirds were left on deferred payments at low interest. [Statement as to area sold and the names of purchasers, &c. See Appendix, page 35.]

106. *Hon. Mr. Seddon.*] You said there were negotiations between the Nelson Land Board, the company, and the holders of the leases for the 44,000 acres?—I did not say so.

107. How can the company sell land unless the Land Board fixes the value?—Because these gentlemen found out what our views were and came to terms. They then handed in, at the request of the Government officers, to the Commissioner of Crown Lands the surrenders of their rights to buy under their old leases, and then of course the company took their blocks free from any right to purchase and re-sold to them, in accordance with the arrangement to that effect.

108. The Government were parties to this sale of 44,000 acres?—I do not know. Their Commissioner actually required the surrenders of their right to purchase to be handed in before the preliminary title to these lands was granted to the company. It was a grave question, to my mind, as to their right to get it. If they had not, the company could still have insisted on getting the block subject to their right of purchase.

109. What was the B 1 value of the 44,000 acres?—10s. an acre.

110. The contract says it is not to be sold at less than £1 an acre?—No, not at less than the B 1 value.

111. What is the lowest statutory value of land in the Nelson District?—I know the actual value of lands which the Nelson Land Board have recently sold to other parties. A Mr. M. and a Mr. J. recently applied to purchase some land held under precisely similar conditions, and the Board sold to them for 10s. an acre. The company have warned the Government that some proceedings may arise in consequence of these sales. The company thought the land was distinctly worth 15s. an acre. In these two cases I am informed that Mr. J. first agreed to give 15s. an acre; then Mr. M. applied, and insisted on getting his land at 10s. an acre, and pointed out that he was