

14. Do you think that new legislation should take place, and so put those who took up land under the old leases on the same footing as those who took up under the new?—Yes, I think that would be a proper thing to do. There was great dissatisfaction under the old Act, and the House reduced the rents because it was impossible to pay them; and then they brought in the new Act, but did not repeal the old one, only giving twelve months for any tenant under the old Act to come under the new.

15. Have many come under?—Most of them cannot come in, they are barred. The rents put on are so excessive that they would rather remain under the old than come in under the new. They have small areas, and when they grass and fence in the land they find themselves with £8 or £9 per acre worth of improvements on the land, and by coming under the new lease the Public Trustee sweeps away half of the money expended by them on improvements.

16. These people consider that they are placed in a worse position by coming under the new lease than they are in under the old?—Yes. They cannot come under the new. A man with 30 acres of land who has made certain improvements cannot afford to pay the Public Trustee £200 or £300. It would be practically purchasing the freehold of the land, and the consequence would be that these unfortunate people who have been only making a bare living would be robbed out of that.

17. You take exception to the valuer who has been appointed?—Yes.

18. Did he value improvements under the old for the issue of new leases?—Yes, and the prairie value of the land.

19. Are there many objections on the part of the leaseholders under the present Act?—Yes; they have got their grievance about the insurance, but I do not think there are many who have insured.

20. Do I rightly understand you to say that they are not all insured?—No; they are not compelled to build, but as soon as they build, and the more improvement they put on the land, the Public Trustee wants everything. Sometimes a man, in order to make his family comfortable, builds, and spends more money probably than he can afford, then, if the Public Trustee takes away his policy of insurance, he is deprived of his only security to get anything on his improvements. So that any man who improves is looked upon as an enemy, according to the working of the Act, and treated as if he had done something wrong. It is doing an injury to this colony, and is not at all in sympathetic accord with what the Government is doing in their endeavour to open up the Crown lands of the colony.

21. In your opinion the Public Trustee manages this estate in the interests of the Natives, and not of the tenants?—In my opinion he is acting in the interests of the Natives, and the Natives alone; but I admit at the same time that his administration is not in the true interests of the Natives.

22. And contrary to the interests of the tenants?—Yes; and that is why we want an amendment to the Act. I do not want for one moment to say that the Public Trustee is acting outside of the law, but what I say is, he could have done things under the Act which would have been beneficial to both Natives and Europeans; his administration is deficient from want of knowledge. He is also unable to see both sides of the important question.

23. *Mr. Meredith.*] It appears to me that the burden of your remarks are in the direction of accusing the Public Trustee or the Public Trust Office of maladministration of these lands?—Yes, from want of knowledge, his administration has been a miserable failure. It is impossible for the Public Trust to know anything about land, or the difficulties that settlers have to contend with.

24. You admit that the Public Trust Office is administering these lands under the West Coast Settlements Act of Parliament?—Yes, after a fashion, which is detrimental to all parties interested.

25. I suppose you also admit that the Trustee has also got certain discretionary powers under that Act?—Yes.

26. And your opinion is that these powers are used in the interests of the Natives?—Yes. I believe the Trustee is under that impression; but my impression is that he is doing damage to the Europeans and to the Natives.

27. Will you admit he is working under the Act of Parliament?—Yes, that is what he pretends to be doing; but in my opinion he is doing a large amount of mischief.

28. By tenants on these lands availing themselves of the Act of 1892 improvements are valued, and anything over £5 per acre goes to the benefit of the Natives?—Yes, that is so; and that is why we ask the Act to be amended in order that no confiscation will take place.

29. So that practically all improvements over the value of £5 an acre are confiscated?—Yes, that is so, I exceedingly regret to say.

30. Now, you say that tenants have given a mortgage to the Trustee for improvements over and above £5 where they were not in a position to pay cash?—Yes; in order to save themselves the expense of a Supreme Court suit.

31. But this money is allowed to remain if the tenants choose to pay 6 per cent. on the capital value?—Yes; I understand that he charges 6 per cent. to the tenants on their own improvements.

32. Then the burden of your evidence is that, in your opinion, it would be to the advantage of the tenants and the Natives to have the administration of this estate transferred to the Lands Department?—Yes; I feel confident from my knowledge of thirty-two years' colonial experience that would be a great advantage to both parties concerned, and to the Public Trustee himself. He should only be permitted to receive the rents from the Land Board, and he could pay it over to the Natives as of old; but he should have nothing to do with the land, because that is beyond him.

33. I do not understand you when you refer to the Public Trustee refusing to pay rates; do you mean local rates or the land-tax?—I mean local rates on the land held by him.

34. Has the Trustee been in the habit on any occasion of paying local rates?—I understand that he has paid them in some instances.