

64. From whom did you hear that Mr. Ballance said that the fee of £12 10s. was absurdly high?—I am not sure whether it was in a letter that I had from Mr. Ballance, from Wellington, when he told me that the charges would be made as light as possible in the new Act, or at an interview I had with him in Wanganui.

65. In your statement of the valuation of improvements you stated that the valuation of your improvements was £985?—No; the valuation of £2 5s. per acre was unimproved value, I did not give the improved value.

66. The improvements under the land-tax assessment were valued at £985, so that you are complaining that I put too low a value on the improvements?—No; I did not. You yourself introduced the question of improvements in a letter I had from you showing that I had no right to grumble:—

“Sir,—

“Sections 39 and 41, Block IV., Cape.

“In acknowledging the receipt of your letter of the 4th instant, remarking upon the apparently excessive valuation of the above-described land, I beg to state that an allowance of £1,400 6s. having been made for improvements, which, under the land-tax assessment, were valued at £985, the unimproved value of the land does not appear to me to be over-estimated.

“If the property would realise in the market the value which I have placed upon it, you should have no ground for complaint.

“Yours, &c.,

“J. K. WARBURTON,

“Public Trustee.

“James J. Elwin, Esq., Waiweranui, Puniho.”

What connection can any one see between these two things. I had spent £400 in the interim.

67. The tenants on the Puniho Road took their leases without any conditions that I would make the road?—That is understood.

68. *Hon. Mr. Reeves.*] With regard to the preliminary fee of £12 10s., was that ever reduced?—It was reduced to £7 10s.; but, as I showed from the account, the cost to Mr. Bell of obtaining a new lease was £17. The charges are very heavy—£4 19s. 6d. for valuation.

69. What was the annual amount of the rental?—£28.

70. You complain that the preliminary costs are excessive?—Yes; they amount to a half-year's or a year's rent.

71. The Trustee puts the cart before the horse in placing the valuation before the meeting takes place?—Yes.

72. You contend that there seems to be no power to compel the eradication of noxious weeds on Native land?—Yes, there is no power.

73. The Trustee refuses to pay rates on unoccupied land?—Yes.

74. Is it not also the case that no rates are paid on land occupied by Natives?—That is so.

75. With regard to this question of his refusing to contribute towards the making of roads, you do not, of course, accuse him of breaking the law, but rather of making an erroneous use of his discretionary powers?—Yes; he does not use that discretion. The general burden of the complaint is not that the Trustee breaks the law, but that his discretionary power is used in a way hurtful to the settlers and not advantageous to the Natives.

76. You want the whole of the administration brought under the Land Board?—Yes, and under the Land Act.

77. The lease in perpetuity you ask for, does that contemplate a periodical revaluation or not?—The question of periodical revaluation is a very curious one, because, as I say, in three or four years, in applying for a new lease, the original valuation of the land is lost sight of. We take up the land, clear the stones off it, and plough it, and any valuer coming in at the end of the lease does not—he cannot—appreciate the fact that thousands of pounds have been spent in clearing this land.

78. That might be met by appointing competent valuers?—Yes.

79. Would you give the Committee, as briefly as you can, an outline of what you consider would remedy this vexed question of the payment of rates?—I think, if the whole of the estate was handed over to the Land Board, they would find the means to pay the rates, but under this Act the Trustee seems to have power to take what money he has to pay rates on these lands.

80. Supposing he will not pay, what is the practical step to make him pay if the settlers want it?—The Act appears to be quite positive about the matter, litigation is the proper remedy; but if the Trustee is able to shelter himself by the Governor in Council what is the use of the Court?

81. You think the law ought to be changed?—If the Supreme Court gives judgment against him he says he will appeal to the Governor in Council.

82. You will admit that an Act of Parliament might stop that?—I do not know.

83. *Mr. Hall.*] You say that under the Advances to Settlers Act your place was valued, and the unimproved value was given at £1 10s. an acre?—No; that it is the value it works out. Under that Act details of improvements are not given. I took off the ascertained value of improvements, which left the unimproved value at £1 10s. 11d.

84. As I understand it, this land is the freehold of the Natives?—Yes, to all intents and purposes, it is.

85. It has been Crown-granted?—Yes, but Crown grants are upset by this Act.

86. The only remedy that you see for this matter is to grant a lease in perpetuity on a 5-per-cent. rental?—Yes, upon the ascertained value.

87. Does it not occur to you that it was rather drastic for the Government to step in and take it away from the Natives, and give it in lease in perpetuity?—They have done it in this Act of 1892.

88. But it is perpetual lease under the Act, and that is different to lease in perpetuity. Are you aware that the perpetual lease provides for a revaluation every thirty-three years; the other lasts for 999 years?—If we could find the real value at the present time, with all improvements