

this?—I do not think this legislation will affect the companies already floated; if this Bill passes I do not think they could have a better title.

60. Do you think that a leasehold is a better title than freehold?—I do not say that it is a better; but I do not see that would interfere with any mining company that has been floated in England.

61. Will it interfere with any succeeding claims?—No, I should not think so; for if the Crown resumes the right they will have their title direct from the Crown.

62. You are well up in the method in which these claims are taken up: would you give us some idea how they are pegged off?—I do not quite understand what you mean.

63. I should like to know something about the Warden's Court—how these claims are taken up; is it all legitimate, or is there any amount of speculation in it?—I cannot answer the question. I am not supposed to know when a man goes out and discovers gold. If he thinks it is payable ground he goes to the Warden's Court and pegs it off. I presume that he will not take up a piece of ground unless he sees something in it to pay him for his trouble. A man will not go into the bush in such weather as we have had—he will not discover a reef, and then go and pay £40 into the Warden's Court for a license if he does not expect to get something out of it. I know I would not do so.

64. Suppose a man discovers a reef, and he knows that others are pegging off around him without any prospecting?—It is quite possible it may be so.

65. Is it legitimate?—So long as he pegs off the ground and pays the license and puts the men into work it is. Broken Hill did not take long to discover; it is now worth £10,000; it is a splendid property.

66. You say this has been locked up for some time; is it locked up now?—It is now some twenty years that it has been open for working on the same terms as ordinary ground, or as other blocks, with the exception of the time it has been held by the Timber Company, and no one can go there now unless he accepts what the Timber Company may offer.

67. You say you have the printed conditions upon which this ground can be opened up?—Yes; I have them in my pocket.

68. If you peg off a piece of ground anybody can take up ground round you; under these conditions does it follow that, because the company claim the surrounding ground, it is a loss to you?—Distinctly. It is locked up; their claims are private; no man would go and take up such ground.

69. Tell us the prohibitive part?—It is this: If a man discovers gold in it he has to notify it to the company; then they have the right to lay off 30 chains all round him; then he has to give the company so many paid-up shares; he has to do several other things; if he does not do them the ground reverts back to the Kauri Syndicate.

70. You consider that prohibitive?—I do.

71. That opinion does not appear to be held by all miners, for I understand there are some going on the ground now?—I am not aware of any man who has gone there and taken a lease under the conditions mentioned; I do not know of one. So far as I know of mining companies, I do not think that any man would be mad enough to go and take up ground and prospect it upon those conditions.

72. Is it not rather early for leases?—Not that I am aware of.

73. Is that one of the prohibitive conditions—that 30 chains you speak of?—That is one, certainly; but I object to them as a whole. That is one, because it might enable them to take away the gold altogether.

74. That is your chief objection?—That and the forms which a person must observe who discovers gold.

75. You object to the 30 chains?—I object to the whole, because—

76. Which of them do you object to principally?—I object to the whole of them from beginning to end.

77. Do you object to the 10s. for rent?—Well, I would not object to the rent exactly.

78. Then, you do not object to them all?—Taking them altogether, I object to them.

79. There is one thing you have admitted—that the claim for rent you do not object to; if so, you cannot object to the recovery of arrears?—The Warden's Court does not go so far as that.

80. But you object to the terms for floating a company?—Yes, I should think so; so I think would anybody else. I do not think anybody would take up ground on those conditions.

81. *Mr. Fraser.*] You mentioned that certain prospectors had gone on to this land, discovered reefs upon it, lodged their money in the Warden's Court. Do you refer to leasehold land or freehold?—Leasehold; on the Kauri Timber Company's ground.

82. Did they know when they lodged their money that there was no law by which they acquired the right to mine there?—I could not say what they knew. I know this: that the money up to the present time has been lying in the Warden's office.

83. If they knew that they could not acquire any title to it, would you say there was any grievance, even if the money is lying there still?—I could not say. It is difficult to know where this leasehold is; it is a dense bush and unfenced.

83A. Would it not be a waste of time for a man to go prospecting on land when he knew that if he discovered anything he could not have it as the result of his labour?—Certainly, if he knew it.

84. Was it not known in the district?—It is impossible to tell where this lease-land is.

85. Would men go prospecting on these lands even on the chance of discovering gold, which they would have no right to extract?—They must have gone there, for these blocks have been prospected for years.

85A. Have you had reason to complain?—If it were my case I would certainly withdraw my money and go somewhere else.

86. You were talking about companies that were floated in the colony?—Yes.