

satisfied with charging that £6 10s. per cent. for, say, the first two years, and then reduce the per centage charged for collecting the rent to, say, 2 per cent. ?—No ; it would not pay the office at all.

55. You have all the trouble of arranging matters in the first place, and all the Public Trustee has to do after that is simply to collect the rent ?—Yes ; but the rents do not pay for the trouble in the first place. It has to be spread over a number of years. The first trouble is altogether more expensive than $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

56. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] What is the commission charged now ?—Seven and a half per cent. on the collection of rents from Europeans.

57. And general administration ?—Three and three-quarters per cent. on those collected from Natives. Taking it altogether, the average charge is £6 16s.

58. Cannot you bear a further reduction ?—No ; not now. The rate will bear a reduction in about ten years, when the leases fall in and larger rentals are obtained. It will not mean any greater work on the part of the office, but it will mean a greater income. At present we would be simply running at a loss if we reduced the rate, and the other branches of the office would have to pay for it.

59. *Mr. A. L. D. Fraser.*] As a matter of fact, you do not make money out of leasing the West Coast lands ?—No ; it is the least profitable branch of the Public Trust Office business.

60. *Mr. Wi Pere.*] I understand, in connection with lands the owners of which have been ascertained by the Commissioners, or as the case may be, the Public Trustee has only to lease the land and collect the rent ?—That involves a great deal of trouble, as I explained before.

61. What are all these troubles ?—I do not want to repeat them, but they are very great.

62. The illustration you gave was only one particular block ?—Work of that sort occurs in five out of six cases.

63. Do any outsiders ever come and interfere with the owners of the lands that you are leasing ?—Yes ; they are what we call in the office “squatters.” They come and sit on the ground and try to cultivate it, and then we have to run them off.

64. *Mr. Herries.*] Are they Maoris or white men ?—Maoris.

65. *Mr. Wi Pere.*] It has been stated by certain people, including the witnesses who have been before the Committee, that in some years you pay the owners of lands under lease a greater amount in rent than you pay them in other years ?—That is correct. Sometimes a tenant cannot pay just at the time. He has to sell his cattle, perhaps, or something else, and we cannot collect the rent for that year. Sometimes it goes over the time, and the Natives get the money the next year.

66. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] They do not lose it ?—No.

67. *Mr. Wi Pere.*] Do you not have an understanding with the Europeans to whom you lease that if they are not in a position to pay one year they need not pay until the next year ?—No ; we always try to get the rent.

68. Then why do you not summon the European lessees ?—The Natives would have to pay the cost of the summons if we did. It is better for them to have to wait six months than to have to pay costs.

69. Why do you not try to make an example of one ?—We do ; we have in two or three cases.

70. You say that you have tried in two or three cases, but hundreds of people have told me what I say ?—There are very few cases. The Natives have every reason to be thankful for the promptitude with which their tenants pay. I do not suppose there are elsewhere as many leases where there is such a small amount in arrear.

71. I understood you to say that you have leased only two blocks of land to Native lessees ?—The Natives holding occupation licenses number over three hundred.

72. Suppose you allow Mrs. Thompson to lease her land, what will the preliminary expenses be in fixing up the lease ?—By law she cannot lease it to Europeans.

73. Supposing that you were removed from your administration of the land, and she had the right to lease it, do you mean to say that you consider it would cost her $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. every year to lease this land ?—It would not cost her that to lease it, but it would cost her more than that if she had to collect the rent for all her other pieces.

74. Going about and collecting the money would cost her more ?—Yes. She would have to come down to Polhill Gully to get 5s. 10d., or the tenant would have to send it up to her.

75. Could not the person by whom the amount was payable send it to her in a letter and save all this ?—Yes ; if he would do it ; but suppose he did not ? She would then have to employ a lawyer to hunt him up.

76. *Sir W. R. Russell.*] Is there no possibility of simplification of title—that is, amalgamation of interests ? Take Mrs. Thompson's case. It is impossible for me to follow you in the various small interests she has, but would it not be possible by some means to amalgamate the interests so as to simplify the title ?—It would be if all the interests were in one block ; but a Native may have shares representing a one-fourth interest in a block up in one part of Taranaki, and shares representing a three-fourths interest in another part, and so on.

77. Could it not be arranged that you should amalgamate Mrs. Thompson's interests, which are scattered about in different places, so that she could have a certain area in one place ?—That would be a matter of arrangement by exchange among the Natives themselves.

78. Do you not, from your knowledge of the administration of the West Coast Settlements Reserves Act, think such a scheme as that would be beneficial to the Natives ?—It would consolidate their interests ; but to carry it out would be a matter of, I think, insuperable difficulty, because a Native would say, “I do not want to have my $3\frac{3}{4}$ acres in a block down there and let you come here. I am satisfied where I am.” I do not think it would be possible. It could not be done.

79. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] It could by mutual agreement ?—Oh, yes ; but they have power under a recent Act to exchange land, yet in only one or two cases have they done so. If they wish to exchange land there is nothing to prevent their doing so ; and this remark applies to Mrs. Thompson.