

local bodies which have thereby suffered. I do not propose now to enter fully into the matter, but there is such a *prima facie* case that in the opinion of the Boards affected the whole question should be referred to an independent tribunal for decision. If you accept this principle I would endeavour to obtain the assent of all interested to the acceptance of the award which would be the outcome of an inquiry by arbitrators mutually appointed. If you are not prepared to assent to this method of disposing once and for all of a claim which deserves the most serious attention, it would at least be satisfactory to ratepayers to have a formal and reasoned opinion from your responsible legal advisers as to the admissibility or non-admissibility of our claim.—I have, &c., GEORGE CLIFFORD, Chairman, Waipara Road Board. I may say that I believe the men here to-day are prepared to sign a declaration that those they represent will abide by the decision of a fair arbitrator or arbitrators appointed to settle this matter. I saw Sir George Clifford on Monday, and he would have come up here with us, but he is engaged every day just now, and could not attend. He believes in the justness of our case. We appeal to you, sir, and the Committee for redress.

1 *Mr Witty*] The configuration of your district is such that it is very expensive to road and maintain, is it not?—We had about 70,000 acres of flat country facing Rangiora, with the Ashley River between, and out of the £35,000 that we got we spent probably £10,000 on the bridges crossing that. The rest of the country is practically mountainous.

2. *Mr Lang*] What rate do you strike?—It is equal to 1s. 3d. on the pound on the annual income. There are other rates, but that is the roading rate.

3. What are the other rates?—Water rates in part of the area, and rates to pay for loans for bridges.

4. Were you paid thirds and fourths up to a certain period?—We got them up to a certain period—while the 70,000 acres were going, but since the General Government made these laws that we knew nothing about we have not received a penny in thirds and fourths.

5. For how long were you paid thirds and fourths?—It lasted till the free selection was stopped. The last day of free selection was the last day of our thirds and fourths.

6. *Mr Anderson*.] You deny the statement of the Department that there was no provision in the East and West Coast Railway Construction Act for these thirds to be paid to the local bodies? Was there any such provision in that Act?—No, there was not.

7 *Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward*.] I presume that you and your friends are aware that when these lands were disposed of to the Midland Railway Company, that disposition of the lands was not under the Land Act at all?—We are not well aware of that. The foundation of our claim is that when we accepted the responsibility of roading, the fourths were provided to supply the means. Any legislation passed afterwards we know nothing about.

8. Irrespective of that legislation, do you know that at the time you refer to, even under the old Act, if the land-sales had taken place in your district for cash, you would have been entitled to no thirds at all?—We do not, sir.

9 Are you aware that at the time to which I allude, any land sold in your district, for cash, under the Land Act, you would have been entitled to no thirds at all from?—I am not aware of that, because the Land Department told us that if the lands were sold for cash we should receive thirds. Mr Barron, for the Minister of Lands, told us that there was no cash received, and so there were no thirds to get. They all attributed our getting no thirds to the fact that no cash was got for the land for the railway. So I presume that if the cash had been received they would have given us the thirds.

10. If I tell you that the law at the time provided that where land was sold for cash you were entitled to no thirds, would you make a claim under those conditions?—We would, and I will tell you why. These conditions were created without our knowledge or consent.

11. No; that was the law at the time. At the time we are referring to, the law provided that in the event of land being sold for cash no thirds were to be paid?—But Mr Ballance said here that if the land were sold for cash we should get thirds on it.

12. Do you know that if Parliament were to respond to the request you are making, we should have to do the same thing all over the country, and it would have to be done by special legislation?—I do not believe, in the first place, that you would, because I do not think there are any other local bodies in New Zealand in the same position. Is there another local body in New Zealand whose land was taken from it in order to help make a railway in a district that it has no connection with?

13. Apart from your case, there are a number of Acts on the statute-book by which lands have been devoted to other purposes under those special Acts, and none of the local bodies concerned have received thirds at all. Now, if you get what you want, all the local bodies affected by these special Acts should surely get thirds too?—They should not, in my opinion for the reason that we have reserves that we do not claim thirds from—education and other reserves that are common to all New Zealand. This is a special grievance concerning a special locality only.

14. Is not the greater part of the land in your district pastoral land, upon which no thirds are payable anyhow?—But fourths were always payable on all the land until the modern Acts tampered with our rights. If in passing those Acts you had taken the responsibility of the roading we should have no grievance.

ROBERT MCINTOSH, Chairman, Ashley Road Board, Loburn, examined. (No. 2)

*Hon. the Chairman*: Will you make a statement, Mr McIntosh?

*Witness*: I think that after the way in which Mr O'Halloran has explained the matter I need not mention thirds at all, but that if I briefly tell you the unfortunate position we are in through being deprived of them it is all I need do. For some years now our roads and bridges have been getting in a worse and worse condition. We are taxing our ratepayers more than they can really