

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 1911.

CHARLES L. PEMBERTON, Settler, Oreore, Raetihi, examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Are you a resident on the Ohotu Block?—I have been a resident for six years.
 2. You have heard the petition read and are familiar with its contents?—Quite so.

3. *Mr. Herries.*] You are one of the petitioners?—Yes.

4. *The Chairman.*] Have you anything to add to what is stated in the petition?—I wish to speak about the difficulty with regard to roading the block. When I took up the land there were indications that the block was going to be roaded in the way of giving access by bridle-track. The roading operations were continued somewhat energetically until the whole of the block was taken up. When the whole block was taken up the roading operations ceased, completely and immediately. Since then nothing has been done actively. The settlers have been forced in cases to raise loans in order to give themselves road access. They will have to pay off these loans, and at the end of twenty-one years there will be a revaluation. They will have increased the value of the land by raising these loans and making roads. They will not only have to pay off the loans, but they will have to pay an increased rental in consequence of making the roads, which I consider is most unfair. Were it Government land, leasehold or freehold, there would be an obligation on the part of the Government to road the block. Were it European land owned by private individuals, instead of being Maori land, the Europeans would be forced to road the block before they could open it. As it is, there appears to be no obligation on the part of the Native owners to make roads. I might state that the Aotea Maori Land Board is granting a measure of assistance, but it is only a measure. A short time ago the settlers on the Orokuku Road, running through the block, raised a loan of £1,300 to give themselves road access, and the Board promised them a subsidy of £300. This was to make five miles of road. It was found eventually that the £1,300 would nearly cover the cost of the road, and they discovered that at about the middle of this road there was a very wet portion which badly required metalling. It was the proverbial weak link in the chain of communication; and, although there had been nothing said about metalling in the first instance, the settlers applied to the Board to know if they could have this subsidy of £300 to metal this portion, but the Board replied that they could not have it for metalling purposes. I suppose they regarded metalling as a luxury. You will understand that this £300 spent in metalling would only equalize the road—would make this bad place good, and the road would be workable after wet weather at a much earlier date than otherwise. But the Board would not allow this bad place to be metalled with the money, so the £300 has to be expended in further formation—more mud road. I understand also that where the Board have granted assistance they have subsidized loans that were being raised: they will pay interest on these loans for a term, until the revaluation takes place. When the revaluation takes place they will cease to pay interest, but the amount will be deducted from the unimproved value of the land. I contend, sir, that it should go on as an improvement. It is an improvement in the same way that buildings on the land are an improvement. They do not add to the productivity of the land, but they are necessary conveniences: the land is of no value without road communication. Therefore all loans raised for the purpose of giving road access to sections should go on as improvements—should have nothing to do with the unimproved value. If they reduce the unimproved value in that way it may be open to the public to go in, and a man's improvement would be confiscated in that way. The only way to insure his recovering it is to add it to the improvements actually on the land. That is where the unfairness of the present system of valuating comes in. A man is not entitled to anything as an improvement unless it is actually on the land within his boundaries. I think I have sufficiently explained the position as regards the roads. There is another grievance, and that is fencing. You take up a section, and there is no obligation on the part of the Board to fence the boundary-lines. You have to do that all yourself, and it necessitates, through bush country, felling the bush a chain outside your own boundary and putting up the fence entirely at your own cost, and you may be there for years and years before the adjacent land is taken up and you can recover. Now, in my case I was in that position. I had a boundary-line to fell and fence, and I applied to the Board, and they told me that when the adjacent land was taken up that land would be loaded with the value of the improvements I had put upon it. Just recently the land was put up for lease. I understand it was let the other day in Wanganui. When it was advertised I wrote to the President and informed him of the agreement that had been made between the Board and myself. I may say that the present President was not in charge at the time I got the assurance I would be paid for my improvements.

5. Who was the President then?—Mr. Fisher.

6. When you state you got an assurance, did you get anything in writing?—Well, I am not sure. It was five years ago, and I am not sure whether that statement is in writing or not. But I was told to send in, as soon as I had put the improvements on, a statement of the cost of the improvements, and I duly sent that in; but I had no reply to it. It must be in their records somewhere. Mason Brothers were in the same position. I do not know whether they got the assurance in writing or not, but we had it, anyway.