

7. Did any other lessees get that assurance, do you know?—I do not know whether any others did. As I say, I replied to Mr. Jack, the President of the Maori Land Board, giving him all the particulars, and since then I have not had a communication from him. So I do not know whether the sections have been sold without being weighted with the value of my improvements or not. That is the position. You see, I put up that fence five years ago and felled the bush, and I have been losing interest on that money ever since, which is not fair.

8. *Mr. Parata.*] What was the value of the fence, per chain?—It cost me £1 2s. 6d. a chain to erect.

9. *Mr. Herries.*] Does that include the bushfelling?—No, that is the fencing. Bushfelling cost £2 an acre, and grassing 10s.

10. *Mr. Parata.*] What kind of a fence was it—sheep- and cattle-proof?—Yes, a legal fence—a thoroughly good fence. There are many sections in the Ohotu which have no road access whatever. As I said, roadmaking operations ceased, and bridle-track communication was not given to a great number of sections. They remain without access. Nothing has been done whatever.

11. *Mr. Herries.*] Are they sections that have been taken up?—Yes, they have all been taken up—for at least five years. I think that is all I have to say.

12. *The Chairman.*] Who was carrying on the roading operations prior to the stoppage?—The Roads Department of the Government.

13. Was the County Council doing anything?—No, the county had nothing to do with it.

14. What is the rental that you pay for your section, and the area, and the term?—I hold a section of 734 acres, on which I pay 1s. 9d. an acre; and my wife holds another of 400 acres, for which she pays 2s. an acre.

15. And what is the term?—Twenty-one years.

16. Do you get repaid for any improvements at the end of the term?—We get valuation for improvements.

17. Have you any idea what the Maori Land Board have spent on road-formation?—Not the slightest.

18. Have they spent any money?—I do not know.

19. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] I take it all these leases are the same as regards terms in Ohotu?—Yes.

20. Can you give the Committee briefly the main covenants of your lease?—It is for twenty-one years, with valuation for improvements.

21. Is there right of renewal?—There is right of renewal at an increased rental.

22. At 5 per cent. on the then unimproved value?—Yes.

23. What happens at the end of the second term? Do you get anything for improvements then?—I do not know.

24. *Mr. Herries.*] Your petition is to be allowed to buy the freehold, is it not?—Yes.

25. How do you propose that that should be done—that you should deal with the Natives themselves or the Board?—Well, I do not know whether it would be taken over by the Government. We thought that it would be quite equitable if the land were bought by the Government and the money invested for the Natives. All this Ohotu land a few years ago could have been bought for 10s. an acre. Now, as you hear, I am paying 1s. 9d. and 2s. an acre, which is equal to £1 15s. and £2 an acre for the freehold.

26. If the Government bought the land from the Natives, do you propose that they should sell it to the present tenants, or that they should put the land up to competition?—That we should get it at the price they pay for it—the present value.

27. The present tenants should have the first chance of buying?—Certainly.

28. In your opinion, would the land be better cultivated if the freehold were granted?—I think there is no question about that. As it is at present we are forced to raise loans to make roads, which in wet weather are impassable for wheel traffic. Under the present conditions I do not think the question of metalling will ever be seriously considered, because settlers are not going to burden themselves so heavily without compensation. There will be mud roads, and they will remain mud roads till the end of the chapter. If the land were made freehold I have not the slightest doubt that in the course of time these roads would be metalled. And there are many other ways in which the land would be made to produce more than it will under present conditions.

29. Then you mean to say that settlement is held back because of the bad title?—Decidedly. It is the business of the settler at the present time to make as much as he can out of the land, with as little outlay as possible. There is another question—that of noxious weeds. We are surrounded by Native country which has been breeding noxious weeds—Californian thistle among them—for time out of mind, and although we are fighting hard to keep them down on our own places the seed is blowing on to us every year. Whenever a patch of bush is burnt you will find the Californian thistle growing there alongside the ordinary thistle.

30. *Hon. Sir J. Carroll.*] Will the freehold improve that?—Decidedly.

31. I mean, if you got the freehold would the seed stop blowing over?—No, but we hope that people will get the freehold of the adjacent lands simultaneously. I know a block of land within three miles of the centre of Raetihi. The fires passed over that a year or so ago. It has never been sown with anything, and it is filling up with noxious weeds.

32. *Mr. Parata.*] Who brought the noxious weeds there?—That is beyond me. The trouble is to know how to keep them down.

33. *Mr. Herries.*] What you mean to say is that if you got the freehold people would take more trouble to clear the weeds?—Yes. They would make a better fight. At the present time we are forced to cut the thistles. The Act is satisfied if we cut them; but we would make a very big endeavour to eradicate them if the land belonged to us.