

HALBERT ALEXANDER GOUDIE sworn and examined. (No. 78.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are the Superintending Nurseryman for the Government for the North Island?—Yes. I am under the Lands Department.

2. Do you consider that the present system of employing prison labour in tree-planting operations under the Forestry Branch is satisfactory?—It has been satisfactory on the whole, but during the last three years the supply of prisoners has gone down.

3. What was the average number employed in your district during the past year?—Speaking from memory, I think there were eleven at Whakarewarewa and twenty-six at Waitapu. I will supply the actual figures.

4. How is the prisoners' labour estimated?—We put a value on it according to what it would cost to do similar work by free labour. Clearing the land costs £1 an acre by free labour. By prison labour it would not be valued at all. The cost of pitting and planting is treated in the same manner.

5. When you make up your accounts is the Prisons Department credited with the value of the labour done by the prisoners?—I do not think so. The total expenditure shown in the 1912 returns does not include the cost of the prison labour, but in order not to allow the southern plantations that do not employ prison labour to compare too unfavourably with our plantations in the north we have included the prison labour in calculations.

6. In the event of the afforestation operations being very much extended I suppose you could not count on receiving a much greater supply of prison labour?—It appears likely that we cannot; but I do not know the views of the Prisons Department on the subject.

7. Has any application been made to the Prisons Department for further men?—I understand they have not the men available. Nearly every month I call attention to the dearth of prison labour, and I understand the Department is in communication with the Prisons Department about the matter.

8. What class of prisoner is generally sent to this work?—I do not know a great deal about the method of classification, but I think in the first place they send out good-conduct men who it was thought would be amenable to such treatment. Latterly the Government have been a little more strict in selecting the men, and the Waipa camp is really a first-offenders' camp. I do not know, however, the ideas of the Prisons Department on that point.

9. Have the tree-planting camps been of benefit in the treatment of these prisoners?—I think the system has had a good effect in reforming the men. After leaving prison they are in a better position to engage in an honest living. We have employed a number of discharged men, and, of course, we have not had success with every one; but there are plenty of men I know of who have stayed with us some months, earned a few pounds, gone back to the towns, and got into a fairly decent job. In employing men after they have been discharged we are very particular in selecting them. Latterly the Prisons Board have allowed men out on probation on condition that they would get work at tree-planting.

10. What is your opinion as to utilizing consumptives in this work?—The chief fault I had to find with the labour of consumptives was its uncertainty. A Sister was put in charge of the place—it was an offshoot of the Cambridge Sanatorium—and the men did not realize that they had to earn their living. They were told that if they could not pay for their keep there the Health Department would remit it; consequently they were not keen on work. Latterly the system worked better, although we found that only about half of the patients sent to us were capable of doing the hard work, the other half being incapable of doing heavy work such as fencing and digging the holes.

11. Was each man on piecework?—They were paid on the co-operative system, and that was one of the faults, the men who were comparatively strong not caring about sharing with the men who could do but little in a day.

12. Can you suggest how that difficulty could be obviated?—If we are going to utilize consumptives' labour it must be done with one large camp, or perhaps two. If there are a hundred men to be employed there had better be one camp established in such a place where there will be plenty of tree-planting for five or six years to come. Then it would pay to have a doctor in charge to advise whether a man was fit to work or not. With a Sister in charge the men simply traded on her sympathies, and many would not work at all.

13. In such a camp would it be necessary to employ an overseer to instruct the men as to their work?—Occasionally you would have to send some one to overlook the work, but you would not want a man stationed there permanently.

14. Should such work be treated as on a strictly commercial basis, the Forestry Department not being saddled with any more cost in regard to planting than would be the case if it were done by free labour?—If there is any deficiency the Forestry Department should not have to pay it. It would be far better to give these patients a piece of land to plant, and at the end of the year pay them by results.

15. *Mr. Murdock.*] Then you would have to provide supervision?—Yes. With a camp of a hundred it would pay to do so.

16. *The Chairman.*] What is the least area you consider should be planted to do the work on economical lines?—I would not advise anything under 5,000 acres, unless you planted blocks of 1,000 acres each close to one another, so that the supervision would not be heavy. 5,000-acre blocks would be better than 1,000-acre blocks, as the fencing would be less; also the boundary fire-breaks would be more extensive.

17. If a camp were established in a central place, what radius could be planted with economy without having to move the buildings?—It is not profitable to ask the men to walk more than two miles. A mile radius would be all right.