

14. I will give you a case. Riding across country in the North Island last summer after thistle-seeding time, I rode along a ridge on the side away from the prevailing wind. There were about 5 acres of solid Californian thistles: not one foot of the ground but was covered. In a place like that on a high ridge, do you not think it is necessary that the Noxious Weeds Inspector should go over the property and see for himself the state of things?—They do so. It does not follow because thistles are met with that the Inspector has not done a great deal to get them cut. The man may have been actually prosecuted. He may have first of all been told by the Inspector to cut those weeds; then he may have received the printed warning; then he may have received the legal notice; then he may have received a letter from the Inspector later on stating that he would have to recommend prosecution; then he may be actually prosecuted. The whole process may have been gone through; but that does not actually cut the thistles. It must not be assumed that because the thistles are growing nothing has been done.

*The Chairman:* I do not think the question of noxious weeds is under discussion. It is the question of whether partiality has been shown to large landholders.

15. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] My attention has been drawn to the statement that probably the Inspectors have been told to deal lightly with the large landholder. Have you been asked this question?—The statement is false.

16. *Mr. Guthrie.*] How long have you been in charge of the Department?—A little over four years.

17. During that time have you received any letters objecting to the action of the Inspectors in different parts?—Yes, on both sides of the fence, as it were. I have received letters, and the Minister has received letters, complaining that the Act was being too strictly enforced in some cases, and complaining that the Act was not being strictly enforced in others. The man who has weeds on his property naturally does not wish to be forced to take action to cut them and control them; but the man who has no great number of weeds on his property but is in the neighbourhood of a man who has weeds wants the Act very drastically enforced, and the Department sometimes is between two fires. Inspectors do their best to meet the position reasonably.

18. You have got the file of those letters on the subject?—There is a large number of those letters: they are on record.

19. At any time have you, as head of the Department, issued any instructions to the Inspectors to relax their vigilance?—Never.

20. Not by instructions of any Government?—No.

21. There was a Commission lately to investigate this question?—In one district—in the district that is under discussion.

22. Has that Commission reported?—Yes. Mr. Clifton went especially into the district and made inquiry very thoroughly on the spot.

23. As the outcome of that Commission's inquiry have you changed your treatment or issued fresh instructions to the Inspectors?—Not in any way.

24. Then the law remains in force just the same as it was, and the Department has issued no new instructions?—Not to any one.

25. *Mr. Anderson.*] You know the position in the South?—I know something of it.

26. You said that it would drive settlers off their land if the Act was enforced?—In some instances.

27. You know there is country down in Southland that is full of thistle. Is the country we are speaking of anything like the country in the South?—In some cases it is even worse, but there is a great deal of that kind of country there. The class of country that I refer to more particularly is country with rocks, stumps, &c., where it is impossible to take a machine through. The whole work would have to be done by hand.

28. Do you remember a remark made when introducing a deputation to the Hon. Mr. Mackenzie in Dunedin to the effect that the regulations should be relaxed?—Yes, I remember.

29. It was shown there by experienced farmers that it was quite impossible to clear the land of the thistles?—Yes.

30. I think that as a result of that Mr. Mackenzie introduced an amendment to the Noxious Weeds Act allowing the settlers' evidence to weigh with the Magistrate?—That is so.

*The Chairman:* I think we are going away from the subject of the examination.

31. *Mr. Anderson.*] Is it not possible that Mr. Hornblow has been misled as a result of the altered legislation? The provision may mean that the Inspectors' evidence will not be so valuable in obtaining prosecutions under the new law as it used to be?—That is so.

32. And is it not possible that Mr. Hornblow may have been misled on that account?—It is possible. There were some statements in the newspapers some time ago—whether in Mr. Hornblow's paper or not I could not say—practically to the same effect.

33. You do not think he would be likely to be misled by the altered action of the Department?—I do not think so, because there was no altered action. The only difference is that Inspectors' evidence carries less weight with the Magistrate than it used to.

34. An Inspector would not be so ready now to bring an action as he was before?—No, because he has to produce proof other than his own word. In previous times, before that amendment that you speak of, any Inspector—

*The Chairman:* This is going beyond the range of the subject.

*Mr. Anderson:* My point is this: that the law was found to be utterly impracticable in the South where these weeds are common, and where the settlers found it was utterly impossible to eradicate them. It may be that the Department have not brought as many actions in the North—following on what they are doing in the South—as they would have done if the Inspectors' evidence had been sufficient to secure a conviction. That is my point. I have no doubt it is a fact.