

*The Chairman:* I want to draw attention to the fact that the only question Mr. Pope was to answer was whether he had given instructions that large landholders were to be favoured.

35. *Mr. Statham.*] Were instructions given by any member of your Department to do so—that is, to any of the officials to your knowledge?—Not to my knowledge. No official of the Department had any authority to do so. I think I am safe in saying no official has.

36. *The Chairman.*] Is it a fact that all are treated alike?—It certainly is.

37. Has there been any change of policy between the different Governments?—No change of policy.

WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 1913.

NATHANIEL CRAIG examined. (No. 7.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Crown Lands Ranger at Taihape.

2. You are aware that this Committee is holding an inquiry into the question of the aggregation of land?—Yes.

3. Will you make a statement in regard to the matter?—I will be pleased to answer any questions.

4. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] What is the value of the agricultural lands in and around Mangaweka Settlement?—They average from £12 to £15 per acre. It depends on the distance you go back.

5. It has been alleged that there has been certain aggregation of some village sections in the immediate vicinity of Mangaweka: do you know anything about that?—No, I know nothing about the aggregation of Crown lands within the immediate vicinity of Mangaweka. There has no such thing taken place to my knowledge.

6. Not in the case of those small 5-acre sections?—We have possibly given a section that would be really of no use for any man, even to make a living off, to an adjoining neighbour—stony, poor land.

7. People have been allowed to acquire an additional section of poor land?—Yes, in one or two cases.

8. And do you consider that is in the interests of the country?—In the interests of settlement and of the country.

9. Was the original holding, in your opinion, sufficient for a man to make a living off?—It was not sufficient for him to make a living off—it was stony land.

10. Supposing a man was working outside at casual work?—No, you would not get even a working-man to live on it and make a living.

11. It is alleged that homes have been vacated through this aggregation being allowed?—No, that is not the case—not to my knowledge.

12. You are the present Ranger for the district?—Yes.

13. There has been evidence given before the Committee in regard to farm sections in the Kawhatau Valley: has there been any aggregation there recently within your knowledge?—What kind of lands?

14. Rural lands?—Do you mean Crown lands or freehold lands?

15. Freehold lands?—Freehold lands, Yes; but Crown lands, No.

16. Say, under the Act of 1907, have Crown lands been allowed to be aggregated?—No. We have possibly allowed a settler who had not sufficient land to make a living off to take up another section so as to make a living, but that is all that has been done. The interests of the country have been safeguarded by doing that.

17. Do you know anything about the Gorringses and the Wilsons?—Yes.

18. How many different Wilsons are there in the district?—Two families. There are four holdings between the two brothers.

19. And each work independently of the other?—Yes; in fact, they are all married, and they are very good settlers, and have separate holdings.

20. Now, with regard to the Gorringses?—There are two families there, but they are aggregating land to a considerable extent. They have now something like 6,000 acres.

21. Of Crown land?—No, freehold private land.

22. *Mr. Witty.*] Have you been stationed in the district for long?—Five years.

23. And you have noticed that there has been some aggregating of land in the district?—It all depends on what land you mean.

24. Any land in the district?—Of course, with freehold land a man has a right to sell it.

25. Are there many empty houses in Mangaweka?—No, not in the town.

26. If Mr. Hornblow says there are he is not stating what is correct?—Not at all.

27. Do you know any one named Hewitt?—No. I know the country.

28. Does he live there?—I do not know. There are some sections that have been turned into freehold.

29. Has this section been freeholded?—I do not know without looking it up. I know the locality, but I cannot locate the section.

30. It has been stated that several of the people who have got land are not living on their holdings?—Of course, if they have carried out the improvements and fulfilled the residential conditions there is no necessity for them to live on the land.

31. Some of them have not, I understand?—Not in my district, that I know of. Most of the settlers have willingly fulfilled the conditions of the leases.

32. You do not consider there is any aggregation going on except in the case of privately owned lands?—None whatever.