

might be removed, but, taking the conditions of the Dominion as a whole, a Court constituted in the manner I have suggested may meet the position better than the one suggested by the Mayor. There should be a means whereby the small taxpayer can make himself heard before the Court with as little inconvenience, loss of time, and cost to himself as is possible. At present there are a great number—I believe the vast majority, certainly in number if not in value—who are excluded from the Court by force of circumstances. They are small ratepayers and small taxpayers, and they know from past experience of going to the Court that they have to attend perhaps five or six times, which to a working-man means the loss of half a day or perhaps a whole day, and, in addition, perhaps he has to employ counsel and a valuer. The cost is so great that even if a reduction is obtained it is no redress at all. It is more profitable for him to pay the extra tax or the extra rates than give time and incur expense in an endeavour to get redress. This was brought particularly under my notice recently in Wellington. I saw a lady who attended the Court five times before her case was reached. The Government should appoint a solicitor, either from the Crown Law Office or from outside, to represent those individuals who cannot afford to engage counsel, and an outside valuer should also be appointed at the cost of the Crown to represent such people. The Court should then arrange for hearing objectors in alphabetical order, specific days being set apart, always being assured that the time would be sufficient to deal with the cases set down for a particular day. In that way I believe a great grievance would be removed that exists in the minds of hundreds of people in this city. I was Mayor of Wellington some years ago, and I remember how general the complaints were as to the valuations, especially on the part of small people, and the Government should see to it that the smallest individual in our midst should have the easiest means possible to redress a wrong, and at the least possible expense. I think, too, that the system of arriving at the value of a property is a decidedly wrong one. I have attended this Court off and on for thirty years. I have wasted days there, and got a reduction which meant a saving of perhaps £3 in a year, which in five years would represent an amount of £15, and I may have lost in my business anything from £50 to £100 over the matter. But I got tired of appearing before the Assessment Court until recently, when I have had a little more time, I have put in an appearance again. The result of one's experience is distinctly discouraging. The Department for the most part hit on a property that has been sold in a particular locality for a special purpose which may have a special value for the person who buys it. It may be for a bank, or for a mercantile or hotel purpose, but it gives a special value to that property, and it forms the basis of values in that particular district. I think that is wrong. We have had Upper Hutt mentioned this morning, and I use that as an example. A few people go to Upper Hutt to live—week-ends for the most part (probably they are professional people)—and it gives a special value to the whole district, which for many years must be a farming district. The value of that place for many years to come must be the productivity of the land from the common use to which the land is put. That is the basis of what the valuation should be. In regard to special lands, a particular site may be bought for a special purpose, or a piece of land suitable for a special purpose is held by a man for that purpose until the opportunity for its use comes along, and its sale then enhances the value of land all round. There is no corresponding value between the freehold and the leasehold. Leasehold lands are loaded with many disabilities. They are loaded, first of all, for borrowing purposes by a very large amount. The average investor will not invest his money in leasehold property. In a word, there is a margin of value of 20 or 30 per cent. between leasehold and freehold land. Then leaseholds in this city which were commonly understood to be Glasgow leases, but are not such, are really leases with a fixed tenure and expire, some in twenty-one years, others in forty-two years, and the interest of the leaseholder in these lands is a diminishing one and in many cases approaching vanishing-point, whilst his interest is shown, according to the tax return, as an increasing interest. It is not consistent at all. One case came under my own observation. For about ten years we have had Harbour Board leases. For the first two or three years there was no real commercial need for it, but under the conditions of lease we were compelled, in common with others, to build. In the first place, we took this lease for the purpose of shifting our engineering plant, because where the works were situated the land was of such a value and the rating was so high as to preclude us carrying on our business profitably. Unfortunately the values went down, and we could not sell at that time, and we were saddled with those additional leases. Any sane man under these conditions would have let the leased land remain idle, but the conditions of lease compelled us to erect a building in keeping with the character of those in the neighbourhood. For two or three years we could not find a tenant at all. We have since been able to find a tenant, but about half the time the building has been unoccupied. In the face of that, our values have been going up the whole time. One property, let all the time, returned £345 a year. The cost of that property, reckoning 6 per cent. on the value of the building, is £421 10s. 2d. per annum. In spite of that the valuation has gone up a fairly considerable amount. We would take to-morrow from 10 to 15 per cent. less than the valuation of these properties.

2. *The Valuer-General.*] Why not offer it to the Government?—There is no provision under the Act, as it is leasehold land. The provision by which a freeholder has some remedy is a very wise and a very fair one, and what I want to impress on the Commission is that some similar provision should be made in the case of leasehold land. With a provision of that nature I will offer these properties to the Valuer-General to-day for 10 to 15 per cent. less than his own valuation. It is an injustice that a condition of things should exist in this Dominion without any remedy or redress. I have hopes that this Commission, comprised as it is of men of experience and judgment, will be able to point out to the Government or the responsible authorities some possible means by which there will be a remedy for these things. In regard to the property I have cited, I want to tell you that the tenant left a month after the valuation came out, and