

it has been empty ever since, and may be empty for years. With regard to the rate struck, it is not necessary that a local body should continue to rate at the old rate per pound when the valuations have gone up; but I am an old public man, and have sat on public bodies so often that I want to say emphatically that the disposition among local bodies is to get the same rate per pound and take advantage of the increase that occurs for the carrying-out of extra but not always necessary works. I know that part of the remedy is the rating question, and in itself may be the cause at times of taxation bearing unduly on the persons who are carrying the properties for the time being. I do not know what the experiences are elsewhere, but I can cite places like Wellington Suburbs and Hutt, where the valuations are excessive.

3. *The Chairman.*] It has been suggested to us that there was an exceptionally large number of objectors at the last Wellington Assessment Court?—I think there were. I think a great many came the first two days, and then gave it up disgusted and disappointed.

4. Do you think that for average Assessment Courts it would be necessary to break up the case-lists in the way you suggest?—Yes, even in ordinary times.

5. *Mr. Myers.*] Or bring the objectors on in streets or blocks?—Yes. Either would be a remedy.

6. *The Chairman.*] Section 31 does not apply to leaseholds, and this suggestion was made at our original sitting in Wellington by Mr. Tripp, I think: the Act provides that there is no appeal from the Assessment Court on value, but only on points of law, seeing that the lessee has no right to offer his property to the Government under section 31 he should be given the right of appeal to the Supreme Court on the question only of value. How does that suggestion strike you?—I think it is a very desirable one.

7. Do you think it would be sufficient for the protection of the lessee, instead of giving him the right to offer to the Government?—No. I do not like the idea of a person being forced into the Supreme Court first of all for a remedy. I think there should be an intermediate step, and that step should be the one by which they can offer their property to the Government, and, failing an amicable decision, the Supreme Court should be the Court of Appeal.

8. If that were done the leaseholder would be more favoured than the freeholder. Mr. Tripp suggested that for the leaseholder there should be an appeal to the Court on the question of valuation?—Yes; but I should prefer that the leaseholder should first have the right to offer to the Government, but no doubt the Government would not care about being loaded up with a number of leaseholds.

9. *Mr. Myers.*] What do you think of the suggestion that section 31 should be altered by providing that a freeholder, when he objects to the decision of the Assessment Court, should be required to state not only the capital value, but the unimproved value and the value of his improvements, and that the Crown should have the right to purchase the land at the unimproved value, leaving the improvements to be subject of arbitration? That would be fair to the Crown and not unfair to the freeholder, and it would prevent the freeholder from trying unfairly to place a big value on his improvements and too small a value on the unimproved?—I see your point. I do not think a person should be enabled to force the Government to purchase improvements at an inflated value in order to get rid of the responsibility of land which is overvalued. I think that is the only equitable way by which you could arrive at the value of the improvements. By arriving at the value of the improvements by a process of arbitration you get at what is a fair market value.

10. You were present during the greater part of the sitting of the Assessment Court at Wellington?—Yes.

11. You are aware, are you not, that on the main question—namely, the value of land in the business area of Wellington—a very considerable body of evidence on both sides was submitted to the Court?—Yes.

12. I think you yourself were a witness?—Yes.

13. You would know also that evidence as to a great many sales right through the business area was given?—Yes.

14. You will admit, then, will you not, that the decision of the Court did not depend upon an isolated sale, but that there had been a number of sales in each section of the locality, and that these sales ranged over a period of years?—For the most part I think that the sales that took place, as evidenced in the Court, were sales more or less inflated because of some peculiar personal requirement for the purpose for which the land was to be put.

15. Every sale that could be found was brought before the Court?—I cannot say that.

16. Do you not know, as a matter of fact, that the values which were placed upon the city lands were really less than the price that these sold lands had brought?—I know that was so in relation to one or two sales that came under my observation.

17. *Mr. Campbell.*] Do you know of places sold here at prices really under the Government valuation?—I know of no such sales of my own knowledge.

18. In the country, at Hutt, do you know of any?—In the Hutt I do. And I know of a good many properties that would be sold at 20 per cent. under the Government valuation. I know a person who would sell at 50 per cent. under the Government valuation of two or more years ago.

SYDNEY KIRKCALDIE examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a member of the firm of Kirkcaldie and Stains (Limited). I understand that the object of this inquiry is to obtain both general and specific evidence in the working of the Valuation of Land Act, and also as to the manner of apportioning the individual interests in the unimproved value of the freeholder and leaseholder in cases where land is leased. I am interested in the working of the Act both as a freeholder and as a leaseholder, and both as a lessor and lessee. I was one of those who lodged objections to