

89. After your seven years' experience with prison labour on pumice land, what system would you suggest to the Government as the best for working this land?—My answer would be that it should be developed by organized labour.

90. On a large scale?—Yes.

91. With modern tractors and so on?—Yes, modern farming.

92. You are of the opinion that if the Government undertook to break in 10,000 acres of this land right away, you would suggest that they should do it on a community basis?—Yes.

93. Or mass action?—Yes, like the prison authorities are doing now.

94. Only on a larger scale?—Yes.

95. And you are convinced, after your seven years' experience of pumice land, that failure will be impossible?—There could not be failure there if you had the right men.

96. And when that 10,000 acres was put in order, what would you suggest then?—That it be divided up into farms, on the same principle as the Prisons Department is following now.

97. Do you think it would be wise to pick out some of the best men we have in the country, and give them the preference to put that country in order?—Men who were keen and who had had experience would be better than inexperienced men, certainly.

98. Do you think that the men would learn something during the process of breaking it in?—Yes, just like my prisoners. Some of them who come there have never seen a plough or handled a horse, yet they learn the job in twelve months.

99. If men were selected for that purpose it would give the officer in charge the opportunity to pick out the men most suitable for settlement on that land?—Yes, that is my idea.

*The Chairman:* I would point out that we are getting away from the question of the construction of the railway.

100. *Mr. Semple:* Yes, but I want to find out just what it is possible to do with that land. This witness has stated that he is not concerned with the railway, and I have had in mind the idea of getting from him some real practical evidence regarding his own personal experience upon this land. I am not worrying about the railway at the moment. I want to find out what this land can do. If we find out what the land can produce we can then discuss the possibilities of the railway. Do you think, Mr. Banks, that under supervision and with organization—under a practical man who knows this land and how to bring it into cultivation—this land is capable of producing?—Yes.

101. How many acres, would you suggest, would return a man and his family a livelihood?—I would say, 300 acres. My experience is that a man wants to employ labour to assist him. With one man on a farm by himself he would be killed because he has no assistance. That was the cause of my brother's death—he has just died. A man must employ labour to assist him.

102. You think that a farmer would have a better chance of success if the area was big enough for him to employ labour on it?—Yes, just the same as your men in business do to-day; they employ labour, and the same thing applies on a farm. A man wants assistance.

103. And that would be a good thing for the nation?—Yes, more would be employed then.

104. Are you familiar with all the area of pumice land in your district?—Yes, I have been practically all over it.

105. Is there water in most parts?—A fair amount of water; it can be got by boring.

106. You think that water can be got by boring?—Yes, it can be procured by boring.

107. Do you think that that land will lend itself to irrigation?—I do not think there is any need for irrigation there; I think you will get water there without irrigation.

108. By boring?—Yes.

109. Apart from grazing, does the land produce other stuff?—We are growing good crops of potatoes and other things. It is very good for growing root crops.

110. And fruit?—Yes, it is producing good fruits.

111. What about strawberries?—Yes, they do exceedingly well there.

112. Is it not a fact that you give your prisoners strawberry-pie?—That is true; they have had strawberries there.

113. Have you kept any account of the cost per acre of breaking in this ground?—Only privately; the Head Office keeps all the records.

114. What is the cost?—Between £14 and £15 per acre.

115. That is what it cost the Prisons Department?—Yes.

116. Well, now, if the system was extended on the lines you suggest, by using modern implements, and by selecting the best type of men available, do you think that that cost could be reduced?—Yes, it is being reduced now, with the prisoners. The capital cost is being reduced the more land you bring in.

117. And do you think it could be reduced if the breaking-in process were extended and worked on a larger scale—with well organized labour and with modern implements?—Yes, with picked men you could do it cheaper than with prison labour.

118. You said that the success of the development of this land depended upon access?—Yes.

119. In other words, the speediest way possible to get the stock off the land to the market, and to get fertilizers on to the land—you think that would reduce the cost?—Yes, that is so.

120. Then, if this pumice country lends itself to land-settlement along the lines you have suggested, it would be necessary ultimately to give access to it by rail?—Yes.

121. That would naturally follow?—Yes.

122. What is your opinion about this sickness amongst stock: do you think that cultivation and closer settlement would minimize if not wipe out the trouble?—That I could not say. I know that is the stumbling-block. As far as I am concerned, I am not worried about sickness in stock.