

114. I am a farmer in the Tirau district, which is only six miles from Putaruru, and which is bordering on the whole of that country. I quite agree that they have frosts in December and January, but what I want to point out is that we also have frosts in December and January in Tirau?—Your property is on the Cambridge side of Tirau, and more than six miles from Putaruru.

115. On Christmas Day and New Year's Day we have experienced heavy frosts in Tirau, and although the frosts have a detrimental effect, the ground affected is not any worse off?—But the country there is different from the Taupo land, and the Taupo crops would be affected.

116. The Waihi Plains country has been referred to. Do you know that at some period of the year they experience heavy frosts and exceptionally cold winds in the Waihi district?—But according to the topographical features they cannot have such cold weather as is experienced at Taupo.

117. It is merely a matter of opinion. Now, with your experience of the Taupo country, do you think that if a block were taken up by the Government, and a number of unemployed farmers placed on it under supervision, and if that block was developed by scientific methods, they cut it up after it had been brought into development, do you think the farmers would have a chance of making those farms pay?—I think that the first thing to be done would be to ascertain whether water could be provided.

118. Naturally the Government would not take up a block unless water were available. If this block were brought in under those conditions in which an ordinary farmer could make his land pay elsewhere, and men were given a start from that point, and were paid wages up to that start, would they then have a chance of making good?—It is problematical. It would all depend upon how far the Government was prepared to support those men, because you cannot precipitate that country.

119. Then in your opinion Taupo could not be brought in except by consolidation by stock?—I say it is a question whether you can bring that country in quickly enough for a farmer to get it into a position in his lifetime to make a living upon it; but provided that the State is willing to take the responsibility of making an experiment upon it, the experiment is worth making.

120. You know the Hamurana country?—Yes, know it well.

121. You know the Kaharoa Block: is it not mostly tutu and fern?—I like the tutu land, but there is very little of it in the Taupo country.

122. I will give you an example of a block of country which the Government sold at 15s. an acre. First of all they burned it, then they disked it over, and then sold it?—I know the back country there, and it is very different from the country at the top of the hill. I would like to have a block of that country myself.

123. You reckon that it is worth more than £6 an acre?—On adjoining land I put £6 an acre unimproved value.

124. You reckon that the Taupo country is mostly of no such value?—I say that in my opinion the unimproved Taupo land is a liability and not an asset. That is why I say that the State should bear the cost of the initial development.

125. I think we are all agreed upon that. Then you think it can be economically developed, as long as the State develops it?—No; I say it is problematical, but it is an experiment worthy of a trial, and if it gives the encouraging results asserted by some gentlemen, that the experiment should be made for the sake of posterity.

126. Was not the prison farm an experiment in development?—Yes.

127. Was it a successful experiment?—That is a point that I am not sufficiently conversant with to be able to discuss it. Before we can say whether it is a successful experiment we would want to know what it is costing to bring in.

128. Are you of opinion that the land that has been brought in by means of prison labour is now a good example of the capabilities of the country?—I do not know enough about the prison farm to express a definite opinion. With a lot of that country the cost of maintaining it has to be considered.

129. You say that the farmers are existing on some parts of the country?—Yes.

130. Well, the mere fact that they are existing proves that it is capable of enabling them to exist?—In the majority of cases the farmer is just living, and not meeting his liabilities.

131. Then he cannot be existing?—I define the term "existing" as meaning that the farmer is just living on it.

132. Then if he is living on it, it must mean that he is just making both ends meet, and saving something?—Not necessarily.

133. If he is not making both ends meet he cannot exist, because there must come a time when he must become bankrupt?—It all depends upon circumstances.

134. The men who, you say, are just existing are keeping families?—Yes.

135. Then the land is providing enough to keep these men and their families?—But not enough to pay the cost of it.

136. Supposing they had capital provided to help them, could they improve their places to a further extent which would keep them?—I do not mean merely existing, but putting by a little money?—It depends upon what areas you are referring to.

137. You said that at Putaruru the settlers are a struggling quantity?—Yes, a lot of the settlers I have been in contact with.

138. Have you any knowledge of the settlers in Putaruru, and in the Putaruru district—men who went there with nothing, and have done exceptionally well?—I do not know of any. I do not say that there are not such men. It would depend upon how much capital they had when they went there.

139. I do not think the question of capital enters into it. We are agreed that the Taupo country is not country for a man without any capital at all?—I am not comparing the Putaruru land with the Taupo land. It is vastly different.