

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.*

EVIDENCE TAKEN BY THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF BOTH HOUSES OF THE
LEGISLATURE APPOINTED TO CONSIDER ALL BILLS AND PETITIONS
AFFECTING WASTE LANDS OF THE CROWN, ON THE FOLLOWING
PETITION.

To the Honourable the House of Representatives.

The humble Memorial of the undersigned Settlers in the Clutha District,

HUMBLY SHOWETH—

That, in the opinion of your Memorialists, it was intended by "The Waste Lands Act, 1866," that settlement should proceed in the usual way of first declaring the land into hundreds, and not by the sale of blocks outside hundreds.

That the Provincial Council at its last Session decided by a majority of two against the sale of land at 10s. per acre. The Government, however, at the close of the Session, again introduced the matter, when the sale at this reduced price was carried by a majority of one. Your Memorialists believe it was not competent for the Provincial Council to reverse the decision it had come to at an earlier period of the same Session.

That "The Waste Lands Act, 1866," as administered by the Otago Executive, is injurious to the Revenue of the Province; is detrimental to the interests of those already settled in the country; offers no inducement to settlement, and is not only fitted to drive people out of the country, but is actually producing this result.

Your Memorialists therefore pray your honorable House to appoint a Committee to inquire into the whole subject of the administration of the Waste Lands in Otago; and if possible to prevent the sale of blocks in runs, and the unsold portions of the old hundreds at the reduced price of ten-shillings per acre.

And your memorialists will ever pray.

[Here follow 78 signatures.]

James B. Bradshaw, Esq., M.H.R., was called in, and gave the following evidence:—

The grievance is, that certain blocks of land have been set aside for sale outside of hundreds. This is a new feature in the sale of land in Otago. The blocks alluded to are now advertised for sale. The hardship is, that the system of hundreds will be done away with, and that the blocks so set apart will fall into the hands of the runholder or capitalist, instead of the small holders, for whom they are apparently intended. By the agreements under which these lands have been taken out of runs, the runholder is to have the right of pasture on all the land within the block until sold and fenced; and no new hundreds are to be proclaimed on the run affected by the agreement. No man will buy out of a 15,000 acre block in the middle of a run while the runholder has the exclusive right of pasturage on all that is not fenced and bought. I believe that what has been done is illegal. A compact was entered into between the Committees of the Legislature on the Gold Fields and Waste Lands Bills, so as to enable those measures to be worked together. This compact is broken by the setting aside of these blocks. A clause was proposed by Mr. Vogel to the effect that land should be sold at 30s. an acre within Gold Fields. This was lost; and so was an amendment by Mr. Reynolds to allow the sale at 20s. an acre; yet what is now being done is just what the House refused to sanction. The understanding was that occupation should take place before sale on the Gold Fields; but the course now adopted violates this understanding, and indeed infringes the Act. As to the agreement made with the Provincial Government, every squatter I have asked has informed me that a lease was only given in exchange for a license on the express condition that they would allow blocks not exceeding 15,000 acres to be taken out of their runs without the compensation to which they would otherwise be entitled under the Gold Fields Act—the runholder retaining the exclusive right of pasturage over all the unsold portion of the block. I say that there are not sufficiently large blocks of land open for occupation and purchase under clause 16 of the Gold Fields Act. I get letters every day complaining of this, especially from the Mount Benger district.

1. *Mr. Reynolds.*] How many miners are there in the Mount Benger district?—I refer you to the Member for the district.

2. Can you tell the Committee what the amount of compensation would be if the Government gave the diggers all they want?—When I was Ministerial Agent for the Gold Fields I was in communication with the various Wardens for the purpose of opening up new blocks under clause 16 of the Act. I stated that 2s. or 2s. 6d. an acre would be sufficient compensation to the runholder, but the sum demanded was usually much higher. This, however, had to be settled by arbitration under the Act. The Government tried arbitration at Lawrence (Tuapeka) and Wakatipu, and in those cases the compensation was I think about 2s. an acre.

* For the Report, see Journals of the House of Representatives, p. 215.