

sale. I do not say that there is not a *prima facie* grievance in their not being able to get pasturage if they buy. They feel it so, as they have had the run of the unsold land for years past, and they bought their lands at £1 an acre under the impression that the price would not be reduced. I think it right to say that with respect to the cry of "Land for the People," there is a great deal of claptrap in it. One would imagine from the language used that there was no land to be got for settlement or occupation; yet there are from 700,000 to 800,000 acres of land open for settlement, exclusive of runs. I do not of course say that this land is all good. It is good and bad together. A portion of it is already in hundreds. There are about 1,600 sections pegged off, varying from 50 to 100 acres each. These are open for selection under the Land Regulations. In addition to this, there is in the Gold Fields about 500,000 acres open for selection for agricultural leases. A great proportion of this land is accessible, and about 450,000 acres is common for depasturing purposes, at 3s. 6d. per annum per head for great cattle, and 7d. per head for sheep. The only way of removing the complaint made in the petition would be to proclaim a run in their district into hundreds; but even if this were done I don't think the land there would be found suitable for agricultural purposes.

8. *Mr. Reynolds.*] Will the reservation of blocks of land in various runs for sale preclude or encourage settlement?—I think it will decidedly encourage settlement. With respect to some blocks recently opened up in Gold Fields, there have been a good many applications for agricultural leases; and with regard to some blocks outside Gold Fields, there have been a good many purchases of freehold, and I have reason to believe, with regard to one block in Gold Fields, which is about to be taken out and put up to auction, that a great portion of it will realize £3 to £4 per acre. I cite these instances in answer to Mr. Reynolds' question, to show that settlement is being and will be carried on; at the same time, there can be no doubt that settlement would be much more encouraged if pasture land could be given with the agricultural land sold.

9. Will the Government be precluded from proclaiming hundreds because of the reservation of these blocks?—No.

10. In the sale of these blocks is it the intention of the Government to sell in large or small sections, and will the runholders be placed in a better position to purchase than the public?—It is intended to sell the land in ordinary farms of from 50 to 100 acres each. The runholder will have no better position in regard to purchasing than that which he may derive from having a longer purse than the public. When the land is of special value it is put up to auction.

11. Do you consider that taking these blocks out of the runs will destroy the value of the rest of the run for sale, or secure it to the runholder for all time coming?—If the runholder could pick out the eyes of the run, that would be the effect; but as these blocks must be from 5,000 to 15,000 acres, I say decidedly not.

12. Can you state roughly what sum might be required under the Gold Fields Act to cancel pastoral leases if the Government were to give effect to the wishes of those residing in Gold Fields districts?—To compensate for all the runs applied for within the last six months to be taken out of Gold Fields under the Act, would require at least £50,000. That is the greatest difficulty the Provincial Government has to contend with.

13. Would this sum be refunded to the Province, and when?—It would be repaid of course ultimately, but it would be a long time before it would all be refunded with the present population. I could not say how long. There is the cost of survey to be taken out of the rent of 2s. 6d. an acre, and that would run away with the first year's rent. There has not been any difficulty in collecting the rent of agricultural areas where the leases have been properly completed, as most of them are now. Within the last six months I have signed upwards of 400. I cannot say if there has been difficulty in collecting the assessment on stock, but if so it has not been the fault of the stockowners on the Gold Fields commonage, but owing to the want of a proper system of collection on the part of the Government. This will not occur again, but I believe a good deal of revenue has been lost owing to a want of proper system. The only observation I wish to volunteer, is with regard to agricultural leases on Gold Fields. I think 50 acres far too small an area for agricultural purposes, and I would recommend that the area should be 200 acres at least. This to a certain extent would obviate the complaints made at present.

14. *Mr. Reid.*] Do you think the policy of the Waste Lands Act is being carried out by the setting apart of these blocks without their being proclaimed hundreds?—I should like to know what is meant as the policy of the Act.

15. I mean the general scope of the Land Act—that all lands should be proclaimed hundreds before being open for sale, and that the setting aside of these blocks for sale outside Gold Fields is the exception?—I take it that the policy of the Act is twofold, partly to secure revenue and partly to settle the country, and I say that the Act as now administered secures these objects.

16. Do you contend that there is a larger revenue collected when land is sold outside of hundreds, or that settlement would be promoted to a greater extent by such sale than if the land were proclaimed into hundreds and then sold?—My opinion is that the adoption of both courses is best.

17. *Hon. Major Richardson.*] The blocks to be taken under the engagements not being defined, will not the result be that the best portions of the country will be included in these blocks?—Practically the boundaries of the block will be decided by the Chief Surveyor, the ground of its selection being its suitability to agricultural purposes.

18. Will these blocks in every case receive the approval of the Provincial Council before being sold?—There is no law at present requiring such approval, but I have no doubt that practically the Council will have a voice in the matter.

19. Has it not invariably been the case in regard to hundreds heretofore recommended?—No hundreds have been proclaimed without such approval, it being required, I understand, before His Excellency will proclaim new hundreds.

20. *Mr. Reid.*] Assuming it to be legal, do you consider it is equitable to leave with the runholder exclusively the grazing over lands actually purchased within these blocks, and do you think that by such a course purchasers are placed on an equal footing with the runholder?—I believe the law on this