

improvements only, and nothing in respect to the land, the said compensation to be settled by arbitration; in the event of the miner not finding payable gold, in restoring the soil to its former state; and if no damage to the crops has occurred, he should be entitled to receive back his deposit. The evil of locking up auriferous land is just beginning to be felt, and encouragement ought not to be given to persons to take up lands in the immediate vicinity of gold workings.

#### *Revenue and Expenses.*

Under this head the Conference would desire to record that while it is patent that all reduction of revenues ought to be met by a like reduction of expenses, it does not approve of special taxation being imposed on miners to any greater extent than any other portion of the community, and the reduction it may advocate it trusts will be looked upon as being based on fairness. The disbursement of gold fields revenue the Conference would entirely leave in the hands of the Government, trusting it will be based on the same principle of fairness.

#### *Mining Boards.*

The opinion of the Conference is that the miners are the best judges themselves of the rules and regulations by which they should be bound in the prosecution of their avocation, and it would ask the Government to appoint a Board of Miners for the Province of Otago, to be elected by the miners from certain districts, which may be either defined by the miners or by order of the Governor in Council. The Governor might appoint from among the elected body a chairman. Power should be given to said Board to make rules and regulations in conformity with the Gold Fields Act, which, on receiving the sanction and approval of the Governor in Council, should become the rules and regulations for any particular district or province of the gold fields. The mode of election, the time for which members should be elected, and the defining of the districts, may be safely left in the hands of the Government.

#### *Administration of Justice.*

The Conference having considered carefully this subject, would recommend that the present system be entirely altered. Wardens' Courts and officers were introduced in Australia, and imported from thence, for the double purpose of raising revenue and dispensing justice. When these institutions were first introduced, the gold fields were occupied principally by a very different class of people from what they are now. Gold was then got by little labour and expense, and large bodies of miners kept continually moving from place to place, to follow every new field that was discovered.

It was no doubt necessary that a special system of administering justice should be adopted; also, that special taxation should be raised from among the miners to meet the expense. The gold fields are now in possession of a more settled and enterprising class, who, by their energy and perseverance, are slowly succeeding in developing the mineral resources of the gold fields. The Wardens' Courts in the early days were excusable, and for revenue purposes were properly employed; but the population has now scattered and spread over the extensive area of our gold fields, and these Courts are too numerous and expensive to make their functions as revenue officers a profit to the State. A reduction of this class of officers will enable the legislature to relieve miners from the pressure of a taxation which bears heavily in their industry. The Conference is of opinion that the Common Law Courts in existence would meet the requirements of miners in matters between themselves, as between the general population of the country, leaving in the hands of the miners the adoption, if necessary, of Courts of Arbitration, which could deal with matters of dispute, which could be appealed from to the District Court of the Province if desired; and as most cases of any great importance or magnitude are now either finally settled by the District or Supreme Courts, while arbitration has been used to settle cases even after being before these Courts. Should the Government see its way to adopt some such principle, the Conference believes they would confer a great boon to the miners, but should Wardens and Wardens' Courts be considered to be indispensable, the Conference would recommend the system proposed in "The Gold Mining Bill, 1872," in preference to that now in existence, with a clause that in cases when Warden, plaintiff, or respondent may desire the assistance of assessors, that the Warden may summons them verbally from among persons in attendance and in the vicinity of the Court. The Conference would also recommend that the fees and costs given in Wardens' Courts be greatly reduced.

#### *Mining on Private Property.*

The Conference would recommend that either part of the Gold Mining Bill referring to the above subject (excluding the inspectorship clauses) or a separate Bill be introduced to provide for facilitating mining on private property.

#### *General.*

Most of what the Conference considers necessary in framing laws for the miners has now been enumerated, and the sum and substance may be embodied in a few words. Give the miners a legal right to mine and to prosecute their industry, give them a simple and secure title to all mining property, and deal with them as with other members of the community.

#### *Agricultural Leasing.*

The Otago Waste Lands Act of 1872, which will soon come into operation embraces, the above subject, and the Conference is of opinion that it might not also be embraced in any Gold Mining Bill; but though it admits that such leasing of lands in gold fields has been a source of great prosperity to the gold fields, it has nevertheless been attended by a considerable amount of evil by locking up from the miners large tracts of auriferous lands. The Conference desires to foster and facilitate settlement on the lands of the Province, but it is decidedly of opinion that rigid inquiry ought to be now held on all lands open for agricultural leasing, and mining reserves declared where considered necessary. It