

67. *The Chairman.*] I have in my hands a Bill introduced by Sir G. Grey called the Deferred-Payment Settlers' Relief?—I have read it.

68. Would you be good enough to say what you think of the provisions with regard to deferred-payment settlers?—I do not like it at all.

69. *Mr. J. Green.*] You do not think it would give the requisite relief to deferred-payment settlers?—I think it would tend to demoralize the settlers. I do not like the machinery of the Bill. A man has to plead poverty, and apply in an objectionable form, a form which would tend to demoralize the agricultural settlers. The settlers do not desire to come to the Legislature for eleemosynary relief, and do not want it. They say that, owing to the exceptional circumstances set forth, they have entered into unfair and onesided contracts, under which some of them do not receive a fair value in land for the payments they have to make, and they ask the Legislature to review the contracts.

70. You think a revaluation of the deferred-payment lands and interest charged would be the best relief for these people?—I think in case of hardship: I say I do not think there is a very large number of cases where relief is really in equity desirable; not many cases, probably twenty-five, or perhaps twenty-five to forty cases altogether, where equity and fairness would demand a revaluation. These cases are very fair. The great bulk of the settlers got their land on tolerably fair terms.

71. *Mr. Hurst.*] How many?—I should think twenty-five to forty cases ought to be relieved.

72. That is the lot?—Yes.

73. I understand you have said most distinctly that the Bill introduced by Sir G. Grey would not meet the circumstances of the case of these twenty to forty cases?—No; I stated I did not approve of the machinery of the Bill. I would bring under the notice of the Committee a matter I have not been asked a question about, and which I think of great importance. I may explain to the Committee that a very large number of settlers in Otago, in the Maniototo District and Upper Clutha Valley, and other districts, have taken up land on deferred payment. The Government surveyed the land into 200-acre sections. All the adjoining land is large blocks, reserved out of the Otago runs for settlement. These areas of 200 acres are far too small for successful settlement, and it is of great importance to these men that they should have an opportunity of selecting the additional 120 acres each out of those blocks of Crown land adjoining their present holdings. I told the Waste Lands Board I would bring the matter under the notice of the Committee, and I thought it probable it would be adopted by the Committee and the Legislature. The Board have, in anticipation of this being done, issued instructions to the surveyors now surveying these lands to lay off suitable areas adjacent to these holdings, in order that these settlers may have an opportunity of completing their holdings if the suggestion is adopted. I hope the matter will receive the attention of the Committee. I drafted certain clauses, which I will read, to meet the case of these men: they are marked 55A, 55B, and 55C on my annotations to the Government Bill, and are as follows: "55A. When any selector shall hold a license to occupy an allotment or allotments of rural land on deferred payments, of a less area in the whole than three hundred and twenty acres, and there shall be adjoining such allotment or allotments any Crown lands set apart or intended to be set apart or opened for sale or settlement, such selector may apply to purchase on deferred payments so much of the said Crown lands as shall, together with the allotment or allotments already occupied by him amount to three hundred and twenty acres in the aggregate; and such selector shall, on the Board approving his application, be entitled to a license to occupy such additional land as from the day of the date of his application, if such Crown lands shall not then be subject to any pastoral lease or license; or, if such Crown Lands shall then be subject to a pastoral lease or license, then from the day of the date of the termination of such pastoral lease or license. 55B. The price of such additional land shall be the price at which similar land may be sold in the district for cash, with one-half thereof added thereto, and shall be payable in the manner provided by section 63 of 'The Land Act, 1877,' (or of the said Act), and the license shall in all respects be subject to the provisions of the law for time being regulating the disposal and occupation of land on deferred payments. 55C. Any selector selecting an additional area under the provisions of section 55A of this Act shall, if the land applied for be unsurveyed at the time of making his application, pay the survey fees thereon." I would ask the Committee to consider that matter, because it is of very great importance to a considerable number of settlers in the interior. They would have a right to take up land at the upset price for cash, plus 50 per cent., to complete their holdings, and they will never have the opportunity again once these lands are sold.

74. *The Chairman.*] Have you seen the Lands Boards Bill of Sir G. Grey?—No; I have heard it discussed.

75. Perhaps I might ask you have you heard any express desire on the part of the settlers in Otago generally for an elective Land Board, as distinguished from the present system?—No, I have not. So far as I am aware there is no such feeling in Otago among the settlers.

76. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] No dissatisfaction?—No.

77. Is there any dissatisfaction with the existing system, as far as you are aware: the constitution of the Board, I mean, as being nominated?—Not that I am aware of.

78. Would you give your own opinion as to the advisability of an elective Land Board as against a nominated Board from your own experience?—I may mention that in 1876 I had publicly suggested that a proportion of the members of the Board should be elected: a minority; but a very careful consideration of the matter since, and practising, as I do, at nearly every meeting of the Land Board of Otago, I have become thoroughly convinced that it is much better that the Board should be entirely nominated. I may mention the danger I have noticed that is likely to arise from elective Boards. There is sometimes very strong pressure brought to bear by local bodies, instances have come under my own observation, to induce the Board to dispose of Crown land in a manner not for the public interests. It is a very frequent thing that local bodies very badly informed indeed with regard to the true needs of agricultural settlement, generally come down to make special representations to the Board to induce them to act in a particular way; and even at the present time, even with a nominated Board, the Board is subjected to very considerable pressure, which induces it sometimes to act even against its own better judgment. I notice, particularly when politicians get upon the Waste Lands Board, that they are very apt to allow their political leanings to influence their better judgment in a manner not to the interests of the settlement of the country.