

263. *Mr. J. Green.*] I should like to ask Sir George Grey whether he considers the deferred-payment system a good one for the *bonâ fide* settlement of the colony?—I think it is a very good one.

264. Is it in your opinion a system that should be persevered in?—I think we should continue it as one of our systems, but without auction.

265. You prefer the ballot system?—Yes.

266. What did you say with regard to the quantity of land thrown open in the North Island?—When I was asked whether I could speak positively on the subject, I said I really did not know. I believed that the best land had not been opened, and that it was very likely people would not take up indifferent sections. From what I have heard and gathered that is the belief in my mind. I have had no opportunity of examining witnesses. I believe very often inferior land has been opened at an unfair upset price.

267. Do you mean generally over the colony?—The particular case I refer to is in the Middle Island. When it was opened for deferred-payment selection, an additional price was put upon it. I forget the name of the district, but I have heard complaints from the settlers. This is since my Bill was introduced.

268. Your opinion then is, that the best agricultural land has not been put under the deferred-payment system?—Yes.

269. You think that there was not sufficient land opened to meet the demand?—I am of opinion that a large quantity of land should be opened in advance of selection.

270. Do you consider that the upset price has been too high for the quality of the land?—In places.

271. *Mr. J. Macandrew.*] You say in your Bill that any deferred-payment settler, who finds that he cannot pay his instalments, may apply to the Court for relief, and that the Court may refuse to accede to the application?—Yes.

272. Under Mr. J. A. Connell's idea there could be no refusal. What he proposes is, that any selector who shall be of opinion that he has purchased his land at a rate above its true value may serve a notice upon the Minister of Lands. There is this distinction between the two proposals apparently?—It would be for the Committee to consider which they prefer. My answer is this. If a man has taken up a section on what the Court hold to be fair terms which he could fulfil, and have prevented another man who competed with him from getting the same section, it will be for the Court to decide if it will be to the advantage of the public that he should be allowed to get rid of it. I think the advantage of what I proposed is, that the case will be settled on its merits. If you intend to allow everyone to play puss in the corner, and run from one place to another, whether they have just claims or not, that is quite another thing. I think it clearly will not do to allow everyone who has taken up land to throw it up and get something else.

273. There is no limit in your Act. Under it the settler may apply to the Court at any time during his life?—I suppose it to be a standing Court, but the time during which application could be made could be limited.

274. Will it not be desirable to put a limit?—I think this will be a Committee objection. I take the thing in the most general sense. I have considered the matter very carefully, but in a general sense. If I get the Bill into Committee in the House the point you raise can be considered.

275. *Mr. J. Buchanan.*] I think I understood you to say that the general idea of the measure is adopted from the Irish Land Act?—Yes.

276. Would the system introduced here involve the necessity of employing experts to value the land?—Not at all. I believe that they will be settled easily by the Commissioner at each place.

277. They would not need to have any special acquaintance with the circumstances of the district in which they act?—They would get evidence of this. The Crown might appoint the District Judge of a particular locality. I have introduced the words District Judge to direct the attention of the Government in this direction.

278. District Judges here are usually legal gentlemen, with no acquaintance with matters connected with land. Is not that the case?—They will be able to get the evidence of people in the neighbourhood. There is this difference between the circumstances here and in Ireland. In Ireland the question is between two subjects, the rights of both of whom have to be protected. Here in New Zealand the question is between one subject and the whole public, of which that subject forms one. I imagine the pressure of public opinion in favour of the public interest would greatly modify the applications people make. It would be very different from a dispute with an ordinary landlord.

279. There is a large section of the public who has not taken up land. Will it not be desirable that their interests should be seen to?—I think that will be done.

280. Am I right in stating the meaning of your measure to be this. To cast upon a Court selected in the way described in the Bill, the duties now discharged by Government?—I think you can hardly say that. I do not think the Government now have power to do what I propose. The Government could not without being under suspicion of favoritism or pressure, agree to reduce one man's rent very much and let him off, and at the same time refuse to do so for another person. I think it would be much better for the public that the cases should be heard in open Court.

281. At present the valuation of land is fixed by the Ministry of the day or their officers. Would you think it better, under the circumstances, that the Court should fix the price of this land rather than the Government?—To this I reply that I do not think the question is relevant to the Bill. In these cases the Government did not fix the price of the land. It was the auction and competition that determined the price.

282. Would you be surprised to learn that, at the majority of instances, the land went at the upset price?—Yes, I should be surprised to hear that that was so in the majority of cases. These are not the cases I am aiming at. The cases I aim at are those where the upset price was enhanced by auction. There are also cases in which, I believe, the Government officers have fixed the price of the land too high.

283. You say the Government fixed the upset prices?—Yes.