

any one person might acquire. Was that not an example of unwise administration on the part of the Commissioners? Could you offer any information as to how that was done—whether or not it would be prejudicial to settlement?—Well, the Commissioners thought that in the interest of settlement—beneficial settlement—it would be advisable to sell a portion of these lands; and they recommended a portion to be sold on deferred payments and a portion for cash—two-thirds on deferred-payments and one-third for cash. Under the Act of 1882, they forwarded their recommendations to the Government; but the Government disapproved of the sale of these lands in this manner, and suggested to the Commissioners that one-third should be sold on deferred payments, one-third for cash, and one-third let on perpetual lease. The Commissioners did not see their way to making the recommendations in this shape, and after some protracted correspondence on the subject, when they found that the Government adhered to its decision they took the only alternative they had, in order that the lands might be occupied, by offering to let the lands under the powers they had under the Act of 1877. They saw no wrong in letting the lands under those conditions, if they could be let, although previous experience did not lead them to expect that much of the land would be taken up. And if it was taken up it would be taken up under pastoral lease, and would be available for settlement by freeholders on expiry of lease.

168. Then, what about upwards of sixty sections included in that sale? How many were sold?—No doubt the Committee have access to the advertisement. About a hundred sections were advertised at first, but at a subsequent meeting of the Commissioners it was thought advisable to reduce the number, and I think only about one-third were offered. Of these, I think sixteen were taken up.

169. So that really that feature of it did not prove an attraction in inducing purchases?—The result did not surprise the Commissioners. For two or three years they had been endeavouring to let these lands, without success. Therefore they were not in the least surprised to find such a small number taken up.

170. Do you think, if the administration had been in the hands of the Waste Lands Board the reserves would be in a different position now, or that the lands would have been taken up more freely?—If the lands had been offered for sale I believe a larger number would have been taken up; but the Commissioners had no power to sell.

171. *Mr. Fulton.*] Have there been any complaints made by the public as to the administration of the Commissioners?—There were a few in the District of Waikaiti.

172. In what direction?—In the Commissioners not throwing the lands open for occupation.

173. By what method?—Well, I believe a small number desired to have perpetual leases, but generally there is a desire to acquire freeholds.

174. *Mr. Brown.*] How many Commissioners are there?—Five.

175. How often does the Board meet?—The regular meetings are held monthly.

176. Are there any expenses attached to the meetings—any honorarium?—Travelling expenses only.

177. Do you know the amount paid to each member for travelling expenses, roughly?—Well, all the members do not receive travelling expenses. The expenses amount, I think, to about five guineas for each meeting for any member who receives expenses.

178. Each?—Yes, five pounds or guineas.

179. How many officials are there in the office?—A clerk and a message-boy.

180. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] Is not practically the whole of the work of the Commissioners done by the Commissioner of Crown Lands and the Survey Department? Is not all the practical work of administration done by Government officials?—The chairman of the Board of Commissioners is the Crown Lands Commissioner.

181. *Ex officio*?—No; appointed by the Government. But it is as chairman of the Board of School Commissioners that he does the official work. The work done by the Commissioners under the Act of 1877 is done in the offices; but any work done under the amended Act of 1882 is done by the Land Board.

182. As a matter of fact, is not the preparation of lists of sections, transfers, cutting up lands, and the general work of administration, done by the Lands Department?—It has been as I said. The Survey Department has done work, but not all. Much of the survey work has been let by contract.

183. Is it not true that a considerable amount of feeling exists in favour of maintaining the Commissioners, from a dread of what is called “colonization” of these reserves?—It may be so in some quarters.

184. As a matter of fact, are you not aware that such is the case?—I have heard one or two persons express such an opinion.

185. Do you not think that that feeling would be removed if the position of these lands was clear, and if the public felt assured that the proceeds of each reserve would be distributed to the beneficiaries through the Public Trust Office?—I can hardly answer that question, seeing that I do not entertain the feeling myself.

186. The Commissioners have a good deal of business in connection with mortgages, have they not?—Yes.

187. On what basis do they act?—On the advice of the Board's solicitor. That is left in the hands of the chairman to arrange.

188. Do you mean that the Board does not take an active part in it?—The particulars are laid before the Board, and the routine work is done by the chairman.

189. The chairman being a Government officer?—Yes—the Commissioner of Crown Lands.

190. What public statement is there of the transactions of the Commissioners in respect to these mortgages?—The particulars are laid before the Press from time to time.

191. Is the Press represented at your meetings?—The representatives of the Press are allowed to be present, but they are rarely present. They have access to the minutes.