

tion. I should like you, sirs, to consider the memorandum of the Public Trustee even now, as it is not too late for remedial legislation being introduced on the lines of that memorandum. That seemed to us a fair and equitable measure of relief. The effect of it was to allow them to come in under the Act of 1892 on their paying a price. If they had up till 1900 to come in, why not let them come in now, provided they pay the Public Trustee for all improvements over £5, and provided they pay the difference in rental between what they were paying in 1900 and what they would have paid in 1900 if they had come in under the Act of 1892. That, you can see, is pretty severe.

*Mr. Kerr:* Is that carrying it out to the times in which they had the right to convert?

*Mr. Welsh:* Yes, calculating from that date.

*Mr. Bell:* Although I said I had no objection to the file going in, I have no objection to the documents, but what is in the file must not be taken as an admission by the Natives of what is fair. It is a statement of what the Public Trustee thinks is fair.

*The Chairman:* No.

*Mr. Welsh:* I do suggest to you, sirs, consideration of that document, which appealed to us all then as a fair and equitable basis for consideration. We were saddling ourselves with a heavy burden. The facts as are outlined, if the evidence I lead bears them out, I think will satisfy the Commission pretty clearly that the lessees did think they were entitled to something a great deal more than the lease gave them: they thought they were entitled to their improvements. I am going to call some witnesses who understood that their improvements were limited to £5 an acre, but there are others who thought they were entitled to all their improvements, and for those men who did not come in under the Act of 1892 to pay the Public Trustee for all their improvements over £5, and pay the difference in the rent, is a pretty fair thing. Thrice they had the right to come in under the Act, and they did not avail themselves of it for the reasons shown. The Public Trustee recognized that, and so did the Committees of the House. It was put to them: they have had three chances, but give them the chance if they are agreeable to pay the difference. We were prepared to accept that, and we are still in hopes that we will get legislation on those lines. I will show that throughout these men, when they first became aware of their position, have endeavoured and done their best to place their grievance before the proper authorities. We did not think that to have introduced a case into the law-courts would have given us any assistance at all. We thought it would have been a costly operation, because it was difficult to get over the exact words of the lease, but that a petition to Parliament would really represent that we have a real grievance. So far as the Natives are concerned, we have no wish to take away anything from the Natives—their birthright; but if as a result of this inquiry Parliament yet refuses to grant some remedial legislation these lands do not revert back to the Natives, because at the end of the leases they have to be put up to public auction and sold. Then we come in with the rest of the world and bid. We are, of course, in a little better position, for the reason that to the extent of £5 an acre we are protected. Mr. Hastie's lease of 500 acres went up since Tinkler's case; he had his improvements up to £5, and he was the successful tenderer for the new lease. I am desirous of pointing out now that if we are refused any measure of redress at all we simply revert to the old position; and under the present legislation all the lessees, as their leases fall in, are paid £5 an acre by the incoming lessees. If the leases are not sold, then it is open to the Public Trustee to tender with us for the sale of the lease, and to grant us a new lease. In fact, you will see that we can stand up and bid against the world, because it is not likely that the lessees are going to permit their homes to go and their improvements to go without a determined bid.

*Mr. Kerr:* That is because you are relying on the fact that these leases, in terms of the Fourth Schedule of the regulations of the Act of 1881 have been validated by subsequent legislation.

*Mr. Welsh:* That is a fact.

*Mr. Kerr:* The point is that under your present position you have only got a conditional right of renewal.

*Mr. Welsh:* We have no right of renewal practically.

*Mr. Kerr:* Not a conditional right?

*Mr. Welsh:* It is conditional if it is not sold by public auction. Let me present another phase. I have so far dealt with the lessees and the Natives. Now, sirs, we come to the question of the land. Is it conducive to good farming, is it conducive for the good of the community or the Public Trustee, to leave this matter unsettled? There has been a big difference in the farming of lands in Taranaki within the last few years. Farming has become closer and higher, and more money has had to be lavished on the land, and improvements which would be fair five, ten, or twelve years ago are not sufficient now. We have to cut our lands into smaller areas. The Dairy Regulations make certain provisions, but they are not sufficient—we go considerably further than the Dairy Regulations provide for, and we say that for good farming we must cut our farms, which were once small at 100 acres, down to 50 acres; more buildings must be erected, more sheds have to be built, and there must be concrete floors. Now, we are waiting for all that; and the lessees will tell you that to make these farms profitable further sums of money must be expended on them. One gentleman has already spent £10 or £12 an acre on his farm, and he is only waiting for legislation to go through to spend larger sums, and surely that is worthy of consideration. In conclusion, let me say that the lessees are not here to work a land-grabbing scheme of their own; they are not here to try and do the Native out of an acre of his land. The improvements that have been made by the lessee have been made upon his own home, and it is only fair and reasonable that he should endeavour to get a reasonable tenure. I put it to you that it will be established that all down the line the lessees did not understand their position. Had they done so they would not have spent money in bushfelling and grassing, and more than £5 an acre in improvements. If they had understood they would have accepted the right to convert under the Act of 1892.

The Commission adjourned till next day.