

235. *The Chairman.*] Why did you not do all the talking afterwards, when you found that Mr. Rennell had told you one thing and you got a lease with another thing in it?—Well, I did not.

236. That is what I cannot understand: you say he told you most distinctly that you would get all your improvements paid back on valuation, and you got a lease which contains another thing, saying it is limited to £5 an acre?—I do not think my lease did say that.

237. Well, it is in the regulations. Why did you not go to Mr. Rennell about it there and then?—I could not say now. I cannot explain it.

238. When you took up the land at first Mr. Rennell told you you would be paid for all improvements, and the lease did not contain that: why did you not tackle him then?—I cannot say.

239. *Mr. Kerr.*] How did you get to know about it that this section was thrown open?—I was trying to get a small piece of land from the Maori owner of this property, and he told me about this section that was open, and I went and had a look at it. I took my friend Mr. Dingle with me. The Maori owner was Korikapa.

240. *Mr. Welsh.*] Can you say of your own knowledge whether there are any lands in your neighbourhood that are occupied by white men under lease or license from those Native lessees who are holding from the Public Trustee?—I could not speak of any such instance just now, but I had one myself for seven years.

241. Do you know of any instance at the present time?—No. The Public Trustee complained that the furze was not kept down and the place kept clean, and I asked for a lease from the Reserves Agent, and I got it. This Native held it under an occupation license. I had it for seven years, and afterwards I got it from the Public Trustee.

242. What was the acreage of the land you were holding in this fashion?—140 acres.

243. *Mr. Bell.*] What was the name of the Maori?—Rangiekieki. That was 100 acres, but I could not say who the other belonged to.

The Commission adjourned till 10.30 a.m., Monday.

HAWERA, MONDAY, 13TH MAY, 1912.

JOSEPH BEST sworn and examined. (No. 2.)

1. *Mr. Welsh.*] You are a farmer?—Yes.

2. Living where?—At Mangamingi.

3. You are a lessee under the Act of 1881?—Yes.

4. What is your section?—No. 18, Block XIV, Ngairi.

5. What is the acreage?—200 acres.

6. And the lease will expire when?—In 1913—30th June.

7. Are you an original lessee?—Yes.

8. What is your rent?—3s. per acre.

9. When you took up your lease, what did you think you were to be paid for in regard to improvements?—Well, of course it was a bush section. There were about 5 acres of fern and tutu and the rest was all heavy bush, and I thought I would be paid for improvements up to £5 an acre.

10. You knew of the limit of £5 an acre?—Yes.

11. Now, for what class of improvements did you understand you were to be paid?—Fencing, buildings, bushfelling, and grassing.

12. You thought you were to be paid for those up to £5 an acre?—Yes.

13. And did you think you had the right of renewal under the lease?—No, I did not think I had any right.

14. What was to happen to the lease at the end of the term?—It was to be revalued and put up for public competition again.

15. And if not sold, what was to happen to it?—Well, we were to come to terms with the Public Trustee if we could for a renewal of the lease.

16. Now, at the time you took up the land what was its condition?—It was all standing bush except a small piece of about 5 acres.

17. And what did you do?—The first thing I did was to build a whare, and then I started to fell the bush.

18. Did you go on to the land yourself?—Yes.

19. How long did you remain on the land?—Well, I was continuously residing on the land for twenty-five years.

20. You got a slight reduction in rent, I think?—Yes.

21. What was the amount in your case?—8d. per acre. It was reduced from 3s. to 2s. 4d.

22. For what time?—For five years.

23. Did you make any effort to convert your lease?—Yes.

24. What was the first step you took?—There was a public meeting called of the different lessees under the 1881 Act asking for the Act to be amended so that it would include all improvements, and the Act was amended and we were given the opportunity of coming under the amended Act of 1892.

25. After that Act of 1892 became law what did you do?—I made application to come under that Act.

26. To whom did you make the application?—To the Public Trustee.

27. And what was the result of your application?—They sent a Valuer round to value the land, and they put the rent up to such an extent that I could not see my way to accept.