

142. *Mr. Anderson.*] You said the population is less now than it was originally. There was a lot of clearing, I suppose, in the early days?—It was all bush with the exception of a few small patches, but nearly all heavy bush.

143. Would that affect the population then as compared with the present time, on account of the work there?—It is a floating population. I did not consider that. I meant, by "population," the settlers. Of course, naturally there would be bushfellers and fencers, but I do not consider them as population.

144. Are there any schools there?—After the settlers came the schools became established.

145. Are the schools there now?—Yes.

146. You told Mr. Wilson that you did not know whether each of the Wilsons is living on a separate section?—Yes. I have not been in touch with this district for ten or twelve years.

147. *The Chairman.*] What is the nature of the country in question in regard to its physical formation: is it flat or hilly?—It is all hilly—good papa country.

148. Then, in your report you say, "The areas aggregated were only sufficiently large to provide a comfortable living," and that "the holders were residing and working the land in a *bona fide* manner." Is that true?—Yes.

149. Is the land steep land that you could not ride over?—Most of it you could; some of it in wet weather I would not care to ride over.

150. Is G. H. and N. D. Wilsons' land country that you could get over?—Yes, most of it. It is very steep in parts.

151. When you went round the district did you go round with Mr. Hornblow, the editor of the *Mangaweka Settler*?—No, interviewed him.

152. When did you visit the district?—In April last.

153. Has this aggregation been caused by the Land Act of last year?—No, I do not think so. It was in March I made my report, and not April.

WEDNESDAY, 8TH OCTOBER, 1913.

ROBERT EDWARD HORNBLow examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A journalist residing at Mangaweka, and proprietor of the *Mangaweka Settler*.

2. You are aware that the Committee is inquiring into the question of the aggregation of land, and the matter was brought up in the *Mangaweka Settler*, the following words appearing: "All through this district there are agents out, their pockets lined with gold in order to tempt the small farmer to take advantage of the Reform Government's legislation to convert his leasehold into a freehold and hand it over to the man possessed of capital." We will be glad to hear what you have to say on the matter?—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, in referring to this matter I want the Committee to distinctly understand that it is not a matter of making political capital out of this business at all. Long before the present party came into power I directed the attention of the authorities to the aggregation, and also to the speculation and dummyism that has been going on throughout the Rangitikei and Oroua districts. It has been carried on for some considerable time—at any rate, for the last twelve years, since I have been in the district. I called attention in the article mentioned to land agents travelling round with money in their possession to buy up holdings for the benefit of those people who had capital to spend. I still stick to the statement I have made, that it is a fact that land agents have been employed by men who are in search of properties and who already own properties. They have travelled round the district with money to buy these sections. The first article I wrote on the subject was on the 18th February. I might say that since the new clause was inserted in the Land Bill of last year it has been detrimental to Mangaweka and, I consider, to the country generally. If we take Mangaweka as an illustration, I might state for the information of the Committee that probably Mangaweka may be placed in a very different position to most of the other townships throughout the Dominion. When Mangaweka was originally laid out those who framed the Act laid out village allotments. Their reason for doing so was that they considered that by and by as time went on the blocks of land adjacent to the town would be taken up in large holdings, and that labour would be required on those farms during a certain period of the year. In order to keep the labour in a central place the Government at that time framed their law so as to allow these suburban sections to be taken up by working-people. The land was taken up in holdings of from 6 to 10 acres. In no case were they supposed to dispose of those sections to their neighbours, but since the new Act was brought into force a number of holdings have been taken up by neighbours. There is one instance alongside my own home, of which I produce a photograph, which will be more convincing to the members of the Committee. The one neighbour has taken up three of those village allotments. [Photographs were produced of various cases of aggregation of small and large sections throughout Rangitikei and Oroua.] In some of those instances the land was aggregated prior to the clause in the Bill being brought into force. The areas are village allotments of 10 acres in the majority of cases. I produce also a photograph of a holding at one time held by Mr. Rummell which has been aggregated. You will notice in the list supplied by the Crown Lands Ranger where the Masons took up various blocks of 1,000, 500, and 200 acres. The photo produced is one of the residences. I could have got another dozen or so of photographs, but I did not have sufficient time at my disposal, but I thought those I produce would be interesting to the Committee as showing the class of buildings and what is happening. Speaking of Mangaweka, the position is not a party question at all, but I believe in connection with these matters the present and previous Ministers in charge of