

the Departments concerned were ignorant of what has been going on in the country districts, and they naturally look to their officers to give them the necessary data to go upon. As far as our district is concerned, things have not been carried on as they should have been to enable legislation to be brought forward to stop aggregation. I am not going into the details of the report and the remarks made by the Under-Secretary, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and the remarks made by Mr. Lundius, but I say their report as published in the Press is a misleading report, and the statements contained therein are inaccurate. It is not a fair report at all as far as our district is concerned. The numbers of acres that have been quoted are not correct, as I shall be able to prove in the course of my evidence. In addition to the country that has been aggregated in and around Mangaweka, I might mention that Utiku, Pohonui, and Te Kapua are places where aggregation is rampant at the present time. The aggregation is of 200- and 300-acre blocks, and is now mounting up to over 1,000 acres. No doubt Mr. Guthrie, who is a member of the Education Board, will bear me out in saying that I do not think there are a dozen children left in the Ohutu School. It is reported the average attendance does not exceed six children. Owing to the aggregation that has gone on the attendance at the Ruahine and other schools has also depreciated to the extent of fully 30 per cent. I give that as an illustration of what is going on in connection with aggregation. I do not wish to confine myself to what has taken place during the last twelve months, but also prior to the last twelve months, as I consider it is a question which affects the whole of the people of this country. In connection with recent cases of aggregation near Utiku I refer to Weston's transfer of his property of 200 or 300 acres to McCartney. Then, as to the case of the Masons, I think this is a clear illustration of the land-jobbing and land-speculation which is going on near Mangaweka. Masons are non-resident people of the district—they belong to Wanganui; and they sent agents into the district and purchased Mr. Stevens's property for £12 an acre—a block of 1,000 acres. In addition to that, they bought up a reserve of 500 acres, and then bought up another 200 acres.

3. *Mr. Guthrie.*] What was the reserve?—An education reserve. They held the property for about eight months. Mr. Stevens thought he had done well out of it, and he left this country to settle in Australia. He went to Australia and travelled over different parts, but he was dissatisfied and came back to New Zealand. He went to the South Island and found nothing suitable there equal to the land about Mangaweka, so he came back to Mangaweka again and gave an advance of £3,000 to get his property back from these speculators who held the property. In addition to what he previously held, Mr. Stevens has taken up the 500-acre education reserve. Then there is the case of Keating and Smith. The Smith family also hold considerable property. I am now speaking of the country up towards Tairoa. One of the family, Mrs. Phoebe Smith, has taken over that section during the last two or three months from Keating. Then, as to the Hawhaengo Settlement, adjoining Mangaweka, you have the case of Cameron. He bought Pittam's section, for which he paid £10 or £15 an acre, and he sold it within three months for £25 an acre. He has now taken up another section, and, I understand, getting the freehold in Manui, which is three or four miles out of Mangaweka. He has taken up a block belonging to Hurley; the transfer has been granted by the Board, and they must realize that this sort of thing is nothing else but land speculation and land-jobbery.

4. *Hon. Mr. Buddo.*] Could the Land Board in that case refuse a transfer—have they the right?—I do not think they could, because at the time he put in the application the man had no land—he had disposed of his section. I do not think they could turn round and prevent a man taking up another section. I do not think there is any provision in the present Act to prevent the land-jobbing which is going on. He bought the land in this case—it was not a ballot. There was another farm opposite to Pittam's, belonging to Kraiger. He disposed of his section to Caselberg, who also held another block. The latter paid £15 an acre to Kraiger. I am giving the prices because the Crown Lands Ranger said the land in the Kawhatau Valley averaged from £8 to £10 an acre. Wilson's land has been offered for sale at £15 an acre. An attempt is being made to get some of these big estates cut up near Mangaweka. Caselberg has aggregated that of Kraiger's, and Billingham's property has also been disposed of. The latter transaction recently took place. Then we have cases in Mangaweka: Amer has taken over three sections, and originally he had a block of 8 or 10 acres. He found it paid him better to buy out the adjoining neighbour. He did so, and he paid £400 for 6 acres of land of village allotment. He removed then from his old house into the latter, and turned the former into a barn. Since the Act came into force in which l.i.p. tenants have the right to acquire the freehold he has bought another village section on the opposite side of the road. It is a well-known fact that people have great difficulty in getting grazing, and many of them would be only too glad to avail themselves of the opportunity given them by the Government to acquire these sections. They have not had the opportunity, and have to go elsewhere. On the opposite side of the road, almost adjoining Amer's, is Bertlestones' section, and that has been acquired by Mr. McDonald, who holds 400 acres at Manui. He is turning it into a freehold, and has let it to a tenant. Then we have the case of Charlie McKinnon, in the Mangaweka Village Settlement. He owns several hundred acres at Kawhatau, and also a large block on the Main Trunk line. He also has purchased 10 acres from Deaken, and has converted it into a freehold, also buying out the adjoining neighbour, Stevens, and converted that also into freehold. Another point to prove my statement in connection with land agents is that the money is being invested for speculative purposes. I will take the case of Mr. Powell, in Ruahine. Harris Bros. have a lot of land in different centres: one of the brothers bought this place from Powell, and it was reported in the paper that the reason he wanted to take it up was because he wanted to reside on the section. The Land Board held it over and then decided to grant the transfer. From that time he has not resided on the section, and has taken several people there to sell it to them.