

143. It conduces under that Act to making it more easier than under the previous conditions?—Decidedly.

144. In reply to Mr. Forbes you said the Government should again acquire the land around Mangaweka and resettle it?—Yes.

145. Is the Committee to understand that you suggest the Government should acquire the o.r.p. sections that have been made freehold?—It is the only way out of the difficulty.

146. At what particular point would you consider this settlement should finish—is the Government from time to time to go on reacquiring and resettling as aggregation proceeds?—Unless they bring in legislation that is going to debar that sort of thing, it is the only way they have out of the difficulty. Not only this Government, but previous Governments, have spent thousands of pounds in acquiring estates throughout the country, and yet they are permitting men who have means to aggregate thousands of acres of land at from £8 to £10 an acre and then selling it again at from £15 to £20.

147. Then I assume the Committee are expected to understand that the continuance of Mangaweka as a town and a centre is absolutely dependent on the resettling of the lands from time to time under the present conditions?—The way things are going on at the present time, as long as the law allows these people to step in and aggregate their neighbour's land and turn it into large sheep-runs, unless legislation is brought in to prevent that the only way to get the land back, unless by paying an exorbitant price, is to get the Government to resume the land from time to time.

148. That is the only solution of the difficulty?—Yes, under the present law.

149. *Mr. Guthrie.*] Your statement in the paper was to the effect that the land agents were out, and you explained that by saying that you knew of definite cases?—Yes, definite cases where land agents had been canvassing landowners to sell their properties.

150. Have they not been canvassing these same men for years and years past?—Probably so.

151. You mention the cases of Harris and Powell: do you know Powell's section?—I do.

152. How many times has it changed hands?—Several times. I could not tell you how many, but it is a section I would not have.

153. You know the man who originally took it up could not make a living on it?—Yes, he could not make a living. I reckoned that 500 acres of that rough country was little enough to get a living off.

154. The Hawhaengo Settlement is different from Mangaweka?—Yes.

155. It was established for those people in the district who were working in the district and making a living for themselves?—Yes.

156. It is very poor land, is it not?—Yes, some of it.

157. And some of the settlers who were there originally have gone to different places?—Yes, with the exception of one or two.

158. Pittams had to leave?—Yes, and he sold to Cameron, and then Cameron sold to Dixon. I should like to make a remark about that transaction. I referred to a price of £25 an acre being paid by Dixon for the section. I think in the interests of the people of this country it is infamous that land agents should be allowed to lie in wait for new arrivals in this country—men who have had no experience and who have a certain amount of capital. Dixon arrived in this country with £300, and the land agents heard he was likely to go in for land. It is in the interests of the people of this country to protect a man who comes from the Old Country from the land speculator. This man Dixon has been practically ruined by them. He put his £300 down, and a land agent and the seller collared the cash, and the poor fellow had a mortgage over his cows and land to make up for the amount due on the holding. It is well known that the section is an old river-bed, and the whole of that 60 or 80 odd acres will not carry twelve milking-cows. The land agents have robbed that man, and it would be well for the Committee to consider the question of making a recommendation to the Minister on the matter.

159. This Hawhaengo Settlement was specially set apart for workers?—Yes.

160. When the Government works were going on in the district?—Yes.

161. And the Government works are done now?—I do not know whether the Hawhaengo Settlement was cut up then specially. It was thought that eventually, with the possibilities of the valley, it would be a sort of village township.

162. You are also acquainted with Kairewarewa?—Yes.

163. In regard to the Timaru Settlement, that was originally settled, was it not, by Timaru settlers under Mr. Hall-Jones?—Yes.

164. How many of those original settlers are there now?—I suppose there would be about 15 or 20 per cent. at the outside.

165. Can you give the Committee any reason why those people left the sections?—In the majority of instances to better themselves and take up larger holdings. They took up land originally at £1 or £1 5s. an acre, and as their families were growing up they thought they had better sell out to their neighbours. The areas varied from 72 to 150 acres. The average was about 70 acres.

166. They were eventually found to be too small?—Yes, some have hung out, but it has been merely an existence. You could not expect them to make a good living off 70-odd acres. It was monstrous to give them only 70 acres.

167. You know the Pemberton Improved Farm: the sections were too small there?—Yes, and they had to allow them to aggregate.

168. There were a great many settlers there at first?—Yes, there was double the number of children in those days.