

(6.) The Valuer-General also suggested that where an owner takes advantage of section 31, a period of three months should be allowed to the Government in which to decide whether the valuation shall be reduced or the property purchased, and that he shall have power during that period to place the property in the hands of a registered land agent for private sale at the net amount of the valuation fixed by the Assessment Court, and on reasonable terms and conditions.

52. We approve of the suggestion made by counsel for the Department under paragraph (2) above. This meets also the case under paragraph (1).

53. As regards paragraph (3), we recommend that the property-owner shall have the right, if he so desires, to offer all his contiguous properties in one offer to the Government.

54. We disapprove of the suggestion No. (4), that an objector who has not appeared in support of his objection should have the benefit of section 31.

55. As to paragraph (5), we recommend that the Government should from time to time acquire properties under section 31, with a view to checking the abuse of the section referred to. We are unable to agree with the suggestion under paragraph (6), as we think a property would be injuriously affected by remaining in the Department's hands for three months, or even a shorter period, should a sale not be effected by the land agent, and the Government decide ultimately not to acquire the property. We think the owner should have the right to offer his land to the Government without being placed at this disadvantage.

56. We have on the preceding pages reported on the questions referred to us by Your Excellency in the order of the importance they assumed to us on taking the evidence, and we now have the honour to report under your remaining directions.

OTAHUHU PETITION.

57. We sat at Otahuhu on the 1st December, 1914, to hear evidence in support of this petition. The petition, which was addressed to the House of Representatives, runs as follows:—

“That petition of ratepayers of the Borough of Ōtahuhu humbly showeth:—

“(1.) That the undersigned ratepayers of this district hereby petition Parliament to take into consideration the matter of excessive valuations of properties in this borough as set forth by the recent valuations of the 1st April, 1914, and to add our protest to the unjust system of burdening the ratepayers by this method throughout the whole of the Dominion.

“Your memorialists therefore humbly ask that the Government will be pleased to institute an inquiry to amend this inequitable taxation by Government officers.”

The petition was referred by the House to the Lands Committee, which, on the 22nd October, 1914, recommended that the petition be referred to the Government for favourable consideration. The witnesses who appeared before us were represented by a member of the Bar, who acted generally in support of the petition, and asked for further time in which to formulate his case. We adjourned the sitting until the 3rd December, holding a sitting in the City of Auckland on the intervening day. At our suggestion counsel in the meantime selected a number of cases deemed to be typical of the grievances of the petitioners.

58. We found that the complaint on the part of property-holders in the borough was attributable partly to alleged overvaluation of the unimproved value of their properties and undervaluation of their improvements; partly to the circumstances that the borough had, on the 31st March, 1914, come under the system of levying local rates on the unimproved value; and, again, partly to the fact that the borough, which had only been constituted two years ago, had since levied special rates in connection with loans for water-supply and drainage. The alleged high valuation of the unimproved value, on which were payable the land-tax and the general and special rates, was said to bear hardly upon the property-holders of the borough; and as regards the local rates it