

So far I have stated matters of fact, but in some of what follows I shall have to touch upon matters of inference or hearsay.

Before the time came for the appeal to be dealt with as provided by the Land Acts, it was very generally believed that Mr. A. Peebles was so anxious to obtain the land that he was prepared to give a large premium to whoever drew the section, in order to secure it. It is, at any rate, certain that the great majority of applicants were persons engaged in town occupations, and that the circumstances of many of these were such as to preclude the possibility of their complying with any of the essential conditions of the land-laws. One firm alone is believed to have had sixteen representatives in the ballot.

There is also some reason for believing that a genuine settler caused some of his friends to apply in order to increase his chances.

About a month after the drawing the Land Board proceeded to deal with the appeal, and resolved to recommend Government to withdraw the section from selection under the first notification, and to offer it for sale at auction, on the ground that Mr. Sowry must be held to be disqualified, and that if the land was worth more than the price originally placed upon it, the difference should go to the Treasury rather than into the pockets of speculators. This recommendation was approved, and the land was withdrawn under the authority contained in section 103 of the Land Act of 1885, and ordered to be offered for absolute sale at auction three months after withdrawal. Mr. Sowry then appealed to the Supreme Court to compel the Land Board to accept him as the licensee, but, so far as I am aware, the Court has not yet given judgment.

Taking all the circumstances into consideration, the conclusion I have arrived at is that this was a case of dummyism of the most pronounced kind.

G. W. WILLIAMS,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

The Under-Secretary, Crown Lands Department, Wellington.

FRIDAY, 29TH AUGUST, 1890.

EDWARD ALEXANDER HAGGEN sworn and examined.

[This evidence has not been revised by the witness.]

672. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—I am a journalist, residing at Woodville.

673. *Mr. Smith.*] I suppose you remember the drawing for Section No. 1, Block XIV., Woodville?—I do.

674. You were not an applicant yourself—you had no interest in it?—None whatever.

675. You know Mr. Joseph Sowry, of Woodville?—I do.

676. He was the successful applicant?—He was.

677. Will you just tell the Committee what you know about this application for the section, at the time he put in the application, or since the refusal of his application?—An intense amount of interest was taken in the drawing for the section, owing to the fact that it was recognised to be rather a good bargain for any one who got it, as it was said that Mr. Peebles would probably be induced to pay £100 to the successful applicant for a transfer. Under the circumstances I had arranged for a special telegram to be sent from Napier giving the name of the successful candidate. Just as I received the telegram after the drawing in Napier, I met Mr. Sowry in the street, and I said to him, "You got the section at the Gorge." He said, "What section? what about it?" He seemed to be rather astonished. I told him he seemed to have been an applicant for the section. He remembered then that he had been an applicant, and said that Mr. Peebles had asked him to put in an application for him (Mr. Peebles). It was not like his usual luck, and if it had been for himself most probably it would not have been drawn out. That was the conversation I had with him. That was on the day on which the drawing took place.

678. Did you have any further conversation with him in reference to this section?—Not at that time, but, hearing afterwards that he repudiated any connection with Mr. Peebles in the matter, I asked him if he was going to transfer that section to Mr. Peebles, as that was what I understood was his arrangement. He said, No, he never dreamt of such a thing, he was astonished that people should suggest such a proposal.

679. Did you remind him of his former statement?—I had some unpleasantness with him; I did not do so.

680. Was there a rumour in town with reference to £100 that Mr. Peebles was willing to give as a bonus to any one who transferred to him?—Yes. The position was simply this: It was known that Mr. Peebles was anxious to get the section, and, in fact, I do not think that many of the settlers in the district would have gone in for the section at all had there been any chance of Mr. Peebles obtaining it in the ordinary way. Some, I know, went in out of friendship to Mr. Peebles. They thought it would suit him, and as a matter of common kindness they were willing to go in for the section and hand it over to him. Afterwards some of them expected to get a considerable bonus out of him for doing it. That was the general rumour, I understood.

681. You are of opinion that at the time he was willing to pay a considerable sum to any one who would transfer the section to him if they had drawn it?—

682. One witness stated that Mr. Sowry told him that he had an offer, since the decision of the Supreme Court on the matter, of £150 bonus?—I have heard something of that, but I do not know anything of the particulars.

683. He did not speak to you about it?—Yes, he did; but I told him I did not wish to hear anything about it.

684. *Mr. Cowan.*] Mr. Peebles did not tell you that he was prepared to offer a sum?—No.