

*Correspondence put in by Mr. McGuire.*

Being leaseholder of Section 129, Block VII., Waimate, I applied for a new lease, and forwarded £7 10s. to cover expenses. My improvements were valued at £146 8s. over the £5 per acre allowed, which is an excessive valuation. I was under the impression that, as the twenty-one years, the time for which the original lease was granted, had not expired, and the Public Trustee knowing that I could not have derived benefit in such a short time from the improvements, he would have granted me a new lease, as agreed on by the Natives, for 8s. per acre; but I have been informed by the Public Trustee that he cannot grant me a new lease unless I comply with his demand, which is that I pay £146 8s. If this must be enforced according to the Act, small leaseholders are debarred from taking up a new lease. To place leaseholders of small holdings on anything like equal terms with those of large holdings, special concessions should be granted them. Mine is a special case, in which I had to grow shelter to carry on my business, and ought not to be valued as improvements.

RICHARD SMITH

(In the presence of T. E. Crowhurst, J.P.)

Manaia, 15th August, 1895.

I hold, under lease from the Public Trustee, section 111, Block VII., Waimate, at a yearly rental of 10s. per acre. When applying for this lease I was requested to forward £7 10s., which I did. My improvements were valued at £183, being £68 more than the law allows for improvements, as my holding is only 23 acres. I got a lawyer's letter to say if I did not pay up the £68 at once it would be taken to Court. I was therefore driven to pay the £68, £2 2s. for said letter, and an additional £2 11s. for my lease, which left me without a penny to carry on with. I may state the valuation put on my improvements was excessive, as the fences are all rotten, and my house merely a shell. I might also state that the sections adjoining mine were thrown open for lease at the time I took mine up, but were afterwards handed back to the Natives, thereby necessitating me erecting all the fencing. I am a working-man, with a family to rear, and my case is a very hard one indeed.

I declare the contents of this to be true, so help me God.

Witness—George McLean, J.P.

H. W. ELLERMS.

DEAR SIR,—

Manaia, 30th July.

I, Henry Betts, having a special grievance against the Public Trustee, was advised by Mr. G. McLean to send it to you in writing. I have a small section of 61 acres, and work it as a nursery. I applied for a new lease. Mr. Morton Jones, of Wanganui, and a Native were sent to value. They must have valued my nursery stock, as they made my improvements come to £440, being £136 over the £5 per acre allowed in the old lease. A few months before I was valued by two local men, and my improvements were put at £300, and there was nothing done between the two valuations. I wrote to the Public Trustee, telling him Mr. Jones had no experience at valuing land, and the Native was interested in the land, and they must have made a mistake, as I knew my improvements were under the £5 per acre; that, if he would appoint a member of the Land Board, or some competent man, to value my improvements, I would abide by his decision. His answer was: "No matter how I arrived at the value of your improvements, such shall be final, and, unless the sum of £136 be paid within fourteen days, or a mortgage executed for the amount, legal proceedings will be taken." I took no notice of this letter, as I had petitioned Parliament last year, and Mr. Ward had promised that the thing should be hung up till this session, when they would legislate in the matter. But the first week Mr. Ward left the colony I was served with a writ for the amount in the Supreme Court in Wellington. I thought I would get justice from a Judge of the Supreme Court if I could take witnesses to prove I had not the amount of improvements charged by the Public Trustee. I was advised to consult Mr. Skerrett, of Wellington, on the subject. To my surprise, his reply was that I had better execute the mortgage, as it would be only wasting money to let it go to Court; that the Trustee could charge any sum he liked, and there was no appeal against it as the law stands now. So I have been compelled to execute a mortgage for £136, with interest at 6 per cent. if paid promptly—that is, within fourteen days—after that 8 per cent., and I am prepared to prove any day that I have nothing for it, if they would let me. It has cost me already over £50, and, if something is not done in my case, the Trustee will worry me out of the home that I have spent ten years to make. I have paid over £11 for my lease more than two years since. I have applied several times for it, but have never received it. I might mention the reason the Trustee has jumped on me is that last year I took round a petition praying the Government to take the management from the Public Trustee and place it under the Land Board.

Mr. Elwin.

Faithfully yours,

H. BETTS.

DEAR SIR,—

New Plymouth, 10th July, 1895.

Pardon a stranger writing to you; but having just read the second part of your very able letter in the *Budget* of the 6th July, makes me feel I ought and must tell you how thankful my wife and myself are for your sympathy and ability shown, and the trouble taken in coming forward as you have done in the Press, to show up the bad side of the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, and the tyrannous administration by the Public Trustee. Several on the Waihi Block are smarting under his lash, myself included. I take the liberty of enclosing copies of petition and letter to the Premier *re* our case, which I feel sure you will like to read, and know that others are moving in the same direction that you are. I am advised not to make public my case yet, as it is *sub judice*, and I do believe the Public Trustee to be vindictive and inhuman, and, with other folks' money at command, can make himself a terror. What with two trips to Wellington, law, interest, and other expenses has run me into debt, and I have not the funds to proceed further. We are now waiting the Premier's reply to my May letter, enclosed. But with any common cause between yourself or any other lessee and the Public Trustee I am good for a pound. No doubt we have lost a treasure in Mr. Ballance. I have thought that the Waste Lands Board would be the proper parties to administer the