

tions amounted only to 1,442 acres. Of that area, 500 acres had already been granted to the company in Block XXVIII.; 200 acres are now held under lease by Mr. Morgan; 30 acres are held for river protection; 125 acres under occupation license; 20 acres under license to quarry; 30 acres adjoins a gold-mining claim: thus leaving only 437 acres to the selection of which the Lands Department have no objections to offer.

It will, however, be clear now, even to Mr. Wilson, that the greatest care should be taken, and each application be dealt with separately, otherwise very serious complications are bound to arise. Now, in regard to the Nelson applications, Mr. Wilson is well aware the Government are proclaiming the mining reserves as rapidly as the terms of the contract permit. He is also fully aware that no selections under clause 33 can be made of land required for mining purposes. I have little doubt that many of the applications will be found to be within the mining reserves. One hundred and forty-one applications cannot be dealt with hurriedly without causing complications. At the same time, every expedition has been and will be used by the Public Works and Survey Departments.

2. The question of regulations: Those better able to judge than either Mr. Wilson or myself have settled that there is no power under the contract to make the same; and there being no power to make them is, I again assert, a good thing for both the company and the colony. Indiscriminate selection of Crown lands under regulations in mining districts would injure the mining industry, and would not promote settlement. Mr. Wilson states it is difficult to see how the Minister can say there is no power to agree upon a method of dealing with these lands. In this Mr. Wilson shifts his ground, for under clause 33 the Minister has power to agree upon the price, and power to agree whether the land shall be sold for cash or on deferred payment, or whether the same may be leased. The agreement in each case to be specific, and not to be by regulation, dealing *in globo* with all and sundry applications.

3. That the Government has not retarded settlement; and what object could I have in trying to make delays? Mr. Wilson says the answer is that until the assessments are made by the Government the company could not proceed with the applications. My answer is that it was only on the 26th January last that, in compliance with clause 33, Government was requested to assess the value of the lands mentioned in the application; and that until requested by the company to assess the Government were powerless to act. The reason the company did not request separate assessments is shown by the correspondence—namely, the company wanted to deal with the Commissioners of Crown Lands direct, under regulations, and to set aside the veto power of the Minister under clause 29.

4. The difficulties in regard to royalties on timber: It would have been wise on Mr. Wilson's part had he refrained from referring to this question. By his own showing he admits the sawmillers and the company took the law into their own hands—trespassed upon Crown lands, cut the timber, constituted the company agents for the Government, and with the most innocent assurance adds, "as per contract." Now, what are the facts? The company submitted regulations to be made for cutting timber; at the same time they submitted regulations for dealing with the land. The company were informed no power existed to make such regulations, yet upon the draft regulations the company collected royalties from all and sundry without the consent of the Government. Altogether some £ were collected. Now, Mr. Wilson promised to pay the whole of these moneys into the Suspense Account. When, however, formal demand was made that this should be done, there was very great difficulty experienced in obtaining from the company the amounts collected; and, whilst a royalty of 6d. per 100 ft. for cutting rimu had been demanded and collected by the company, all the Government received was 3d. per 100 ft., the company retaining the other 3d. Fifty per cent. for cost of collecting by illegally and self-constituted agents is rather a stiff tariff. Now that Mr. Wilson has nominated himself an agent for the Government, probably he will hand over to the principals the whole of the moneys collected as fees and royalties upon timber cut from off Crown lands, and which have not been, and which cannot possibly be, selected by the company. Or, probably, seeing the Commissioners of Crown Lands have accepted a royalty of 3d., Mr. Wilson has generously handed back to the sawmillers the extra 3d. per 100 ft. collected under the draft regulations, which were never agreed to, could not be agreed to, and which the terms of the contract definitely precluded.

5. Selections made by the company and values of same: On the eastern slope—Canterbury and Amuri districts—the company have selected 193,746 acres, of the assessed value of £117,576; whilst on the western slope—Westland District—only 20,500 acres, of the value of £20,500, has been selected. At the end of February, 1892, the area selected on the western slope amounted only to 11,000 acres, of the value of £11,000. This is exclusive of the lands the values of which the company has asked to have assessed, and which lands may or may not be subsequently selected by the company.

In conclusion, I admit it is unusual for a Minister to defend his administration by letter through the columns of a newspaper, but, seeing, however, that the attack made by Mr. Wilson was in respect to the speech made to my constituents, and seeing also that time will not admit of my making another speech, I hope your readers will pardon this departure. I have every respect for Mr. Wilson, the company's manager; he is energetic, faithful, and knows his business, and in what he has done has doubtless meant to further the company's interests. I know, also, the serious difficulties met with by the company in carrying out the gigantic and national work which they are engaged upon. I am and always have been friendly disposed towards the company. At the same time, it is in the interest of both the company and the colony that the contract should be strictly adhered to. A departure therefrom must, in the end, land all concerned in serious difficulties; and I assure all parties that the Public Works and Survey Departments, now that the lines of selection under clause 33 are well defined, will use the utmost expedition in furthering selections made by the company on either the eastern or western slope of the range.

To the Editor.

R. J. SEDDON.