

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 4TH NOVEMBER, 1909.

EDWARD IVEAGH LORD examined. (No. 1.)

1. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] You were District Surveyor for Westland for many years?—Yes; for ten years from 1875 to 1885. But I left the Government service at the latter date.

2. You have been Town Clerk for how many years?—Since 1891, and Borough Engineer since 1886.

3. You have therefore a personal knowledge of the facts stated in your memoranda?—I took them all from the books of the Council.

4. *Mr. Poynton.*] Can you state that the figures given by you are all correct?—The figures supplied by me are not exaggerated.

5. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] In paragraph 2 it is stated that 600 acres were let: is not that a printer's error?—Yes; it is a printer's error: it should be 500 acres.

6. What do you say with regard to the 200 acres of reserve not yet occupied?—The Borough Council are getting about £11 a year for it in rates.

7. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] What is the size of the borough?—Two thousand acres.

8. With regard to the sum stated in paragraph 2 of the petition, amounting to £87,719, do you mean to say that the whole of that money was spent on the 500 acres?—Yes, the amount was spent on the 500 acres.

9. I heard a list read out showing the average rental paid for the last twenty-five years: is that list correct?—To the best of my knowledge the sums stated are correct.

10. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] Was it correct for the last year?—Yes.

11. That, in the face of the statement in the petition that the ground-rent was excessive, was the ground upon which the whole claim was based. Where do you show the expansion on ground-rents on the figures which have been put forward on behalf of the petitioners?—I am not aware of the amount received on the first year mentioned—that is, 1879; but the people of Greymouth think the rentals are excessive. I do not think the 5-per-cent. basis is excessive.

Hon. Mr. Ngata: It is lower this year than since 1899.

Hon. Mr. Guinness: I can explain that to the Committee later on.

The Chairman: The evidence on this point had better be given by direct evidence.

12. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] Many of the lessees have sublet portions of the ground they leased, have they not? A good deal of subletting is going on. Are there any instances in which they have sublet at an advanced rate or a reduced rate?—There are instances in which they have sublet at an advanced rate.

13. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Amongst how many Natives are the rentals divided?—Sixty-six.

14. Are they resident in Westland?—Some are resident on the east coast.

15. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] On what basis is the property taxed for land purposes?—I suppose the Maoris pay their share of the land taxes on the Native reserves.

16. You mentioned that the borough would like to have the site of the Town Hall at a nominal valuation?—I consider the expenditure of borough moneys has been of great benefit to the Natives.

17. You have been asking the Public Trustee to make a gift of the Town Hall site to the borough?—Not as a gift, but at a nominal valuation. We are only paying £1 1s. per year for the Town Hall site. That goes on until 1916.

18. How long has the borough had that from the Public Trustee?—Four or five years.

19. That is, for public purposes?—Yes.

20. Now, as regards the assistance from the Natives for schools, churches, &c., was this assistance to be given at the decreased rental?—I cannot say. For the Wesleyan church the rental was £1 7s. per year. At the 5-per-cent. basis the Wesleyan church would be worth a considerable sum.

21. On the statement that was read to the Committee from the Public Trustee that, prior to the revaluation which was now going on, the ground-rent was £3 15s. per cent., how is it proposed to meet this matter? Is it intended to do so by arbitration? What is the system favoured by the tenants?—I think there is some dissatisfaction about the fees having to be paid by the lessees. Our member has introduced a Bill that will do away with that objection.

22. Who appointed the arbitrators?—They are appointed one by either side.

23. Has the arbitrator been a local man?—He has been. I have been an assessor myself.

24. Apart from the question of fees, is it considered fair to submit the matter to arbitration?—I do not see any juster way than arbitration.

25. As regards the proposal to obtain the freehold, is the option to be given to each individual freeholder to obtain the freehold of his own section?—I believe that is the expectation.

26. *Mr. Greenslade.*] Do you think the lessees would suffer disabilities under the 5-per-cent. basis?—I think they would. I think they would suffer to a certain extent if the 5 per cent. were imposed in connection with the lease in perpetuity.

27. How do you suppose or propose that this land should be taken? Under what Act?—I do not know.

28. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] There is a Bill before the House now: would that meet the trouble at all?—The people of Greymouth will never be satisfied until the freehold is vested in the borough.

29. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] No proposal has ever come from the borough itself?—It has been talked