

6. *The Chairman.*] Was there any other occasion when the leases were surrendered, that you remember?—I think those were the only occasions, that I speak of, when, owing to the depression and decrease of business, the property became valueless.

7. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] Are you referring to the business portions or the residential?—To the business portions.

8. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] Did not that also affect the residential portions, more or less?—Some of the residential portions were sold at less than what they cost to construct.

9. What is the feeling of the tenants with regard to the present leasehold system?—The feeling of the tenants at the present time is that it considerably mars the progress of the place—the present system of leasing. There are a number of tenants there, including myself, who, provided they had a better tenure, or freehold, would put up much more substantial buildings than is the case at present; but owing to the present tenure they do not feel disposed to put up substantial buildings. I see the Public Trustee has included my name in the statement before the Committee in connection with some sections I hold.

10. Have you anything to say with regard to that?—He refers to one in particular that I bought quite recently. At the time I bought it I think I was getting a rental from it of £1 5s., and some little time after I purchased I got notice from the authorities there that I should have to pull down the building, as the Public Health Officer had declared the building unhealthy. Some little time after that I complied with the request, and put up a new building on that section. At that time the ground-rental was £10, and when I bought it I was of the opinion that that rent would not be increased, as I thought the rent was ample for the ground. I put up a new building, and this year my lease falls out.

11. What has been the result?—The Public Trustee tells me in his statement that it is difficult to get the valuers on this reserve, but I think he either forgets or overlooks the fact that he has the same valuator himself, who is the sub-agent for him. The tenant has no voice in the making of the valuation. The public Trustee sends a man out to value the property, as he calls it—a servant of the Trust—and the first the tenant knows about it is when he gets notice informing him of what the valuation is. Referring to my own land, when I got the notice I went to the Department and asked the agent why the rent was doubled, it having been increased from £10 to £20. I asked him whether we could settle the matter without going to arbitration, as arbitration would cost £11 11s.; but he said, “No; I have no power to make a settlement. That is the valuation of our valuer, and we must get that rent; so, as we cannot settle it, we must go to arbitration.” At the same time I produced a document that I got from the Lands Department giving the valuation of the holder’s interest in the property at £210, while the valuer for the Trust put it at £400. I was even prepared to effect a compromise in order to secure a settlement; but that was refused, with the result that it went to arbitration, and the arbitrators fixed the rental at what I proposed myself—namely, £15.

12. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] And to get that done how much had you to pay?—It cost me £9 9s. for the arbitration.

13. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] And the arbitrators put it down at what?—Fifteen pounds. They made a compromise. What I wish you to understand is that it appeared to me that if I did not put up this building, which cost me something like £2,000, my rent would have been increased, but if I had left the old one there it would not have been increased. I built a year too soon.

14. Of course, what you have built and put upon the property belongs to you?—That would depend upon whether I take up a new lease.

15. You would get the value of it?—Who from?

16. From any one taking it?—It goes to the Natives.

17. They allow you the value of the improvements in full?—I have no redress if I do not take up a new lease. Having regard to all these facts, and being a lessee, and, I suppose, one of the largest on the Reserve, I think it is in the best interests of all concerned that this property should be converted into private property and held as freehold. Upon that opinion there is a diversity of opinion as to how the freehold should be acquired. I have given the matter some consideration, and after consulting with a number of others we came to the conclusion that the Borough Council, being a corporate body, would be the only power that could deal with it, and from these facts I have elicited we have thought it advisable to petition Parliament upon the question, as Parliament had passed the Bill that we are now labouring under. In reference to arbitration, I might mention that I have told Mr. Poynton, the Public Trustee, that there were eight leases valued at about the same time. I could cite one case to you of a poor woman who had a small piece of ground, and she went to arbitration the same as the rest. This woman got a reduction of 14s. upon her rental, but it cost her £9 9s. to get it. Of course, it has been urged in many ways that we are going to take advantage of the Maoris in this matter; but I think I voice the opinion of every one on the Reserve when I say that there is no man on the Reserve who wishes to take advantage of the Maoris, but, on the other hand, they wish to give the Maoris every facility and give them the best value for their property; but there is a strong desire on the part of the people that it should become freehold, and that the tenants should become the owners of the settlement.

18. *Hon. Mr. Guinness.*] Do you think that holding the land in a township on a freehold tenure tends to increase the value, and to encourage the owners to improve, more than if they hold it under leasehold?—There is not doubt about it. Probably you may not be aware that these sections in this township are very small, not being large enough to carry a building fit for any business. There are sections in the principal part of the town which are 33 ft. by 66 ft.

19. And there are plenty smaller than that?—They may be subdivided, but that I mention is the principal size.

20. I know two in the principal street which have only a frontage of 22 ft. and 23 ft. to the main street. What do you infer from that?—The price we are paying for the ground, to my