

mind, is far and away in excess of the rent we should be paying for the ground we occupy. I might also remark that the Town of Westport, our neighbouring town, occupies a somewhat similar position, the half of that town being built upon a coal reserve. The rent for a first lease is £5 a section.

21. For how many years?—For seven or twenty-one. The second term is £7 10s., and the third term £10, but in no case can the rent go over £10.

22. *The Chairman.*] Are those goldfield leases?—No, coal reserve. The Greymouth Borough Council has also reserves let to lessees for which they are only getting £2 a section, and in some cases £1 for a quarter-acre section, and they never think of increasing the rental. We have reviewed these facts, and we think we are to some extent entitled to some measure of justice in regard to our troubles. I will now say a few words in reference to the mode or principle that we would prefer to adopt in order to obtain this freehold. It was said yesterday that the Borough Council has not identified itself with the purchase, but certainly the Borough Council has only to be governed by the voice of the people, and the people are the Council, and the Council, so far as I know, has agreed to everything that the deputation has recommended. So far I think I am justified in saying that, being a corporate body, the Council could deal with this question in a satisfactory manner. I am prepared to give my word to-day that the raising of the money is not going to stand in the way at all. If a principle is laid down on moderate lines, the money could be raised, and I am sure it would be a benefit to the Natives and enhance the value of the property.

23. Are the people of Greymouth practically unanimous on this question?—I have heard no dissenting voices.

24. Do you think a meeting could be got up to protest against it?—I do not think so.

25. Were the meetings that were held in connection with this petition public meetings?—Yes —so much so that the number of signatures to the petition quite justify me in saying it was unanimous.

26. Was opportunity for reasonable objections on the part of any persons given if they were so desirous of protesting?—Yes. I might mention to the Committee that the principle laid down in other parts of the world in regard to this land question, which is a very vexed one, where the term giving the right of the freehold of the estate varies from twenty to twenty-three years, works very well, and I think probably some idea of that kind may be brought to bear here.

27. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] Your opinion is therefore that the freehold is the better tenure for the tenants?—Yes.

28. Consequently you would take the freehold from the present owners, and not give it directly to the tenants but to the corporate body—the borough?—No, that would not be the intention. The intention would be this: that the Council, being a corporate body, would become the first purchaser, and raise the money, and they would pass over to each of the lessees their present holding on their paying what it cost the Council.

29. Practically it amounts to this: that you want the transfer of the freehold from the present owners to the tenants, and to use the Council as a machine?—Using the Council as a medium or go-between. I merely refer to that, as the Council would be the first party to raise the money.

30. Of course, at the present time the Native owners wish to retain the freehold themselves?—Oh! no doubt; but if they get fair value I think, in their own interests, they would be safe, and the leaseholders would be better satisfied.

31. First of all, your objection to the leases, I understand, is the cost of arbitration?—Yes.

32. That is too costly, and the tenant has to bear it?—Yes, win or lose.

33. Very well; supposing that was done away with, and, instead of having to go to arbitration, the Act was so amended as to put a Magistrate in the position of being the person to determine the values, that would remove that objection, would it not?—So far, yes. Of course you will understand that there is no fairer tribunal to be got to investigate any matter than by going to arbitration, but in this case the arbitration is one-sided.

34. You say that the improvements the tenant puts on after a certain time do not belong to him unless he takes up a renewal?—I mean to say that the Native owner at the present time is responsible for nothing. If the tenant does not take up his lease the property falls to the owner.

35. But as long as the tenant holds on, the improvements are his?—Yes.

36. And if any one takes it over there is no compensation for improvements?—No. The Native owner is not called upon to contribute.

37. But your improvements are taken into consideration when the land is revalued?—Yes.

38. So that in that way you are made an allowance for your improvements?—Yes.

39. You say there have been three periods of depression during the term of these leases?—Yes.

40. And some sections were surrendered?—Yes, and practically sold for nothing.

41. In the business portion of the town?—Yes.

42. Do you know how many?—I could not say now. I know some houses were sold that did not fetch a third of what they cost to build.

43. It was said yesterday that in 1874 the Maoris paid £707 out of their rents to the borough for rates; in 1875, £483 12s.; in 1876, £541 3s. 9d.; and in 1881, owing to the depression, the Natives reduced the rents by 25 per cent. Are those the periods you referred to?—Yes, those are the periods I spoke of.

44. I see, according to the statement of the Public Trustee, he refers to certain sections held by you, and he states that forty years ago those sections brought in a rental of £157, whereas the present rental is £94 10s.?—Yes, now. I do not remember paying that rent for them. The first rental paid there was £1 per foot.

45. At any rate, there has not been any increase there?—Yes, in the front street there was.