

ARTHUR ROBERT GUINNESS examined. (No. 6.)

*The Chairman:* Do you wish to make a statement to the Committee?

*Witness:* Yes. At the last sitting of the Committee Mr. Ngata was anxious to know what authority the deputation had from the Borough Council with regard to the statements put before the Committee. I was sure the Council would agree to the suggestions put forward, so on Saturday morning, the 6th November, before Mr. Campbell left for Greymouth, I framed certain resolutions which he took with him to submit to the Borough Council. They have since been passed by the Greymouth Borough Council. The following are the resolutions:—

(1.) That the Borough Council of Greymouth desires to purchase from the Native owners the freehold of the Native Reserves Nos. 31 and 32, in the Borough of Greymouth, at a fair valuation—namely, the present unimproved Government valuation of about £110,000.

(2.) That legislation be passed authorising the borough to issue debentures for the amount of the purchase-money, bearing interest at £4 per centum per annum, secured on a special rate over the whole of the rating area within the borough, provision being made for a sinking fund, and the right being given to redeem such debentures at any time after (say) six months' notice.

(3.) That the Borough Council be given power to sell to the lessees the freehold of their respective holdings at the price at which the Borough Council acquired the property.

(4.) That, in the event of any lessee not wishing to acquire the freehold of his holding, the Borough Council to have power to grant a lease thereof for sixty-six years at a rental of £4 per centum on the cost to the borough of the holding so purchased, such lease to contain a clause giving a right to purchase the freehold at any time during the currency of the lease at the price at which the Borough Council acquired the property.

On the 8th November I received the following telegram: "Hon. A. R. Guinness, House of Representatives, Wellington.—Resolutions *re* Native leases passed unanimously by Council, and copies posted yourself and other members.—GRACE, for Town Clerk."

THOMAS WILLIAM BEARE examined. (No. 7.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A barrister and solicitor, residing in Hokitika.

2. Do you wish to make a statement to the Committee?—Yes. I might state on behalf of the Natives that they have come up to Wellington especially to support the Public Trustee in his opposition to the proposition on the part of the tenants of the Greymouth Native Reserve to convert it into the freehold. They practically corroborate all that Mr. Poynton has stated in his evidence given to-day. Briefly, the view they take up is this: First of all, they complain that they have been the ones who have been injuriously affected, inasmuch as they have not got all the rent they should have got in past years, and they are therefore opposed now to the conversion of the leasehold into freehold, on the ground that they would be practically deprived of the unearned increment, if any, which has accrued during the last twenty-one years. They have certainly not derived any benefit from it during the last twenty-one years, and if any benefit is to be derived at the present moment or in the future leases, then the conversion of the leasehold into freehold would rob them of it. I might say that this proposition has been simmering for some time in the minds of the Greymouth tenants, and a deputation came down from Greymouth to meet the Natives at Hokitika, when the whole matter was put before them with the view of obtaining the consent of the Maoris. The Natives, on their part, called a meeting of the beneficiaries connected with the Reserve, and decided to oppose the conversion of the leasehold into freehold and to support the Public Trustee. This resolution was arrived at unanimously by all the beneficiaries. With reference to what I might call the new proposal, that, of course, has not been submitted to them, and they are not in a position to give a definite answer to-day until they have again consulted the beneficiaries. The meeting appointed a Native committee to watch their interests and to act in conjunction with the Public Trustee, and that Native committee is present. They will tell you that, from the Native point of view, they rely a great deal upon the original contract which was made between Mr. Mackay, representing the Government, and the Natives, as far back as 1860. Mr. Mackay, on behalf of the Crown, purchased from the Natives 10,000 square miles of country, including all the gold-mines, coal-mines, timber, and other minerals, for the sum of £300. I need hardly remind the Committee that millions have been obtained by the colony from that purchase, and I suppose millions more will be obtained. In that contract there was a special clause which the Natives desire now to emphasize before the Committee—the clause already mentioned by the Public Trustee, in which it was deliberately stated that this particular so-called Reserve was a portion of the land that was not sold to the Crown by the forefathers of those Natives here. It was specially exempt, and the Natives will tell you there were good reasons why it should have been. Nearly all the exemptions were at the mouths of the rivers on the Coast. The Natives at that time depended considerably on fishing, and they put a great value on it; but there were many other reasons why this particular land, these special portions, were not sold to the Crown, and, speaking from both a sentimental point of view and a practical point of view, they do not desire to part with this portion of the land to the tenants or anybody else, as it belonged to their forefathers, and they think they should not be compelled to do so, as it would be a breach of faith from their point of view if such was attempted, as it is the only land which they have had excluded from that large area of country which was sold for such a small sum to the Government of the day. They would ask, however, with reference to the new proposition on behalf of the tenants for the Borough of Greymouth to purchase this property, that nothing should be done, at all events, until they have had time to consider further in reference to that matter, and that, at all events, nothing should be done without their consent. In the first place, they think the sum proposed for the purchase is altogether too small, as although the Government valuation of the property is £110,000, still, from inquiries they have made, the property is worth considerably more; but they will be pleased to consult with all the beneficiaries and consider the proposal made. I might point out, as has