

Mr. Russell, M.P., attended a meeting of the Lands Committee, read and put in a written statement, but declined to answer questions or give evidence, on the ground that there was no charge against him.

The Committee, having given the whole matter their careful consideration, decided to formulate certain questions, and set down their answers thereto. The questions and answers are as follows:—

1. Was it desirable that the Government acquire the property?—*Answer*: Yes.
2. Could the land purchased, other than that actually required for roads, be acquired in any other way except by private treaty?—*Answer*: Yes; but it was not advisable to do so.
3. Was the price excessive?—*Answer*: Not under the circumstances.
4. Was Mr. Russell, M.P., responsible for the completion of the sale of this portion of Runanga to the Government?—*Answer*: Yes; by reducing the price from £4, which had been asked by the previous owner, to £2 10s. per acre.
5. Did Mr. Russell, M.P., use undue influence as a member of Parliament to effect the sale?—*Answer*: No.

6. Did Mr. Russell, M.P., conduct the negotiations in his own name?—*Answer*: No; all the negotiations were conducted by him in the name of Thomas Ballin, the previous owner; and Mr. W. C. Kensington, then Under-Secretary for Lands, stated in evidence that he did not recognize Mr. Russell as the owner.

The Committee recommends that the provisions of section 59 of the Land for Settlements Act, 1908, should be extended so as to enable lands acquired not only under paragraph (b) of section 6 of the Lands for Settlements Act, 1908, but also lands acquired under paragraphs (c) and (e) of section 6, to be held under the same tenure as neighbouring Crown lands.

The minutes of evidence and proceedings, correspondence, &c., are attached hereto.

31st October, 1912.

EDWARD NEWMAN,  
Chairman.

(*Vide* Appendix I.—5A.)

#### RESERVES AND OTHER LANDS DISPOSAL AND PUBLIC BODIES EMPOWERING BILL.

THE Lands Committee, to whom was referred the Reserves and other Lands Disposal and Public Bodies Empowering Bill, have the honour to report that they have carefully considered the same, and recommend that it be allowed to proceed with the amendments as shown on the copy attached hereto.

4th November, 1912.

#### NAPIER HARBOUR BOARD AMENDMENT AND ENDOWMENT IMPROVEMENT BILL.

THE Lands Committee, to whom was referred the Napier Harbour Board Amendment and Endowment Improvement Bill, have the honour to report that they have carefully considered the same, and recommend that it be allowed to proceed as amended by the Local Bills Committee.

5th November, 1912.

No. 303.—Petition of W. C. O'REILLY and 8 Others, of the Tongioio Special Settlement.

PRAYING for a reduction of rent owing to the presence of blackberries, &c., reducing the carrying-capacity of their land to one-half.

I am directed to report that in the opinion of the Committee this petition should be referred to the Government for consideration.

5th November, 1912.

No. 339.—Petition of JOHN WOULDDES and Another, of Kiritehere.

PRAYING for twelve months' remission of rent on account of losses by fire.

I am directed to report that, as provision is made in the Land Act for such cases, the Committee recommend that the petition be referred to the Government for favourable consideration.

5th November, 1912.

No. 391.—Petition of GEORGE DOIG and Another, of Blackwater, Reefton.

PRAYING for a refund of £21 11s., being an amount paid for land to the New Zealand Midland Railway Company, and subsequently paid into the Public Account.

I am directed to report that in the opinion of the Committee this petition should be referred to the Government for favourable consideration.

5th November, 1912.