

115. You do believe them, then?—I believe a rumour if my common-sense leads me to suppose there is something in it.

116. You believed this rumour that influence was brought to bear on the Minister? Was that the system that was adopted during the three years you were on the Board prior to this Ministry coming into power?—What system?

117. That influence was brought to bear on the Minister to bring about certain things that were desirable in the district: is that your basis for believing in this case?—It occurred to me that the thing would not have been interfered with unless some influence had been brought to bear. I fail to see how the Under-Secretary and the Minister of Lands would have noticed this small transaction at all unless it had been brought before them.

118. Do I understand you to mean that this was the usual thing—to bring influence to bear on the cases?—I have never heard of influence in my experience. If I, as a member of the Land Board, had seen a thing like that, politics would not have affected me at all.

119. Did the fact of your not being reappointed to the Board have any influence with you?—Not the slightest. I quite expected not to be reappointed long before this came out. My time was up, and, as you know, the appointment that is sent you states that you are appointed for two years and no longer. I had been expecting it ever since the Massey Government came in, and I had no feeling about it at all. I thought it would be a natural consequence.

120. *Mr. T. W. Rhodes.*] Can you give us any idea of the value of this section that is under consideration?—I could not tell you. It is a section I was never on.

121. You have no idea at all of the value of the land?—Not from my own experience.

122. Is it as valuable as the others you were speaking of? Is it worth £10 an acre?—I do not think it is as valuable as the one I was telling Mr. Massey about.

123. The value, then, would probably not be more than £10 or £12 an acre?—I should not think so. It might be.

124. The probable value of the section, then—7 acres or so—would be £70 or £80?—Yes.

125. There are special conditions with regard to payment for Cheviot lands, are there not? The whole of the cash has not to be put down?—They would be the ordinary terms of cash sales, I suppose.

126. They are allowed five years, are they not, in which to pay the remaining half?—I am not quite sure. We have had very little experience of sales on the Canterbury Land Board.

127. Twenty-five per cent. down, 25 per cent. in thirty days, and the balance at any time within five years: those would not be very hard terms, would they?—No, certainly not.

128. A man would not need to be a capitalist?—No, decidedly not.

129. Therefore, as you have already said that your friend——?—Do not speak of him as my friend. He is not my friend any more than lots of other men are my friends. He is an acquaintance.

130. Well, this acquaintance of yours would not have any difficulty in financing this?—That I could not say at all. I know nothing about the man's finances.

131. The total amount would only be £70 or £80 and he would only have to put half that down and would have thirty days to do that. A man does not require to be of very great standing to finance a thing like that, does he?—I should think not.

132. Therefore he would have a better chance——?—I am not pleading for Mr. Rentoul to get this section, and never have.

133. You said something about "if he had the means." Now, would he require to be a man of more than ordinary means to be able to finance this?—That was in answer to Mr. Nosworthy, I think, when he asked whether a man would be able to get in easier, and I said, "Yes, if he has got the money."

134. Would it require much money, in your opinion, for a person to finance this?—I do not suppose it would.

135. *Mr. Coates.*] I understood you to say that the Canterbury Land Board had a system of giving preference? You said that in the case of a man with a family it was considered desirable to give him the land rather than another man. I am not sure whether you were referring to this section or another?—It was another one that Mr. Massey referred to.

136. As a matter of principle you cannot do that by law. That was the only case where it was done?—Where we considered the circumstances?

137. Yes?—What are we there for?

138. But by law you cannot give any preference?—There is no law affecting the question like that that I know of—when two men come before you for transfer.

139. In the case, we will say, of Mr. Rentoul making an application, you could not possibly give him any preference?—Certainly not. He was told so from the very start.

140. Would the interests of the State, in your opinion, be conserved as well by offering the section for sale by auction as by offering it for renewable lease?—It is such a small matter; I do not think as far as that is concerned that it would affect the interests of the State either one way or the other—not financially, at all events.

141. It would be possible for a man to hold this section under renewable lease for perhaps a few years and to part with his interest afterwards, probably securing a goodwill consideration?—He would have to hold it for five years.

142. After that time it would be possible for him to transfer the section?—I presume so.

143. In this case have you any objection to the section being offered for sale—I mean, as a matter of policy?—I will put it in a nutshell: I am against the State selling any land whatever.

144. Then, in your opinion, the best interests of the State would not be conserved by offering a section for sale by auction?—Because in my humble opinion we ought not to sell any land whatever.