

that placed on them by the Department have varied from 20 to 70 per cent. The City Valuer, who represents the Government Valuation Department so far as the City of Wellington is concerned, stated in evidence that although he was not a practical builder or had practical knowledge of buildings, yet he had access to special records—namely, the permits required to be procured by builders before they can proceed with a work, and which exhibit the contract price. The City Valuer worked very largely on the figures contained in those permits. But it was pointed out by Mr. Swan, one of the architects who gave evidence, that the permits did not necessarily represent the actual value of the completed building—that in many cases the cost of the work as finished far exceeded the contract price. In certain cases portions of the work contracted for are not gone on with, and there the cost of the completed building would be far less than the permit price. The basis, therefore, on which the district valuer for the City of Wellington worked was not a substantial basis, and in itself constituted a series of error. As the Act requires the unimproved value of the land to be ascertained and also the value of the improvements, if just values are to be furnished, then the valuer who values the improvements should be a person with technical knowledge. The Act says the district valuer shall be competent to make a valuation of land. It does not say “to make a valuation of improvements.”

*The Valuer-General:* The definition says that land includes improvements.

*Witness:* The word “land,” as used in the section, I submit with all respect and deference to Mr. Flanagan’s opinion, does not include improvements. When the Act says the valuer shall be a person with a knowledge of land-values I submit, with deference, that Mr. Flanagan’s interpretation of that as meaning a local knowledge of improvements also is not the case, and, further, that a useful alteration of the Act, at any rate, would be to make that clear. I think perhaps that some of the injustice worked by this Act is due to ambiguities in the Act rather than to anything else.

*The Valuer-General:* Mr. Neave suggests that the Department and the local body worked unanimously with regard to valuations. That is not the case. A case occurred recently where the Department had to fight a local body in Westland to keep the values down. The local body wanted them at a much higher figure than the Department desired them. They exercised their right under the Act, and fought the Department for three days to get the values up. There was another case where the assessor had to resign because the local body with which he was connected insisted on increasing the unimproved value fixed by the Department. There was a similar case at Palmerston North. There are many cases where the Department is in conflict with the local bodies, especially needy boroughs and town districts, where they desire to increase the rateable value. With regard to section 31, the case of the Wellington Gas Company, referred to by Mr. Neave, is not an illustration of the administrative methods of the Department. Notice was sent to the Gas Company, in reply to their application under section 31, to the effect that the company’s property having been assessed in three portions the company would be required to supply the unimproved value for each portion. When it was discovered that the Gas Company was occupying the whole of the site for the one purpose the Department reconsidered its decision, and did not insist on the company furnishing the Department with three sets of unimproved values for the three divisions of the property. The basis of administration of section 31 is this: Section 6 of the Valuation of Land Act, 1908, provides that a district valuation-roll shall be prepared for each district, and shall set forth in respect of each separate property certain particulars. One of the particulars is the name of the occupier of the property. Where we find that a property is separately occupied we insist upon the owner of that property sending in to us an estimate of the unimproved value of each valuation. With regard to Mr. Neave’s suggestion that the valuers are incapable from the sparse information before them of assessing the capital values, this may be pointed out: that the values on the valuation-roll to-day are the result of thirty-five years’ experience, and that in each successive valuation that takes place the values get near their true value. Mr. Neave would suggest that the valuers go on to fresh ground. As a matter of fact, they are merely readjusting values already on the rolls, raising them in some cases, and lowering them in others.

9. *Mr. Campbell* (to witness).] You instanced several Courts where the method of appointment was on a different footing from that of the Assessment Court, and you made out that these Courts were after the fashion of being immaculate. One of those Courts was the Court established under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. I have seen very grave objection taken to the Arbitration Court by people who go there for presumed justice and come away declaring just as emphatically as the people of Wellington have done with regard to valuations that they have not got justice, and that the Court is not properly constituted?—My observation was that I had heard no criticism as regards the constitution of the Arbitration Court. That there has been criticism of the personnel is quite a different matter.

EDWARD KEITH KIRKCALDIE examined.

1. *The Chairman.* What is your position?—I am a solicitor, practising in Wellington, and I am appearing on my own behalf. I may state that I received notice of the sitting of the Commission only at 5 o’clock last night, and have not had time to consider any evidence. The points I desire to draw attention to are chiefly with regard to the administration of the Act. In these matters I am entirely in agreement with Mr. Tripp and Mr. Neave. At the last Assessment Court it was more or less agreed that in spite of any evidence that might be brought the valuations would be sustained.

*Mr. Myers:* A good many were reduced, you know.

*Witness:* I am speaking of those who went to the Court. I should think it would be possible to devise a stronger representation on behalf of the people who have to pay the rates and taxes