

WILLIAM JAMES WELCH examined.

1. *The Valuer-General.*] What is your position?—I am a sheep-farmer, residing at Masterton.

2. Have you made valuations of land?—Yes.

3. For the Government?—For the Government and for private individuals and lending institutions. I was one of those who made the valuations of Tawaka and other large properties.

4. Have you a knowledge of the land-prices in Castlepoint County?—Generally, but not individually. Originally it was part of the county I represented. I was Chairman of the county at the time this riding was constituted into a separate county.

5. Are you Chairman of the county now?—Yes, of the Masterton County Council, and have been so for seven or eight years.

6. Have you made valuations in the Castlepoint County?—Yes.

7. Recently?—Eighteen months ago.

8. In connection with your duties as Chairman of a county you have become familiar with the provisions of the Counties Act?—With some of them. It takes a long time to become familiar with the lot.

9. In dividing a county into ridings, do you think it possible to lay off the boundaries so as to include lands of equal area, value, and population?—I would not like to try it.

10. Would it be possible?—No. That is in country like this. It might be done in country like the Canterbury Plains, where they have small counties, but in country like we are dealing with in the North Island it would not be possible.

11. Assuming it was possible to do it and the county was valued five years afterwards, would you expect the unimproved value of the ridings to increase or decrease, as the case might be, by equal percentages?—I would not.

12. Would you judge the correctness or otherwise of a revaluation by the result of the percentages of increase or decrease on that valuation?—No.

13. A valuation was made of the Masterton County a little over two years ago: do you recollect the results of the aggregate increases in the unimproved values of the ridings?—Very well. Opaki went up 22 per cent. That riding, I would like to explain, takes in a good portion of Masterton, and includes the suburb of Landsdowne. Rangitumu went up 49 per cent., Tewiti 34 per cent., Wainuioru 38 per cent., and Alfredtown 66 per cent.

14. Would that suggest to you that the valuation was a faulty one?—No, rather the reverse, knowing the country as I do.

15. Do you regard disparities in the average increase of percentage valuation as evidence that the valuation is faulty?—No.

16. Have not ridings the right to strike a special rate of their own in the county?—Yes. That is the object of ridings, and that was one of the main objects that the counties fought for—to get country representation, so that the counties could be divided up into small ridings, and so allow the districts to strike rates according to their own requirements.

17. *Mr. Campbell.*] Each riding can put its own rate on?—So long as it is equal to the general rate. A separate rate carries a Government subsidy.

18. One of the reasons mentioned in the petition is that, because of the disparity, the burden of the county rates is largely transferred to the ratepayers in the South Riding?—It lies entirely with the Councillors for the South Riding to remedy that.

19. Did you say you had a knowledge of the land in the Castlepoint County?—Generally, but not individually.

20. Have you had sufficient experience in land and land-valuing to enable you to form, going through a district, a tolerably good impression as to its carrying-capacity?—Yes. If a property is quoted to me in Masterton or any part of this county I could say whether it was worth my while to go and look at it.

21. *The Valuer-General.*] Is it not a fact that there is a considerable amount of poor land in Castlepoint County?—Yes.

22. And that the greater percentage of that poor land is in ridings other than the South Riding?—Yes.

23. If you were employed to value the county, would you raise the poor land at the same percentage as you would raise the good land?—No; there is nothing to warrant one in doing it. Poor land will turn dog on you at any time, whilst good land will stand by you. There is always a market for good land, and anything put on it will come out well. In the case of poor land that is not so, and therefore the demand for poor land is nothing like proportionate to the demand for good land.

24. Is it not a fact that the value of good land will improve to a greater extent than that of poor land?—Up to 100 per cent. more.

25. If you found it necessary to raise the unimproved value of the good land by 100 per cent. to 150 per cent., would you consider it necessary to raise the inferior land by the same percentage?—No.

26. Is it your experience that there are as many inquiries after poor properties as there are after land that is of first-class quality?—There is nothing like the inquiry in the one case that there is in the other.

27. Could any of the properties in the South Riding of Castlepoint County be bought to-day for the same price as they were being sold at eight years ago?—I should think not.

28. Do you know of any sales that have taken place recently of lands in the South Riding of Castlepoint County?—Yes. Grove's and French's, but I do not know what price they brought.

29. Was that sale before or after the revision of the county?—It is about three years since French came out here, and the last valuation was made about two years ago.