

7. *The Valuer-General.*] Did you inform the local office that you were dissatisfied with your valuation for improvements?—I called at the Invercargill office and saw the officer there.

8. Did you know you could apply for a revaluation?—I was going to do so.

9. *The Chairman.*] Do you say that the unimproved value is too high?—The land was originally bought for £1 10s. an acre, and I do not think it is worth any more now. I paid £3 5s., with improvements, and that is about what it is worth now with improvements.

10. How long ago is it that it was bought at £1 10s. an acre?—That was when it was bought from the New Zealand and Australian Land Company, twenty-five or thirty years ago.

11. *The Valuer-General.*] The unimproved value is not the original value?—The valuer told me he was not going to put the value up, and I let him go ahead. I have five miles of fencing, which cost 14s. to 15s. a chain. The land is divided into fourteen paddocks with six-wire fences. Some of the fences have seven wires. The land is, of course, lined as well as drained.

JOHN HIRAM SMITH examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am manager of J. G. Ward (Limited), Gore. I am appearing for Alfred Orr, a farmer of Balfour, who was unable to wait for the sitting of the Commission. He left with me his demands for rates for 1913-14 and 1914-15. In the one year the valuation has gone up £1 10s. an acre. There are 1,095 acres altogether, and no improvements in the meantime have been put on the land. The previous unimproved valuation was £4,535, and the last valuation was: unimproved £6,576, an increase of £2,041 on 1,095 acres, equal to an increase of £1 10s. an acre. No improvements have been put on the land, and the value of the land has not increased during the twelve months. The owner would like to know why there has been an increase in his unimproved valuation.

2. I suppose your client did not think he was overvalued before?—He has always been valued higher than his neighbours, because he is a good farmer and puts a good surface on his land, and his unimproved value goes up on that account. He is taxed for his energy, and that is what he objects to. The natural state of the surrounding farms must be the same, but he is taxed because of the intensity of his cultivation. He is on a by-road, which is a clay road.

3. Was he too lightly valued before?—He was valued the same as his neighbours.

4. *The Valuer-General.*] What evidence have you that the valuation has gone up in one year?—The evidence of the rate notices.

5. What period has elapsed between this last valuation and the previous one?—Three years.

6. No; five years. Does your client object to the valuation for improvements on his property?—The valuation for improvements is too low. Improvements such as land-draining cannot be seen by a valuer who casually looks at the property.

7. How do you know that he only casually looks at the land?—I presume he did the same then as on other occasions.

8. Did this owner appeal to the Assessment Court?—Yes, but he was too late; he missed the fourteen days in which to send in his objection.

9. If the property was tile-drained it would be in the valuer's field-book?—One would assume so, anyway.

10. *The Chairman.*] In your experience do landowners know of the privilege conferred on them under section 31 of the Valuation of Land Act?—No.

11. *Mr. Campbell.*] Do you think landowners would object if taxes were shifted on to the improved value instead of being on the unimproved value?—I do not think you could satisfy them any way. I can give the experience of another property. Land-speculators came along and bought a property across the road, cut it up and roaded it and made footpaths, intending to sell it for closer settlement. They were unable to unload it. Still, the land-valuer put the valuation up £1,600 on this property because of that sale to speculators.

12. Do you know what they bought at?—No.

13. *The Chairman.*] Do you attribute the rise in your property to the fact that this property was roaded and subdivided?—No, but it was bought by a syndicate of land-speculators, who would only sell at boom prices. I did not object to the valuation, because I thought I might get a fancy price for my own land later on. Mr. Smaill informs me that the whole property has been disposed of in separate allotments. That is the syndicate's property.

14. *Mr. Campbell.*] Have you any suggestion to make as to any improvement in the system of rating?—Rating has to be obtained by some means, but I should say that the proper system would be on the earning-power of a property—that is, a farm—and to arrive at the earning-power of a farm would mean considerable trouble and expense. I would suggest that the land should be grouped into three classes, and the earning-power of each class obtained over a period of three or five years. In that work the valuer would have to be assisted by a farmer. The difficulty, of course, in such a system is the number of systems of farming.

15. Have you any suggestions to offer as to the improvement of the Assessment Court?—None.

16. In your opinion, does the Court do its best?—Yes. I think the only grievance farmers have is in regard to sales in the various districts and their effect on the valuations. If cash had to be paid down the prices would not be so high. The prices credited are owing to the manner in which the sales are made.

17. *The Chairman.*] Have you had any experience of the Assessment Court?—No.

18. With regard to exchanges, are there any complaints that the Government valuers insist upon fancy prices after it has been pointed out to them that a sale has been an exchange?—I could not say. Some of the settlers here had to take 40 acres of high land and 50 acres of flat, with rough feed only fit for cattle. To bring that land into cultivation it has had to be drained, and in five years they have converted land which was not worth £1 an acre in its original state