

1905 Land Commission – Epuni Hamlet
Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives 1905 Section C4

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Robert Albert GOSSE examined

306. The Chairman.] What are you? - I am a carrier at Lower Hutt, and a settler in the Epuni Hamlet. I have 1 acre lease in perpetuity, and am paying £6 4s a year rent. I have held the land for three years. I am satisfied with my lease, and also with the land. I should like a periodical revaluation, as I consider it would be perfectly just. We have had a meeting there, and I think I am expressing the views of half the settlers there. I am not here to represent them, because I think they will be here themselves to-morrow in force.

307. Is there anything else you wish to bring before us? – There is one question which affects the leasehold here, and that is in order to enable that land to be profitably worked for agricultural purposes, for which they took it up, the rent must not be more than £7 per year. The present rent is £5, and with rates and taxes it is brought up to £7. For the past few years the value of the land has been gradually increasing, until it bids fair to get past the price at which the settlers can make a profit out of their labour.

308. That will remedy itself, as the people will not take it up if they cannot make a profit? – It is a perpetual lease, they cannot throw it up. It is a fundamental clause in this lease in perpetuity, and if it does not affect them at present it will later on, because with rates and taxes the rent threatens to get past that point at which the farmers can make a living. They are restricted to using the land for agricultural purposes.

309. Are you speaking of the Epuni Settlement solely? – Yes

310. What is the area of the sections? – 1, 2, 3, and 4 acres.

311. But you cannot call those settlers farmers? – They make a living off the ground.

312. Horticulture? – No, agriculture in some cases, and in others pure farming.

313. You are carrying on a business and using your section as a residence, I suppose? – Yes; I have stables there and a residence. But it is a fundamental principle in the land laws of the colony that the farmers can only use that ground for one purpose. They cannot cut it up; but as the rates are gradually increasing they cannot make a living off it. The Government bought the land for £90 an acre, and it is worth £400 an acre now. There has been a tremendous rise in the value, and the rates and taxes threaten to go past that point at which they can make a living out of it.

314. I hear the Chinese are paying £10 a year for land there? – They cannot do it profitably. If the same principles as I have mentioned are applied to the lands of the colony as years go on, then the lands cannot be profitably worked, and it is a matter that should be remedied if possible.

315. *Mr Johnston.*] Did you expect the Government to cut it up for you to make a living off 1 acre? – It was cut up for workmen's homes, and for them to make a living off it. I may say I am a single-taxer and land-nationaliser.

316. *Mr Anstey.*] Do I understand you to say that you object to a fixed rent because you think that with your rates and taxes the rents are likely to be too high? – Yes, later on.

317. And you think as rates and taxes go up the rent should come down? – Yes. There is a clause in the tenure under which you can only use the land for certain purposes.

318. Then when the land is worth £200 an acre it will be too dear for growing crops, and will have to be used for building sites? – Yes. The Government will have to remedy that.

319. Supposing the land is now worth £400, and the Government paid £90 for it, you mean you will not be able to pay the rates? – It is giving us the land for nothing. It is too good for us.

320. *Mr Paul.*] You think you would be better off in the settlement than if you had to pay rent to a private landlord? – Far better off; but a working-man cannot get a chance there with freehold ground.

321. Is it not generally contended that if the single-tax were in operation there the rents would be higher? – No; I never say that. I think the single-tax would bring the rents down.

322. Is not the general contention of those who are opposed to single-tax? – No; I think it is opposed to their contention. A single-tax makes the taxation very low.

323. Is there a demand for more of these settlements similar to that at Lower Hutt? – Yes.

324. Is land available for that purpose? – No.

325. Is the land too valuable? – Yes. It is getting scarcer and scarcer, and workmen will have to go further afield every day for it.

326. Then if land is getting scarcer and scarcer the position of the worker is getting worse? – Yes, every day. He is not getting a chance. If I bought a section at the Hutt it would cost me £150, and to build a suitable house would cost me £350, that is £500 in all. The landlord wants 10 per cent on his capital, and that means that a workman has to pay £1 a week for a house. How can any workman do it. Houses are so scarce and rents are so high that there are three families in some cases living in the one house. I know some cases where there are two families living in one house.

326A. Are there not any houses to let at 10s a week? – No; £1, £1 2s, 15s. There are none at a decent rate.

327. *Mr Anstey.*] You are a master carrier? – Yes.

328. You say you believe in a single-tax? – Yes.

329. Do you think the colony would get on better if you had a single-tax? – I think it would get on better.

330. And do away with all Customs duties? – Yes.

331. How would the manufacturers get on then? – They would have to take their chance in the open market.

Alexander OSBORNE examined

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – I am a bookbinder residing in Wellington, and have resided here for a period of between twenty-five and thirty years. I hold an acre section in the Epuni Settlement, Lower Hutt. It is held under lease in perpetuity. I have been there for two years. It was a transferred section from an original holder. My rent is £6 4s a year, with a rebate for prompt payment. I reside on that section, and go into town to attend to my work.

2. Have you anything special to bring before the Commission? – Nothing beyond wishing to express my approval of the system of leasehold, and one or two other little things that have occupied the attention of the settlers out there, which I think might be of some guidance to the Commission. I desire to read the following petition to the Commission signed by fourteen settlers at Epuni: “We the undersigned settlers on Epuni Hamlet desire to express our approval of the present system of leasehold, and, with certain amendments, believe it to be in the best interests of this country.” I wish to add a few remarks with regard to the amendments referred to in the petition. The amendments that the settlers think would be advantageous are in connection with valuation. One of their grievances is that in valuing the property the valuers take the same view of the leasehold that they do of the freehold, and the Epuni Settlement is unique in one respect – namely, that it is in the centre of a large number of increasingly valuable freeholds. They consider that if the system is continued of valuing leaseholds in the same way as freeholds are valued, it will be a considerable hardship to them as time goes on. Already their taxation has considerably increased, and it is becoming a hardship to those who are holders of 4-acre sections. It is not such a hardship to the man who holds 1 acre, but there are some of them who took up sections with the view of trying to make a living on them, but they find that with the increased taxation they are afraid they will be forced to part with their sections reluctantly. Another question is that with regard to the increase in rent. The original sections were taken up at certain rents, and as values go on the Government have increased the rent to the tenants who have come in on forfeited leases. One or two cases where the tenants have forfeited and the sections have been taken up by other people, the rent to them has been charged higher than that charged to the original holder, and that tends to cause a feeling of dissatisfaction amongst the settlers, especially in the case of those who are living next to men who are paying, say, £6 an acre. The man who takes up the section next to him is asked to pay an increased rent, notwithstanding, perhaps, that the adjoining land may be more valuable. He really only wants to use it as a residential site, and an added value is given to his land and he feels that it is a hardship that he should have to pay the increased rent. There are one or two cases of serious hardship in that respect. I believe these two things are causing considerable trouble, and will help to spoil what is a good system. There is no doubt in my mind that the system of acquiring these holdings for workmen’s home is very beneficial. If these settlements are established near towns, they are likely to have a bearing on the rent question especially. If the Government were to acquire land for that purpose I am quite convinced that they will be successful. Perhaps the holdings might be smaller – even half-acre sections might be an advantage – but I am quite convinced they are good if properly worked.

3. You say that the valuation is increasing? – Yes, very considerably.

4. In the case of the rents that have been increased, may that not have been owing to the improvements done by the tenants? – In some cases perhaps that is so. I may state that in one case the holder was asked to forfeit because he had not effected any improvements. Even in that case the rent was subsequently increased.

5. *Mr Paul.*] You bought this section from the original holder? – Yes.
6. Did you pay anything for goodwill – for the value of the improvements? – Yes, a little, I think about £50. There was not much changed hands in the way of goodwill. That was understood to be the actual value of the timber and the house.
7. Do you consider you have an advantage over the ordinary working-man in Wellington by holding one of these leases? – Yes, in many respects, especially with regard to the rent problem. I believe if I were living in the City of Wellington in a house similar to the one I am occupying – to say nothing as to the area of the ground – I should be paying three times as much as I am paying now.
8. Is there any suitable land in the vicinity of the Hutt, or within a reasonable distance of Wellington that the Government might acquire and let under these conditions? – Yes; I think there are considerable areas of land about here that might be acquired. The Government might have to pay a little more for them, but if they cut them up into smaller areas, I believe that the working-man would – assuming that it was easy to get to them – take advantage of the opportunity and take them up; in fact, I am quite certain of it.
9. Regarding the area, do you find you can cultivate and attend to this acre as well as to your ordinary every-day business? – No; and that is the real reason why I believe if the area were smaller, say, half an acre, or in some cases where land is valuable it might be cut up into quarter-acre sections, and that would be, I think, an advantage to the men living on the land. Personally I am not able to use the whole of my land, but I have an idea that later on, when perhaps I shall have more time, I may be able to use the whole section; but the land is not doing any harm as it remains at present, and although it is not under cultivation, it is being improved gradually.
10. Then the size of the holding might be brought down to a quarter of an acre? – Yes; to meet the convenience of men who work in the town for a living, but I believe there are areas of land – 4 acres, for instance – where, if the conditions were not too harsh, I am sure they could provide a living for a man. Then there is the question of valuation.
11. Do you mean valuation for taxation purposes? – Valuation and the increase in the value of the land.

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12. Have you given any consideration to the question of the revaluation of future leases? – Yes; I have – not a very deep one, but I have considered it in relation to the little holding I have.
13. Do you think it would be an equitable principle to revalue the leases in future? – Yes; I believe it would for certain fixed periods. I believe in giving a lease, say, of twenty-five years. Perhaps it would be equitable to revalue at that time if the leaseholders were to take up the land again. I do not see anything wrong in that.
14. There was a proposal made before the Commission yesterday to revalue existing leases: how do you view that? – I cannot say I agree with that. I think that the contract should be kept. The Government have made an agreement with their tenants, and I believe in equity it is fair they should keep it.
15. Both the tenant and the Government? – Certainly.

16. *Mr Johnston.*] Do you not think it would be quite sufficient if in cutting up these sections the Government should cut up just a sufficient area to give good breathing-space to a section and a garden in front and at the back, and sufficient room for a good-sized house? – Yes, I do. I believe that is the best way to settle the difficulty.

17. These settlers who object to the increased rental: do they object to it because you have paid for improvements and something for goodwill, and therefore you should get the interest on your money? Do you not object to anybody who buys in paying for the goodwill? – I do not know in many cases whether they do object to it; but in the locality in which I live there is very little goodwill obtained. Holdings have changed hands at a value representing the bare improvements, but without any added value for the goodwill. The experience there has been that there is no goodwill.

18. The evidence yesterday practically allowed for a considerable amount for goodwill? – I do not know of any instance of that. I have watched the transfers that have taken place and I do not know of any in which there has been any profit for goodwill.

19. There was a certain amount of profit in your case? – In what way did I give that impression?

20. You said that it was about £50 and then you corrected yourself? – I did so, but I had in my mind the timber; but when I come to think of it there cannot have been very much goodwill.

21. It must have been something? – It may have been a little – it was not a great deal.

22. One witness stated that what the Government bought for £90 an acre is now worth £400 an acre? – That is a correct statement so far as the value of the land is concerned for taxation purposes.

23. I think he said that that sum could be obtained for the land? – I am not so optimistic as that witness in that respect.

24. *Mr McCutchan.*] What do your local taxes amount to on this acre? - £2 12s.

25. Do you think that is likely to increase in the future – the burden of local taxation? – Yes; there is a general impression in the settlement that it will increase. In fact, they have given notice of an increase in the notices we have received.

26. Is it possible that in the future, as fresh conveniences are supplied involving further expenditure, that local rates may exceed the rent? – Yes; it is possible, but under some conditions.

27. Is it for that reason that you advocate revaluation periodically? – I was asked if I believed in the revaluation, and I said that I thought it would be more equitable in the case of future leases.

28. Is it with the knowledge of the conditions of rural settlement that you make that remark, or do you mean it to apply only to suburban lands? – I mean it to apply only to land I have an intimate knowledge of – not to the land question generally, but only to homes for city workers; although, of course, I suppose it would apply to all land.

29. In the case of this forfeited section that has been referred to, what was the increase in rent put on by the Lands Department? – I think it went up from £6 to £10 a year.

30. What period of time elapsed? – About two years.

31. There was an increase of £4 a year rental in two years? – Yes.

32. *Mr Anstey.*] You say there is a danger of the local taxation increasing so much as to render this land unprofitable to the occupier for any purpose but building-sites? – That is so.

33. It is too dear for market-gardening? – It has been proved to be too dear for that already.

34. Do you think it is wise for the Government to resume possession of that land and offer it to workmen in as low as quarter-acre sections, at the same time fully conserving the tenants' interests and allowing them sufficient land for their purposes? – I do not think that would be a bad thing.

35. Do you think it should follow in all cases that dispossession or breach of title should only take place on full compensation? – To me that seems equitable.

36. Generally speaking, do you think that workmen's homes should consist solely of a site merely sufficient for a house and garden? Has the average workman time to devote for farming land? – Very little. In places where land values are likely to remain fairly even there would be no harm in leaving a man on a fairly large section which he might ultimately make use of as he grows older. A man's hours of labour vary and he might have a day or two a week to spare, and in that case he might make better use of his land if he had an area to draw upon, assuming, of course, that it does not get too valuable. In the main, where a man is occupied all the week it is better to have the holding smaller.

37. Would it be wise to set aside 4 or 5 acres for these holdings on the chance of a man being sometimes out of work? – Not if the land is likely to increase in value rapidly.

38. I take it that the system of providing workmen's homes, pure and simple, should be confined to small areas – say, quarter of an acre? – I believe that would be the best plan.

39. Is it wise also to provide small areas for men between workmen and gardeners – say, for market-gardening and so forth? – That would be a wise provision.

40. Should not such settlements be in districts more remote from the town? – Yes.

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41. Is it of no use setting aside workmen's homes a distance from the town? – No. I believe the closer the land is to the cities the better. Where we live we have to leave home at 6.30 in the morning, reaching town at twenty minutes to 8, and getting home at 6 p.m.

42. Are you a member of any labour union? – I am a member of the Bookbinders' Society, which is affiliated to the Trades and Labour Council.

43. We had the president of the Wellington Trades and Labour Council as a witness yesterday, who spoke as the mouthpiece of twenty-seven thousand labour unionists. In his evidence he advocated the reverse of what you advocate – viz., that we should go in for revaluation of existing leases. In fact, he held it was quite right to do with leasehold what was advocated to be done with the freehold – confiscation. Do you agree with that view? – No; I do not agree with the principle of revaluing existing leases.

44. Can you say whether the view expressed by Mr Hampton is a fair expression of the labour unions generally? – It is the view of a large number of workers who are in this position: that they have, through difficulties, been unable to get anything of their own, and that has embittered them to some extent against some of the existing circumstances. I think Mr Hampton was pretty correct in saying that that view is very largely held.

45. You think that labourers as a rule would better their positions by going in for a straight-out steal? – I would not like to express any approval of a sentiment of that kind. It is a rather strong statement to make. There are lots of things that are required by the State that are not called “steals.” They are acquired. When licenses are taken away as the result of a local-option vote the term – “steal” is not applied.

46. Supposing a man purchases a site from the Government, pays hard cash and gets a title: is it not a straight-out steal to appropriate that? – To appropriate it without compensation, certainly. I cannot go as far as my friend yesterday, although he may, in his view of it, be more correct than I am.

47. You could not say whether the majority of unionists hold Mr Hampton’s view or not? – No; because I am out of touch with the labour movement now, and if I were to say so I might not be expressing a correct view. I might explain that in the past I took a very active part in union matters in Wellington, and in many of their movements I am in sympathy, but living so far from the city I am prevented from taking an active part in their work.

48. How long ago is it since you actively worked with the Trades and Labour Council? – It is seven or eight years since I was a delegate.

49. The Council considered the land question at that time: was it ever considered that revaluation of existing leases should take place? – I have no recollection of the revaluation of existing leases being one of their planks. At that time their principal views were in the direction of acquiring land for settlement and getting people on the land.

50. Is it a fact that the Trades and Labour Councils of the colony took a very prominent part in helping to bring in the closer-settlement policy? – It is an undoubted fact, and it is generally admitted by most people that the Trades Councils of the colony have done the main part in bringing it about.

51. *Mr McCutchan.*] Was the retrospective revaluation of leases discussed eight years ago? – As far as my recollection carries me back, I do not think it was.

52. Have you any recollection of its having been discussed? – Not very largely.

53. You admit it was discussed eight years ago? – I think the safest thing for me would be to say that I do not remember it being discussed.

54. *Mr Anstey.*] You say the unions took an active part in helping forth the land-settlement policy: was the proposal to take the estates without compensation at the current value of the land? – That was the idea.

55. Can you tell me when the views of the labour unions changed. You say they were in favour of paying the current value at that time, and to-day you admit there is a proposal to take the freehold at the original cost? – I could not tell you the exact date when they changed on that question.

56. Have they changed recently, or have they held these views all along and hid them? – Possibly, but there has been no reason to express them. I would not make any definite statement regarding that, because my memory is not very clear.

57. Do you know now that they would advocate taking these estates at the original value? – No, I cannot say that, but I believe you would find a number of them who, like many holders of the land, want to buy at the original value.

58. *Mr Paul.*] Do you know whether seven years ago there was a plank which provided for periodical revaluation of future leases? – Yes, there was.

59. Can you say whether the official pronouncement to-day is that the estates should be acquired at the owner's valuation for taxation purposes, plus 10 per cent? – I believe it is.

60. *Mr Johnston.*] If revaluation of existing leases in perpetuity was carried, would you advocate compensation to the tenant for the breach of his lease? – Yes, I think I should have to advocate that in equity.

William James Newton ADNAMS examined

61. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – I am a commercial traveller. I have 2 acres at Epuni Hamlet, for which I pay £5 8s 8d per acre. I have been there three years, and in the Wellington district for nine years. Yesterday afternoon I heard that a petition had been taken round the hamlet, and last night, in company with a friend, I visited twenty-six people in order to get their views on the subject. I found that three people had signed the first petition under a misimpression as to what was implied by the word "amendment." I took round this petition with me which was signed by twenty-five out of the twenty-six whom we called on: "We, the undersigned settlers of Epuni Hamlet, do not favour leaseholds as granted under the present tenure. The restrictions at present imposed are most

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unsatisfactory, and render the working of our land to advantage a matter of impossibility. In our estimation the only remedy that will fully overcome our grievances is to grant settlers the option of purchase." We cannot raise money, we cannot sell, we dare not put up another house, and we are rated on the basis of residential purposes. In the last few years land in the Hutt has boomed very much. One syndicate bought land within a quarter of a mile of the hamlet for £260 an acre, and sold it at auction at an average of £1,054 per acre. Our land was opened to workmen, a term which was defined as working for a wage. Only a casual can make anything out of the land, because we have to leave so early in the morning and get back so late in the evening that we cannot do anything at all in the way of working the land for more than a month or two in the year.

62. Your difficulty is that you have too much land? – No, I am rated as a gentleman's residential site, and the only benefit I can get from it is fresh air. The tenure may be all right, but the conditions are such that if anything happens to a man he cannot dispose of his holding. I know one case of a widow, whose husband died two years ago, who has been trying ever since to dispose of the place, but she cannot get a buyer for the reason that she is not allowed to take time-payment.

63. We heard from the previous witness that not much passed for goodwill, but you get value for improvements? – The goodwill comes to very little. We cannot borrow except through the Advances to Settlers Department, which will advance us very little.

64. Have you tried the Advances to Settlers Department? – Yes, I got £150. I am rated at £845, and I applied for £200 and got £150.

65. Have you cultivated your section? – I have a quarter of an acre in raspberries, and I have a flower-garden, but I cannot spend more in labour because it does not pay.

66. *Mr Paul.*] What are the exact conditions which interfere with your land? – I am not allowed to sublet any part, and I must not put up another house. I can find no time to get any benefit from the soil, and, moreover, I am unable to get any advantage if anything happened to me. I am unable to get a buyer, and even if I did get one the Government have a free hand in rejecting anybody.

67. You have got more land than you can use yourself or profitably employ your labour on? – I have an acre and a half of land, a house, and the use of breathing-space, and that is all I get from it.

68. How does your position as a Crown leaseholder compare with that of a leaseholder from a private person? – I am under a disadvantage compared with a private tenant, for the simple reason that my house is no security to a creditor, and consequently I can get nothing at all if I want financial assistance.

69. Could you not sell that holding if you wanted to? – Yes, I could at the Government valuation.

70. You said that land was going up to over £1,000 an acre in the Hutt? – Yes.

71. There has been a boom on? – There has been a big boom on, and consequently we unfortunate settlers suffer *pro rata*.

72. Is it not possible to sell your holding? – No, I cannot grow one more flower or one more raspberry, and that is all as a tenant I am getting from the land.

73. Do you mean to say that, while the land in your vicinity has increased enormously in value, you cannot sell your leasehold? – No, and the public are frightened of the leasehold. I could not get one-half of the improvements if I wanted to sell. I can buy land adjoining our own settlement for £250. It is a better locality than ours.

74. Is there not margin enough to allow you to sell to advantage? – No, for the simple reason that they will not allow you to sell to an advantage.

75. Have you a definite knowledge of that fact? – No, only hearsay.

76. I advise you to inquire at the Land Office as to your real position? – I applied for a permit as to my position. I got a certain form, which I had to fill in, stating my improvements and my price for the property, and the name of the person I might propose to sell to.

77. How many settlers are there at the hamlet? – Forty-one, I believe: at any rate, about that number.

78. Could the majority of these settlers buy if they had the option of the freehold? – I think the majority of the settlers would be glad enough to leave the large cities, providing they have that option. If they had that option they would have security.

79. For borrowing purposes? – Security to borrow and sell. At present it is almost impossible to sell.

80. What terms do you want that option on – the option of purchase? – Providing we had that, terms could be arranged, either by arbitration or otherwise.

81. You would like it at the original valuation? – I think sufficient should be added to cover the incidental expenses, and if the Government had their interest on the whole of the amount, including the expenses, I do not consider they should be entitled to any more.

82. You think you should have all this increase in value? – Decidedly, because it is due to our expenditure and settlement in that district that the land has gone up.

83. Do you know of any land in your vicinity that has not been improved in any way, or increased in proportion with the rest: is there any such land? – You should take the Epuni Hamlet itself. It was offered about fifteen months before the Government took it up at not more than £60 an acre.

84. I want you to say whether there is a block of land in the vicinity which has had nothing done to it and which has increased with the general increase in land-values? – I might mention the Taine Estate. Of course it is improved, because buildings have gone up, but before that the land increased in value from £280 to £1,054 an acre.

85. Was there any work done on the estate to justify the increase? – No work. It was a block of about 70 acres, and was cut up into small holdings.

86. Is not a large sum of this general increase in the Epuni Hamlet due to the same cause? – Decidedly. The settlers, by taking up their residence in the Epuni Hamlet, have improved that locality.

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87. If it had remained unsettled would it be worth more to-day than five years ago? – It would be worth more to-day, but very little more. The roading, for a start, was not there, and there are sundry other items. It would have cost a certain sum to have brought about the improvements, and it would have increased also to some extent.

88. Without any labour at all? – Yes, without labour.

89. *Mr Johnston.*] Are you affiliated with any trades union? – No.

90. You are simply a labouring-man and you cannot afford to employ labour at present? – Yes.

91. As a labouring-man you advocate the freehold as against the leasehold? – Not altogether. I have every respect for the leasehold. I think, however, we should have the option of purchase in order to give the leaseholder the security he wishes.

92. The fact of the matter is, if you get the freehold of this land, you could make a good profit out of it: that is the real truth? – We have spent a lot of money and work on it, and I think we are entitled to the option.

93. What are your improvements? – A house, trap-shed, and stables.

94. What is the value of them? - £445 I am rated for.

95. What is the value, then? Is that what it cost? – It is about what it cost.

96. What is the Government capital value? – The lessor's interest is £217, and the lessee's interest in the unimproved value, which I consider valueless in my case, is £183.

97. Explain what you mean. Your interest is £217? – That is what I am paying rent on. My interest in the unimproved value they say is £183.

98. Then £663 is the capital value of the holding, is it not? - £663 would be the improvements plus the amount it has risen in value in proportion to the land in the vicinity.

99. No, £663 is the net cost: is that right? – No, sir.

100. Well, what is the net cost? What is the cost of the improvements and the cost of the capital value of the land put together? – I am rated for £445.

101. I do not ask what you are rated for. You say your house cost £445: where is the rest of the capital value? – It goes with the land.

102. What does it cost the Government? What do they charge you? - £108 10s and £183 is the addition which has recently come out.

103. Will you give us the net capital value you got it at? - £108 10s an acre.

104. And you have 2 acres? – Yes.

105. And you have put £445 of improvements on it? – Yes.

106. Therefore the net cost is £663: is that right? – Yes.

107. What are the rates? - 1½d in the pound.

108. What are the total annual rates on the property? – I have not worked that out.

109. What do you pay a year or half-yearly? What did you pay last year? - £4-something. I think it would be £5 5s for the year.

110. Say your rate is £6 a year, well, that £663 is revalued, and you have to pay £40 a year for the section and the house? – Yes.

111. Is that not a reasonable rental? – Yes, but possibly if I were called away I would have to take from £250 upwards for my improvements – what I could get in fact.

112. Do you not think that is quite contrary to your other evidence? You have already stated that land has been sold beyond this settlement at the rate of £1,054 per acre. You have 2 acres? – That is nearer the Hutt.

113. I understood it was further from the Hutt? – No. Land adjoining that I can buy at £250 an acre at the present time.

114. Adjoining this? – Not adjoining my section, but adjoining the hamlet.

115. And your capital value is nearly £217, so you must, if you wanted to sell, get good value? – I am debarred from selling to the man I would like to sell to, because the Land Board has the option of vetoing any man I propose. They will not allow any man who has over three hundred pounds' worth of property to buy the section.

116. Do you not think it is a good thing that the Land Board have that veto? – I do in certain cases.

117. Do you not think it is a hardship to the working-man that the Land Board should have that right of veto to prevent his land going into the hands of the capitalist? – It is really a hardship, because the settler who goes on to the section is unable to get any benefit from the land except fresh air, and has to pay the same rates as the big capitalist would for a residential site.

118. If it were freehold, could you get £1,000 an acre for it? – No.

119. Could you get £500 an acre? – I doubt whether I could get more than £250.

120. If it were freehold? – Yes.

121. *Mr McCutchan.*] You said you could not raise money on it? – Outside the Advances to Settlers Department.

122. It is looked upon as a bad security by the money-lender? – It is looked upon as no security at all by the private money-lender.

123. For what reason? – Because they cannot seize the house for debt amongst other reasons.

124. Has the question of security of tenure anything to do with it? – No.

125. You think the tenure is absolutely secure? – So far as the lease is concerned, I am quite satisfied myself, although I do not think that the settler will keep upon it for 999 years.

126. You said the general public were frightened of the leasehold, and you questioned whether you could get more than £250 for your section? – No one likes to bind himself to live in one place for ever, and one does not know when he may want to leave.

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127. Can you mention instances where the Land Board has refused its sanction to a transfer? – Yes, Mr Petherick. He was offered over £300 a few months ago for his section and improvements, and last night he offered me the same section and improvements for £200.

128. Was the reason he was refused the right to sell to the person who offered £300 that the transferee could not comply with the conditions? – The transferee was possessed of more than three hundred pounds' worth of land.

129. Is that not a valid objection? – So far as the Government is concerned it may be, but it is a hardship on the man who wants to sell.

130. If the Government do not keep these wise restrictions over the sites they have provided for workmen's homes in the vicinity of the big cities, would the provisions they have made be rendered nugatory? – I maintain it gets the workman into bad credit from the start.

131. You advocate entire abolition of this proviso? – I think it requires a good deal of amending, and the only amendment I see that overcomes the difficulty is to grant the option of purchase.

132. Then the capitalist steps in again and reacquires the sections, and deprives the workmen of every opportunity of getting homes for themselves? – I think not. As soon as the land was secured to the worker he would put his labour into it, and would not be likely to go into it for speculative purposes.

133. What do you reckon the selling-value of your place is? – It is a question very hard to answer on the spur of the moment.

134. Do you think the assessment is a fair valuation? – I would be glad to sell at the valuation.

135. Is that not a contradiction of what you said that you could get land alongside for? – That would be freehold, and I could do what I liked with it.

136. Were you dissatisfied with the amount of the advance you got from the Advances to Settlers Office? – I say I wanted £200. The valuator told me I was foolish not to apply for more, and, as the terms were easy, it would pay to get more as a speculation; but even then they cut me down by £50.

137. Do you think the Land Board should exercise some control over these transfers beyond saying that the transferee is to comply with the conditions? – I think when a man has fulfilled his obligations in respect to the land he should be free to go or come.

138. Hampered by no restrictions whatever? – I think not. Why should the working-man be hampered with restrictions no syndicate would dare to impose.

139. I suppose you know that all rural settlers are hampered by restrictions, and they do not complain that they find it a hardship? – I think there has been an outcry of hardship.

140. So far as the law relating to transfer of sections is concerned, there has been no outcry at all – so far as I am able to form an opinion? – I think the workers' homes and these outside leases are on a very different standing. In the case of the workers' homes, the worker is not allowed to put up more than one house on his section; he is not allowed to sublet any portion, and if he is an honest worker he swears that in his declaration. He has no time to improve the whole of his holding, and yet it does not prevent the valuation going up to a certain amount. In the case of the country lands, probably the man is able to get the benefit of every pound of improvements he has put on it. That is hampered by no restriction.

141. With regard to the increase of the equitable value: Is it not the case that the worker enjoys the same advantage from public works in these localities as the capitalist does? – No; you take the case of the road. The land was put up four years ago this month, and since then only 9ft of metal has been laid down upon the road. When winter came on it was impossible to walk along the road. Since then we have had one strip of 9ft. Certainly they are putting drainpipes down now.

142. Was the block loaded for roading? – Yes.

143. To what extent? – I believe the difference between the purchase-money and the cost of the first lease.

144. Was the loading adequate to provide roading facilities? – I think so, providing it had been carried on in a businesslike way, but I think the less I say about that matter the better.

145. Why? – Because I think any private man would have made a good job of it for considerably less.

146. Was the work done by the local authority? – Yes, it was done by the local authority on a grant received from the Government.

147. What is the local authority there? – The Hutt County Council.

148. So your complaint is against the Hutt County Council and not against the Government? – I have nothing to say against the Government.

149. Has the County Council expended this loading? – They say they have expended considerably more.

150. What is your grievance? – That only the centre of the road is passable.

151. So far as the loading is concerned, you have no complaint against the local body? – I did not come with the intention of making any complaint against the Hutt County Council, but still more money has been wasted than would have put the road in decently passable order.

152. *Mr Anstey.*] Is this steep or level land? – All level.

153. Where is it? – Two miles from the Hutt Station.

154. Is it nearer Wellington than the Hutt? – Further from Wellington.

155. Where is this land which fetched £1,000 an acre? – It is the Taine Estate, at the corner of the Waiwetu Road and the main road.

156. Is that between Epuni and the Lower Hutt? – Yes, about half-way. The Taine Estate faces the main road – part of it. In other parts they have put in decent roads to give access to all parts of the property.

157. How long do you say it is since this road was metalled? – Do you mean our road.

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158. Yes? – Nearly three years since it was metalled. They left us the first winter without metal at all; it was just impassable. It was metalled after the first spring.

159. Do you think you were treated with gross unfairness in having to live for a whole year without a metalled road? – I think it was most unfair, but still I think it was more oversight than anything else.

160. You say you were worse treated than back-blocks settlers? – Have you ever heard of settlers in the back blocks being on their sections for ten years without a bridle-track? – My complaint is that as the road was promised it should have been made to enable men to get to and from their sections. My chief complaint is that we were not allowed to get the benefit we should get from a section.

161. You want the right of purchase? Is that what you want? – I have no means of borrowing except I have the right of purchase.

162. Would you be prepared to put your section up to public competition again? – Yes. I think the £108 10s an acre, with me paying the interest on any improvements, should be sufficient for me to purchase the land.

163. You would not put it up to public competition? – No, decidedly not. I have had my lease for three years, and why should other people have the benefit of my labour and money.

164. That would be given to you if you put it up to public competition? – Yes, I maintain that the hardship is he is unable to borrow and unable to go away. It is not everybody who wants to go away, but still we want to go away at times, and under the present circumstances, the land is locked up, and we cannot do so.

165. You want the right of purchase at the original price? – Yes, or a little over.

166. How much over? – I would be prepared to pay another 10 per cent.

167. Supposing the land had gone down in value, would you be prepared to purchase it from the Government at the original price? – I would still have been in favour of having the option of purchase. I am not in favour of being compelled to purchase it – I simply want the option.

168. But because it has increased in value, you want to compel the Government to sell it to you? If it went down in value would it be fair for the Government to compel you to buy it at the original price? – You misunderstand me. As far as the value is concerned, I have nothing to say against it, but I maintain that unless I have the option of purchase I have no security over my property – I could not sublet it without a very special permit, and I know of only one instance in the case of the workmen's homes where such permission has been given. If I had a dozen customers for the purchase of my property I do not believe that I would be able to get rid of it, because they would say it was unsuitable or undesirable as an investment. I believe I would still have the place on my own hands.

169. You told us that land similar to this is worth £250 an acre, and the original price was about £110. If you want the Government to make you a clean present of £140 an acre on 2 acres, do you think it is fair and reasonable to make that request? – I do.

170. Do you wish that principle to apply to the land all over the colony? – I think a settler who has been a number of years on the property, and made his improvements, should have the right to purchase it.

171. You have only been there three years. What is the use of talking about a number of years? Are you prepared to give the same right to similar settlers all over the colony? – I am.

172. To all the settlers under the Land for Settlements Act? – I am. I think they should have the right to purchase it at the original value.

173. Do you think any Government in the world would be able to continue the land-for-settlements policy under such conditions – if they were compelled to sell this land when the price was high and to continue the leasehold when there was a fall in values? – The Government, in this case, have acted as land speculators, and because our improvements have raised the value of the land £90 to £200 an acre, they are charging new holders the increased rent on £200 an acre.

174. Do you not think these sections are altogether too large? Would it not be better if they were cut up into quarter-acre sections – you would then have room for four workmen on the present holdings? – I do not agree with that, for the simple reason that a workman would not take a holding of a quarter of an acre on leasehold. He could go and pay his £10 deposit and get his freehold, and he would very much rather have it than the leasehold.

175. Do most of the working-men have £10 of ready money in hand? – They have, and they can in the first year put a house on it worth £30.

176. Can they buy freeholds for £10? – You can with a deposit, and payments of 5 per cent in six months, and 5 per cent in twelve months, and the balance for a term of years at 5 per cent.

177. At what price per acre can this land be obtained in or near the City of Wellington? – A small holding you would not get as cheap as if you took up a big section and cut it up. A man can get a quarter of an acre for £90 quite as close, if not closer to the station than I am.

178. But you got a whole acre for £90? – Yes, and they have raised our valuation from £600 to £800, and there is no knowing where they will stop when the next valuation comes round.

179. You think that there is sufficient land that workmen can get: if so, there is no necessity for the Government buying any more land for workmen's homes? – I think there are many working in the hamlet who are really sick of their holdings on account of the restrictions which are imposed on them, and are sorry they went in for these sections. We would have been treated much better by the freeholder on paying a small deposit.

180. You say you cannot develop that land properly, because the price of labour is too high? – The price of labour is high, and I have to earn my living all day.

181. Do you not think in that case that there is so much waste land because wages are too high? – I do not object to the price of labour, but on a small place in the country if a workman has to employ labour he cannot do it out of his wages and keep the house as well.

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182. If the price of labour is too high, surely there is something wrong, and we ought to make a reduction in wages so that you could get the advantage from your section? – No, the workman who has to earn his living at a fixed wage cannot turn market gardener when he gets home at night, and he may not be a suitable man to turn into a market gardener.

183. If these sections are too large for a workman's use, do you think a quarter of an acre would be much more suitable? – It may be more suitable, but not as a workman's home, because I do not think he would ever look at such a small holding.

184. Then what sort of a section does he really want to live on? – I think a workman would very much prefer to have one-eighth of an acre of actual freehold to 2 acres of the present leasehold.

185. Have you had any difficulty with the Land Board? – I applied for a permit to sell.

186. What are your relations with the Board generally? – I have never had any difficulty with them. Having always paid my rent they have never worried me.

187. What do you think about the constitution of the Land Board? – If it would be workable, I think it would be better for every district to appoint a representative, but in the case of a number of districts it would be hardly workable.

188. Do you mean to appoint one or elect one? – To elect one. I think there would be too many representatives if there were many districts, but at the same time every district should have fair representation.

189. *Mr Johnston.*] You said you applied for a transfer. At what price were you going to sell your land? – I had no intention of raising that question, but I wanted to find out what form I had to go through in the event of my wanting to sell.

190. You asked, and you said the Land Board refused? – That was Mr Petherick who was refused. I applied for a permit, and they asked me the name of the intending purchaser, the value of improvements, and the price I wanted for my section. I have never replied to that.

191. *Mr Paul.*] You want the right to sublet? – Amongst other items.

192. Do you think that is just the very thing the worker is trying to get away from, private landlords? – It is, but we find at the present time that the land is obtainable on such easy terms that it is easy for him to become his own landlord. If a man pays £20 on a section, and another £25 or £20 to a builder the latter would be quite willing to put up his house for him, and wait for his money until he could get it with interest.

193. Why did you take up this land if land is so easily got in the City of Wellington? – I am afraid it was done in an evil moment.

194. Do you not think it would pay you now to get out of the section at any price and take advantage of this freehold land you say you can get nearer Wellington? – I would go out tomorrow if anybody would pay me what I am rated at.

195. Do you think it would be in the interests of this settlement to allow you to put three other houses on your 2 acres and sublet them? – I do not think it would be in the interests of my pocket, because I do not think any workman would care to live so far away from the station when he would be able to get land as cheap closer to town.

196. But from the point of view of the landlord, do you think it would be advisable to allow you to subdivide it and let it out to other holders? – I think it would be just possible if the by-laws of the Hutt Borough, providing that no dwelling should be erected on a less frontage than 40ft., were applied to the hamlet. I think a 40ft. frontage and a depth of 10 chains would be quite sufficient area for anybody.

197. Then you have too much land? – I have no more than I can work profitably under my present tenure.

198. Would you take the costs of your improvements and go out? – No; then I should lose the interest on the money I have been paying out for several years.

199. Would you take the cost of your improvements and the interest? – I would take what I am valued at.

Charles William HOWARD examined

200. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – I am a settler in the Epuni Hamlet. I hold 2½ acres of land, and I pay £5 8s an acre. I have held it between three and four years, and am the original settler.

201. What do you wish to bring before us? I cannot very well work the land under the leasehold tenure owing to the greivous restrictions under the lease. The rating value also is so high that I cannot use the land agriculturally and pay rates on it as a building section.

202. Do you agree with what the previous witness said? – Not all of it. I work my land as hard as ever I can, from daylight to dark, Saturdays and Sundays. I am trying to make a bit of money to lay by for my old age. I put all my spare time into the section; but since I took it up the rates have increased so much that I cannot farm the land and make it pay.

203. What is your business? – I am a storeman. In my spare time I grow potatoes and other vegetables. My produce has been sold mostly at auction-rooms. I have my own work to attend to in the daytime, and I took the land up to make a little money as a standby in my old age. I got a fair price, as a rule, for the produce I sold.

204. Was it all in cultivation? – Not all, but very nearly all. I have only realized a few pounds for my produce, not very much.

205. Supposing you had worked eight hours a day, would your produce have given you a fair remuneration for your labour? – No.

206. Supposing you had paid 1s an hour for your work, would you have made a fair remuneration? – I have not got 3d an hour out of it.

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207. Apparently your trouble is that you have got too much land to use under your present circumstances? – No; although I work hard it does me good. I am better at work than visiting theatres and music-halls and knocking about the streets.

208. *Mr Paul.*] What conditions interfere with your using this land to advantage? – Supposing I was turned out of work for a few weeks I could work this land during that time; but supposing I was offered employment which was more profitable than working on my own place, if I could sublet a piece of the ground to another man I could share the profit with him. I cannot do that; I must call in labour and pay labour wages straight out. Many a time, if I could have got a man to assist me by taking a piece of my land, it would have been a great advantage to me, and I could have kept at other work.

209. You might have formed a communistic settlement? – That is what I mean – you could call it a co-operative settlement; but we are not allowed to do that.

210. How does your position compare with the average working-man outside this settlement who is paying rent to a private landlord? Do you consider your position worse or better than his? Much worse. I had a house before I went on this settlement. I had a piece of freehold ground at Newtown. I had sufficient to buy the land, and £80 to provide a shell for a dwelling. In my spare time I worked at the dwelling and finished it. I stayed there four years and a half. I did not work as hard as I have worked at the Epuni Hamlet, but I came away with £400.

211. Have you lost that £400 in the leasehold? – I have lost it in this way, that the house is on the land, and if I had a better show and wished to get out of Wellington I could not possibly sell the land for the simple reason that no man would buy it or the house.

212. What is the house worth? – Say, £300.

213. Are there any other improvements? – There is an orchard.

214. Have you lost money by going in for this leasehold property? – Undoubtedly, because I cannot use the money that I have put into it.

215. Are you a poorer man to-day than when you went on that land? – Yes, undoubtedly.

216. And are you gradually getting poorer through going to that hamlet? – Undoubtedly. Through the land increasing in value it has become valuable building-sites, and it has to pay rates accordingly. A Chinaman closes up the land if it costs him more than £7 an acre rent. The European farmer throws it up if he has to pay £6 a year. We are paying in rent and taxes about £6 10s a year, and therefore we cannot make it remunerative.

217. You have got too large an area to work profitably if you have to employ labour? – If there were no rates it would not be too great a value.

218. If you had the freehold there would be rates to pay? – Yes; but see the advantage. If it was freehold and I found I could not work it profitably, I would then cut it up or make another use of it; but now I am bound, because I can only put up one house, and I cannot sublet it and so take up other land.

219. You could not sell to advantage at the present time? – No.

220. Although you have just told us that land is selling all round there at a very enhanced value for building-sites? – That is correct.

221. Would you recommend the Land Board to subdivide your 2½ acres into five sections, allow you to take one, and settle other men on the other quarter-acre sections? – Undoubtedly; they could cut it up as much as they liked provided, of course, that I were paid for the labour I put on the ground. I do not wish to make a profit, but I think that for the four years' work I should be paid something.

222. Would that land yield any more produce if it was a freehold? – Of course not.

223. You said grievous restrictions prevented your using the land to advantage? – Yes. If it were freehold, and I could not work one end I would leave that end bare, or I would sublet it or work it on shares. I am now prevented from working it. Perhaps for three months I cannot put a crop in because I have to work somewhere. If I was a freeholder I could let that land to another man who would put a crop on it.

224. You have more land than you can profitably occupy; is not that the real position? – On the leasehold, Yes, as freehold, No.

225. As a freeholder you would let it and become a landlord. Is that the position? – Yes, a landlord on a small scale.

226. You know as a worker that the workers are now trying to get away from that position? – What sort of a landlord would I be with that piece of land. The trouble is that my landlord steps in and says, “you cannot sublet it,” and so the land must remain idle and be worthless for three months – all because they will not give me the right to let it to another man for three months.

227. Then if this land were freehold it would be cut up into building-sites? – That is correct; it would in a month.

228. Do you represent anybody but yourself? – Myself and my wife.

229. Have you ever applied to the Land Board for the right to sublet? – No.

230. How do you know they would refuse you? – Because my lease says that I shall not sublet.

231. But have never asked the Land Board for that privilege? – No.

232. *Mr Anstey.*] One reason you wish to get the freehold is that you wish to put your savings into the property? – Yes; it is my savings-bank.

233. Do you think it would be wise to allow you, all the Epuni settlers, and all others to do the same thing – to keep this land as a savings-bank and put your money into it? – I think it would be much better to encourage the men to use their sections as a savings-bank than to give them no encouragement at all.

234. You think then that the land should be used for that purpose, and that it should be allowed to remain idle until the settler was ready to occupy it? – But they might put it to worse uses than that.

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235. Are you aware that there a number of people who are protesting against people being allowed to monopolise the land and keep it idle? – I have heard so.

236. Does not that apply just as much to you with 2½ acres as it does to the man with 2,000 or 10,000 acres? – Certainly not, for the reason that I am living there.

237. You say you are only using a portion of the section? – No; I am using the whole of it.

238. If you were to let some of your land to a neighbor you would be prepared to give him the right of purchase? – Undoubtedly I would, always provided I was paid for all labour and improvements I had put on the land. I think that would be only fair.

239. Supposing you get the right to buy the land, on what terms would you want to buy it? – I think it would only be fair that I should be able to buy it at the same price I am paying interest on.

240. Would you be prepared to extend similar conditions to settlers holding lease-in-perpetuity land under the Land for Settlements Act? – I have not considered that question.

241. Are you a member of the labour union now? – No.

242. Is the reason that you have left the labour union because you are now breaking the rules laid down by them? – No; I formerly belonged to the Sailors' Union, but I have not belonged to it for eight years.

243. Would they allow you to work on Sunday or for 3d an hour? – I do not know.

244. Do you think it is fair that you should now be working long hours and under such conditions as would not be allowed to members of the union, and thus get an advantage over them? – I think it is only right that I should have the right to work in my off time in any way I choose, in order to pay my debts, and I have to work long hours and very hard in order to keep my head above water.

245. Do you think it is quite fair that labourers generally should be allowed to work as many hours as they like? – I find my pleasure in working about my own place, and I prefer that to walking about the streets and talking.

246. Do you think it is fair to allow labourers to work as many hours as they choose? – I have come here to tell you my grievances in regard to my land, and you are now trying to entangle me in a discussion in regard to the labour question.

247. Do you think it is fair that labourers should be allowed to work these long hours at the ridiculous wage of 3d an hour? – Certainly not. It is not fair to ask them to work those long hours for a daily wage. I think that if a man does eight hours good work for his boss, he has done enough for a day, and he should be allowed to employ the rest of his time as he thinks best for himself. It is more pleasure to me to take a spade and dig in my garden than to simply walk about the streets and talk on all sorts of questions.

248. You have 2½ acres in the Epuni Settlement, and that appears to be too much for you to use. Do you not think it would be a wise thing for the Government to take that land over and cut it up, if necessary, and pay you for the improvements you have put upon it? – Yes; but I think I should be paid fully for the labour I have expended on the land. Then there is the inconvenience I am put to in getting to and from my work. It takes me an hour and a half to two hours a day to get to and from my work, and I think it is only fair I should be paid for that.

249. Should you be paid for all the time you have been going to and fro for the last four years? – Why not? Why should I work for nothing? – I wish to say that I was one of those who went round with the petition. I believe one or two persons signed the petition under a misapprehension, because they did not know the meaning of one word in that petition. Since that word has been explained to them they have signed the second petition.

250. *Mr Paul.*] I would like to point out that there can be no possible mistake as to the meaning of this petition. It expresses approval of the present system of leasehold, and adds that certain amendments might be made in the terms with advantage? – Some of the settlers did not know what the amendments were, and they think if one of the amendments was that we should have the option then they would be quite satisfied. Every man has not got the same education as you have, and some of them did not understand what the word “amendments” meant in the petition. It is because they did not understand the word “amendments” that they signed the second petition.

251. If a man signs a petition in favour of the present leasehold system, it is not likely that he wants the option of purchase? – The position of the settlers in regard to the petition is as I have stated.

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John JACOBS examined

561. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – I am a carrier and contractor living in the Epuni Hamlet. I have a holding of 1 acre 2 roods 14 perches.

562. What rent do you pay on it? – I pay £15 17s 6d per annum.

563. Have you been there long? – Eleven months I think.

564. Did you buy in from somebody else? – I got it from the Government, but I think the section had been taken up before.

565. It was one that had been forfeited? – It must have been.

566. How are you pleased with your section? – I have come to lay a grievance before the Commission, but I do not expect I can get redress of my grievance. I thought I should bring a few thoughts before the Commission which should perhaps open the eyes of other aspirants to workmen’s homes. I took up the section and knew what I had got to pay, but I believe the system of working these homes is entirely wrong. It is too dear. The original rent for that section in June 1901 was £4 10s 3d.

567. Per annum? – No, half-yearly. On the 1st June, 1904, the rent for the same land was £7 18s 9d. I do not see where this revaluation or penalization ought to come in to the workman. The Government, if they have disbursed anything and want to recoup themselves for it, should have charged a certain sum, and not charged it at £4 or £5 an acre for a thousand years. I also believe successful workmen’s homes can never be established on the areas we have there. They are too big for the man to make them pay. I have just made a small calculation as I sat here, and this is not what my rent would be for the land only, and I think it comes to very nearly £26 a year for the land, and I find I can do nothing with it – only build one house. I thought in giving my idea of it here some of these people who are always clamouring for workmen’s homes might see the folly of going in for such large areas, and the danger of having the value rise on you in such a manner. There was nothing there when I went on the land. The section was there as it was after subdivision, and nothing at all had been done to it. I have done what there is myself, and still my rent has been risen twice. I am one of a group of five in the whole settlement. The others, I think, pay a rental on something like a valuation of £1,000 an acre, and we pay a rental of £200 an acre. I think there is something wrong in the working of the thing. We were told we should not be revalued, and in this case we are revalued at the option of will of those in power. We have no redress at all. I give you that suggestion for the benefit of those who may come after me.

568. You say it has been let at three different prices? – The first was £4 10s 3d half-yearly.

569. That is £9 0s 6d yearly? – That was the original rental. From the 1st June, 1901, until the 1st June, 1904, the difference has taken place. From what source we wonder.

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570. It has been by the Land Board. They have the fixing of the prices? – Have they power to revalue?

571. Yes, they have. You have gone on the land at a time when the land has gone up immensely in value, and the Land Board have a right to take cognizance of what is going on. You thought it was worth your while and you have taken it up? – I did so, but it is not worth my while. It is too dear as a workman's home.

572. Are you using it as a workman's home? You are a carrier and I suppose are using it for your horses and stable? – Yes, but it does not alter the value.

573. Supposing the Epuni Hamlet had not been there at all, and you wanted a place in the same locality, could you have got the same area any cheaper from anybody else? – I would not have tried.

574. Would you have gone without? – Yes. I do not see I have any interest in that land at all, seeing it is valued at £317 now. That is the full value I think, and beyond the value if anything.

575. Have you any other point? – No, that is my main point.

576. *Mr Paul.*] You have too much land? – Yes.

577. And you find the rates and rent come very hard on you? – Yes, they are too hard for the privilege of living on a piece of land.

578. Was this section vacant until you took it up? – Yes.

579. No previous occupier? – No one had lived upon it. I am one of those five in this settlement who are penalized in this way. There is one man, or there are two, who have 2 acres, and the rent is so high that they will have to forfeit. Section 104 is one.

580. What is the rent the holder has to pay now? – He pays £14 5s half-yearly.

581. His rate is practically double what the original assessment was? – Yes.

582. Do you consider you are in a better position than the outside working-man who is under a private landowner? – Not at all. I consider my position there is a loss.

583. Supposing you had a quarter-acre only in the hamlet, would you be all right then? – Not under the Government. I would not take it.

584. What is the objection? – I would go in for a section in the Hutt Borough, and better myself a great deal.

585. Can you get a quarter-acre at a quarter of this rental for ground rent? – They told me some land had sold there at £400 an acre. I should not like to say I can get a quarter-acre at that rate, but, as a matter of fact, I do not believe such is the case. I do not think I could get a quarter-acre for a fourth of that amount.

586. Then you must be in a better position. It would have to be considerably less than a quarter of the amount to enable you to better your position? – My condition is bad now on this piece of land.

587. You are in a position of being a land-monopolist. You have got more land than you can profitably use and profitably employ labour to work? – Yes.

588. Then your position cannot be satisfactory? – Yes.

589. Then if you had a quarter of an acre, and the rent was correspondingly low, that would be an improvement? – Certainly it would be an improvement.

590. *Mr Johnston.*] Have you put any improvements on it? – Yes, the Government valuation of my improvements is £270.

591. What did these cost you? – Rather more than £270.

592. You knew what you were doing when you took the land up? – Yes, at least I thought I did, but my position, as far as I find it to-day, is such that if any one will give me the amount of the Government valuation and 6 per cent, I am willing to give any workman who wants a workman's home the opportunity to take my place.

593. *Mr Anstey.*] Do you think it would be a wise thing for the Government to resume that settlement? Nearly every one complains of the sections being too large altogether. Would you be satisfied to be secured in the value of your improvements and have the land cut up into smaller sections? – That is what I believe; that is the only remedy. The Epuni Hamlet is in the wrong place. It is planted in the middle of a valuable borough, and in a short time the land will be so dear that it is no use taking it up under the restrictions. You cannot realize a sufficient income on it except you put up another house on your section. The best thing I can see, if the Government is going to cut it up, is to resume the whole block and resurvey and reroad it.

594. What size do you think is suitable for workmen's homes? – Ordinary sections of a quarter of an acre.

595. Do you think it advisable to cut it up into a number of eighth, quarter, and half-acre sections? – Yes.

596. Would that be satisfactory to all the settlers? – It is difficult to say.

597. Do you think it would be wise for the Government to resume possession if the majority wish it? – Yes, if the Government pay compensation I think it would be quite right.

598. You told us your rent was £15 17s 6d a year, and later on it was £26? – I pay actually £15 17s 6d to the Government. I have put £250 worth of improvements on the place, and I want my interest at 4 percent on that. That would amount to £10. I also, as a reasonable business-man, want a sinking fund on the house, for thirty years is a reasonable life for a house.

599. Do you mean that your home costs you £26 a year? – Yes.

600. Do you think you could get a home as good at 10s a week in the town? – I would not try. I have laid out £250 of my own money.

601. But you are charging interest on that? – It is difficult to find £250 and find 10s as well.

602. I ask, can you get a house and, say, a stand for your horses anywhere near town at anything like 10s a week of £1 a week? – No, I do not think I can near the town. I would not try it, because I do not depend on the horses only for the present. I am looking at the thing at what it is worth.

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William LAWSON examined

603. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – I am a settler in the Epuni Hamlet. I hold a 1-acre section, I am paying £6 6s 9d a year, less 3s rebate.

604. What is the section? – Section 81.

605. How long have you been there? – Four years.

606. Are you satisfied with your position? – Yes, I am thoroughly satisfied with it, and I believe that any one who weighs the evidence on both sides as to what they were before they went there and what they are now must admit that the bulk of them are infinitely better off now, and, as one of those who took round that paper on the leasehold-tenure, in respect to which there was some dispute as to the signature of several names, I may say that we made it clear to every one who put his name down that it had nothing to do with the freehold whatever, that it was leasehold pure and simple, and on any one asking us what the word “amendment” meant we stated it was some readjustment of the rates, because that is really the sore point with all of them.

607. You are in favour of the lease in perpetuity? – Yes.

608. You do not find an acre too much for you? – An acre is certainly not. I think there is about £2 of rates on mine; that is far cheaper than I could get anywhere else.

609. I suppose you are a tradesman – I mean a worker? – Yes, I work in town. I am a furnaceman. As to the profitable use of the land I consider that I shall be able to make a fair thing out of it by using it in its proper way: putting up a glass house, and things like that. At present I am very pleased with what I have got.

610. Do you consider you are in a better position than workmen outside the hamlet? – Oh, yes, I believe I am. I believe most of the people in that hamlet think so too.

611. Can you get a more reasonable house if you looked around outside the hamlet at the same rate? – Nothing approaching it.

612. *Mr Anstey.*] Do you think these sections are of a suitable size? Would not much smaller areas suit some people? – I think that when a man finds his section too big for him to make a profitable use of it he should be able by application to the Land Board to have it subdivided, and I consider that the man who finds that he can work it at a profit and wishes to keep it should be able to retain his original contract.

613. You think he should be allowed to hand back one-half or three-fourths to the Board if it is too large for him now? – Yes.

614. Do you think two acres are too much for an ordinary working-man? – It depends upon what he does with it. If a man is going into town to work every day it is certainly too large.

615. Are you regularly at work as a furnaceman? – Yes.

616. Do you find time to work the acre? – I find time for all the garden material I require from it, and I am looking forward to getting a good deal of my income from that acre.

617. Your complaint is that you have the rates heavily raised on your holding? – No, it does not press so heavily on me with an acre section. The danger is in future years; it is accumulating all the time.

618. As the land becomes more valuable you will be getting it without any increase in the rent? – No, we are deprived of all increment above a certain extent because we cannot utilize it. I could not get more from my land in ten years than I do now. All the profit is what I can produce from it.

619. You said you hoped you would be able to produce a lot more from it? – I can if there is the capital to do it.

620. Do you think it advisable to subdivide these sections? – If I found my section too big to hold I think I should be allowed to cease holding part of it. I would like to make clear that point about the petition upon which I touched before. It has been stated that names were obtained to it by misrepresentation. That is altogether untrue as far as I was concerned, and, if it was thought necessary by the Commission, I could take you round to these men who signed to convince you that we did not misrepresent things to them.

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Robert Freeman HALL examined

708. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – I am a gardener, and hold 3 acres in the Epuni Hamlet, and my rent is £28 10s. It was a forfeited section. I have been there about eighteen months.

709. Are you satisfied with your holding? – I think the leasehold is a very good start for a working-man, in fact, it is the only start I can see that a poor working-man has got; but I think there ought to be some better security of tenure. I cannot, however, suggest in what way that should be brought about.

710. How do you feel insecure? – I think it would be a good thing if tenants were able to pay off a certain portion of the capital value and so reduce the rent. The main thing is to reduce the rent. The rent and rates are very large, especially in the case of some of the forfeited sections. We would like the freehold, but I do not see that there is any possible chance of getting it.

711. If you had the right to acquire the freehold, could you buy your place? – No; it took me all my time to make a start, but I would like the opportunity of buying it. My principal reason of coming here is in reference to the increase in the rent. It is the common talk of the hamlet the great increase in our rent. In the course of two years and a half, from when the land was first put in the market, it has increased about double. I may state that I have worked under great hardships since I took up my land. I put in a crop of potatoes, and they were destroyed, in the first place through the water-course being blocked below our sections, and then the blight ruined the later crop, and now my cabbages and cauliflowers are not worth bagging. I may state that I have been going out and doing two days' work a week in gardening, but everything else has been a failure. I thought that if I could get a good season I might put up a glass house and make my section pay, but, as I have said, everything has been a failure. I applied to the Advances to Settlers Department for a loan to give me a start for another season. I might point out, also, that my neighbor pays £5 and I have to pay £9 10s for the same class of land.

712. *Mr Johnston.*] Have you approached the Land Board and asked for a reduction of rent? – I have explained everything to the Board. It was in a bad state owing to couch-grass when I took it up, but it is practically clear now. The Land Board said they could do nothing for me unless I forfeited the section, in which case it would have to be put on the market again, and I would have to take my chance of applying for it.

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713. What do you estimate your improvements at? - £140 for buildings and £10 for live fences, and a 3 chain cross-fence.

714. *Mr Anstey.*] Are any of these sections at Epuni unoccupied? – Yes, five sections were taken up recently, and those sections have been idle for some time.

715. Why has the rent been increased in your case? – I do not know.

716. Did you think the rent was too high when you took it up? – Yes, but I thought if I had a good season and could put up a glass house I could make it pay. I think that if the sections were cut up into smaller holdings perhaps the land could be worked to better advantage.

717. Would not the wisest course be for the Government to cut up some of the sections into smaller areas, and leave some of them to remain at a fair size? – Perhaps that would be better.

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Harry MARTIN examined

323. *The Chairman.*] What are you? – A market-gardener or nurseryman at Epuni. I hold 2 acres of lease in perpetuity and am paying £10 17s 4d a year. I was one of the original settlers, and have been there since the 1st August, 1901. The lease I hold is a fairly satisfactory tenure, but it has its drawbacks. I make a living off the section, but sometimes I take casual work in the winter. I had a little capital when I started. I have found the Land Board fairly satisfactory, but I think it should be an elective body subject to the public veto. The lease in perpetuity is fairly satisfactory, but requires to be modified so as to allow money to be borrowed on it. I would not prefer the right of purchase; the lease is the fairest thing for the community and the individual. It might be modified to allow the holder to borrow money

from the Advances to Settlers, or to get larger advances than we can get at present. I hold the same views regarding the lease as Mr Reese, who was before the Commission yesterday. I think he said that the leaseholder should be allowed to get the same amount on mortgage as a freeholder would obtain on the same amount of property. With regard to the residential conditions, it is only right if a man will not reside on his section in a settlement like ours that he should give it up, and another man should have the opportunity of living on it. Married people with families should have the same consideration. When the Epuni sections were first opened up there was not a great rush for them, and those who applied first got what they wanted.

324. Was your section loaded with any money for roads? – Yes, the same percentage as the rest, but people complained about the bad expenditure of money. We have got a metalled road now, but as we live so close to the borough and have to pay heavy rates the settlers expect to get something more than they have got. We ought to have a good road, and the present road might be better. We are under the Hutt County Council.

325. You have some forty settlers there and should have some influence with regard to putting a member into the County Council? – The Epuni Riding is of large extent and you do not get much show as against the rest of the riding.

326. Have you any experience of the Advances to Settlers? – I have a small mortgage, but did not get half of what I expected. I could get more now, I suppose, seeing that my improvements are greater.

327. *Mr McCutchan.*] You want the lease in perpetuity to be made as good as the freehold? – Yes, as regards getting advances for making further improvements.

328. *Mr Anstey.*] We were told yesterday with regard to the Epuni Settlement that the sections were too large? – They are not too large for my purpose, but the valuation has made the rates so heavy that with the rent it does not pay to market-garden unless one can afford to have glass houses.

329. It was suggested that the State should take the land over and put it into smaller areas, of course conserving the interests of existing tenants? – That would be a good thing.