

On Wednesday the Arawa chiefs, Hori Haupapa, Matene Huaki, Wi Maihi, Mita Hikairo, Rewi, Rotohiko, and many others of less prominence, met Mr. McLean.

The first subject introduced was the present working of the Native Lands Act, in which the young and intelligent chiefs alone took part.

Rewi Tereanuku complained of the fresh imposition of fees, and desired to be informed how it was that a list of these fees was not published in the *Gazette*; that what with fees and the extraordinary way in which the surveys were allowed to be carried on, the expenses, which were a lien upon the land, were nearly as much as the land was worth. That instead of every facility being given to bring their claims before the Court, the reverse was the case. He asked whether it was true that the reason the fees were increased was so as to help the Government to bear the working expenses of the Court, as such had been reported to them?

Aporo Te Tipi Tipi said that not only were the fees heavy, but the manner in which the surveys had been made had greatly perplexed them; there was an instance of great hardship, which had been brought before the Court. There was one piece of land which had been surveyed, with slight alterations, no less than four times. Licensed surveyors flocked into the district, anxious to get work; they persuaded the Natives, and the Natives believing the licensed surveyor to be in a measure responsible to the Government, had yielded, so that in one way or another it was a source of great trouble and expense. Another grievance arising out of these surveys was, they were often clandestinely made, insignificant names were introduced into the surveyor's plans, and the well-known places were altogether suppressed, so that encroachments were made, and the claimants were not aware of the fact until it was too late.

Mita Hikairo said: I am an officer of the Native Land Court, and I feel some hesitation in speaking, but I have observed that there are alterations continually being made, and these alterations are not published in the *Gazette*. The Arawa were under the impression that the charges were the same as of old, and did not come prepared for these new fees. These heavy fees prevented many speaking who have a just claim to the land, simply because they have not the means to pay. Then with reference to the system of surveys. Every claimant has a survey of his own; and if all the surveys are paid out of the estate, it does not matter how large that estate is, it is swallowed up in expenses; as has already been heard, there is a piece of land at Maketu, which has, with slight variations, been surveyed four times. Already £1,200 of Arawa money has been swallowed up by the surveyors; this, added to the heavy fees, is a great wrong to the Natives.

It must not be thought that because the Arawa do not bring their lands forward, that therefore they have become Hauhaus. It is not so; the reason is they cannot pay the heavy expenses.

Mr. McLean replied, that if he had been made aware in time he would have considered the subject of their difficulties that had been stated, and should have taken steps to have the Native Land Court adjourned for the present. And with regard to Wi Hikairo's speech, it was clear, and as an assessor of the Court, who had had a good deal of experience he ought to be able to judge. He would not charge the Arawa with becoming Hauhaus, simply because they did not bring their claims before the Court. It was for the men they returned to the Parliament to move in this matter; they would be patiently listened to, and any suggestions or alterations they might desire would be considered. It was for matters such as these that Native Members were admitted into the Pakeha House of Assembly. It was not pretended that the Native Lands Act was perfect, and it would be well to urge the Maori Members to assist in improving it.

Mita Hikairo said: "Now that you have introduced the subject of Maori representation, I wish to give the Maori view of that matter. We do not consider that we are sufficiently represented, there are too few returned in proportion to the number of Europeans. We do not consider that Tareha is a representative of ours; letters have been sent to him from this district, but he never took any notice of them."

Mr. McLean said: "There are several European constituencies not represented as well as the Natives, if numbers are to be taken as a basis of calculation. It was estimated that there were 40,000 Natives; they have one representative to every 10,000 inhabitants. On the other hand there were some European districts where they have nearly 20,000 inhabitants who only return one member, for instance, the Gold Fields. With regard to the Native Members, the matter is in your own hands; the elections are now coming on, and you ought to return a man in whom you would have confidence."

Wiremu Maihi: "Why was the Tauranga District thrown into the Waikato (Northern) District, and Ngatiawa divided? Tauranga naturally belongs to the Bay of Plenty, and is closely connected with the Arawa. We held a meeting at Whakatane, and asked to have the boundary changed, but it has been overlooked. With regard to the question of the Native Land Court: why do not the Government appoint a District Surveyor, who alone should survey the lands of the district to which he is appointed, and not leave the Natives to the mercy of surveyors, who, regardless of consequences, have but one object—that of getting money?"

At this stage of the proceedings, I suggested to the Natives that they should embody their ideas in the shape of a letter, and bring them under the notice of the Government, and leave the matter for its consideration. This they agreed to do.

A desultory conversation took place on the mode of conducting elections, and other matters connected with Maori representation, after which the meeting broke up.

I beg to be allowed to make a few remarks upon the complaints of the Natives, especially in regard to the heavy expenses to which they are subjected in the matter of surveys. I made some inquiries, so as to satisfy myself that the allegations of the Natives were correct, and I regret to report that they have very good grounds for complaint. I would very strongly recommend that District Surveyors should be appointed, who should be responsible to the Government, not only for the manner in which the surveys are executed, but also for the peace of the localities in which they act; and to insure them every assistance from the agent of the Government resident in the district, make them subject to the directions of the Resident Magistrate. This would, I believe, relieve the Natives of the heavy expenses of which they complain, and effectually lessen the chances of awakening those bitter inter-tribal feelings so notorious amongst the Arawa.