

PETITION OF RENATA KAWEPO AND OTHERS.

To the General Assembly of New Zealand in Parliament assembled,

The Petition of the undersigned Maoris of the District of Hawke's Bay:

SHOWETH,—

That your petitioners were owners and occupiers of land in the district of Hawke's Bay before the introduction of the Native Land Court, and the said owners of land thought no evil, and were not under any law (as regards land).

That your petitioners bade good-by to their old customs when the Native Land Court was introduced, thinking that prosperity and peace would be the result; and they believed also, that, by a careful division of their lands among the proper owners thereof, they would obtain knowledge and would progress, so that in time they would be equal to the Europeans.

The proceedings of the Court were not clear, for many reasons: Much land has been granted to persons not entitled to the lands comprised in the grants; also, much land was granted, the grants being to few persons, who were to be trustees for the tribe; and because no restriction on alienation was inserted in the grant, the grantees acted towards the others interested as if they were persons out of sight and living at a distance. On the issue of the grants, the persons living among Europeans, who sell goods and are able to entrap people, were wheedled into mortgaging each one's share on account of credit given, without knowing what money or goods were to be given afterwards; and, through the fraudulent statements contained in those mortgages, the land of all was consumed by one man; and before the time for the repayment of the mortgage arrived, the storekeepers urged the grantees to sell the portions for which they were trustees for others, stating that no more goods could be supplied, and the sale was urged before the grantees were aware of what they were doing; consequently they sold for a small price, and they did not receive a statement of the accounts showing what they owed and what rents were due to them.

Those mortgages and sales were not for money but for goods and spirits. The Europeans urged the grantees to take those goods and spirits. They were also intimidated by statements that if they did not take them they would be given to others, and those who refused would not get anything.

Many grantees were ignorant and untaught: they were deceived, and got but little of the proceeds, whether they consisted of goods or spirits, of the land which they sold. They were imposed upon, not knowing that they were parting with their land for ever.

The grantees also sold land for their own particular benefit; those whose names did not appear in the grants, even though they had as much right as the former to the land, got nothing.

The grantees executed mortgages, and were urged by the storekeepers to sell. If they refused, they were told that, if they did not sign, the land would be sold, and they would be cast into prison.

Many of the grantees were well off formerly. They had property themselves, and so had their relatives, whose names were not inserted in the Crown grants, but now they are impoverished and in great distress.

Your petitioners have been informed that if the Maoris get into trouble, they should apply to the Supreme Court to investigate their grievance and grant them redress; but these Maoris consider that they are in a difficulty: they have no money to pay for the investigation, and they do not know the delays which may occur through the strict rules of European Courts. Well, the Maoris who considered that they had been badly treated in respect of the matters above stated, held a meeting to consider their grievances, and to try to find some means of relief. They spoke of their distress, and expressed their opinions as to how they could attain their desires. Your petitioners were aware that this was not in accordance with European laws and customs.

Your petitioners consider that they have informed you of a great deal of improper work, and they ask you to try and find some means of redress. Do not delay, and do not let it be by course of proceeding similar to that adopted in European Courts.

Your petitioners further consider that if these grievances are inquired into fully by persons who appear to both Europeans and Maoris to be upright in thought and in deed, their distress will be alleviated and their minds relieved, knowing that their grievance has been looked into by the Parliament; and they will abide by the decision of the persons appointed to make the inquiry.

Therefore these persons pray for the appointment of persons to inquire into the mortgages and sales, within the Hawke's Bay District, of lands which have been dealt with by the Native Land Court, which the Maoris claim under the plea that they were swindled and are now in distress. The investigation should be conducted by upright men. There should be three Europeans and two Maoris, who should be invested with powers as Commissioners.

And your petitioners will ever pray.

RENATA KAWEPO,
And 553 others.