

the property of all, to be disposed of under regulations which were to give to each individual an equal and fair right of acquiring it in such portions, and to be held on such terms, and in such manner as the Legislature might direct.

Still further, to protect the common interest it is provided by law that when the Government is engaged in purchasing a block of land it may issue a Proclamation notifying this fact, and that thereupon it shall not be lawful for any other person to purchase or acquire from the Native owners any right, title, estate, or interest in any such lands, or any part thereof, or in any manner to contract for any such purchase or acquisition. Those who break this law in truth rob the public Treasury of the large sum of money which this land would have yielded on its resale. They thus entail increased taxation on their fellow-countrymen. They also rob their fellow-citizens of that which is of the utmost value to them. And it is not an ordinary robbery, in which case, by a breach of the law, property is taken from one individual by another, but in this case the whole public is robbed, and land, the source of wealth and political power, is unfairly and unwisely distributed. An injury is thus inflicted on the whole nation, which lasts for generations. Those who have obeyed the law and thought of the common good are, together with their descendants, punished for the benefit of those who are law-breakers for their own selfish ends.

To strengthen the hands of the Government a further power was given. It was authorized by statute to relinquish negotiations for the purchase of any Native lands, and to publish a notification to that effect in the *Government Gazette*; and the law goes on to state that such Native land shall then be exempt from the effect of the first Proclamation after the expiration of two months from the date of the publication of the *Gazette* containing the notification of the withdrawal of the Government from negotiating for its purchase; this part of the law justly providing that, when the land was again opened for direct private purchase by any person from the Natives, the whole country should have full notice of this fact, and that no one should possess any advantage over his fellow-citizens in reference to the purchase of such lands. Such is the existing state of the law.

Now, what did the Government do in the matter of the Patetere Block? It knew that the previous Government had engaged in the purchase of that block of land from the Natives; that it had paid considerable sums of money upon it; and that it had issued the Proclamation in the terms of the law, which rendered it unlawful for any other person or persons in any manner to contract for the purchase of any right, title, estate, or interest in such lands.

The present Government further knew that the previous Native Minister had reported that certain Europeans had, notwithstanding this, in defiance of the law, carried on negotiations with the Natives for the purchase of those lands. That the fact of their doing this and competing with the Government had been, and would continue to be, the means of raising the price of the land which the Government was seeking to acquire for the public at large, Native as well as European, besides protracting the period of its purchase indefinitely.

The present Government also knew, from the same report, that the gentlemen who were acting in this manner had made most of their payments to the Natives on this block of land since the Proclamation was issued, which were consequently illegal; and that in several instances their survey or surveys had been made without authority, and practically by stealth.

The present Government further knew that its predecessors had plainly and positively refused to countenance or recognize a transaction unlawful in itself, and resting on surveys which it was informed had been made by stealth. It was also evidently unjust to the many who were obeying the law that the few who were breaking it should be allowed to realize a vast property by illegal acts.

But, worst of all, on this point it seemed wrong in the extreme that the Government should join in trampling the laws of the country under foot, by showing any persons, however powerful and wealthy they might be, that the Government would aid them in acquiring property and wealth as a consequence of illegal acts. Yet it appeared that such would be case if the Government gave its assistance in this instance, for the same Native Minister, as you are aware, had reported to the previous Government that it should be borne in mind, if it did not accept the proposals of those who were engaged in the purchase of the Patetere Block by means which he regarded as unlawful, that the parties were very powerful and well supplied with funds, and would make as hard a fight as possible, trusting to the chance, perhaps, of a change of Government and to altering (*sic*) in the existing land laws.

There ought not, in the administration of the law, to be any question of powerful or weak, rich or poor. Unhappy, indeed, is that country in which it may be considered necessary that its statesmen are to inquire into and bear in mind such points in dealing with the most valuable rights common to all.

Notwithstanding the circumstances I have stated, the present Government entered into a correspondence, which, with all respect, I believe is almost unparalleled, with those who were engaged in the negotiations for the purchase of the proclaimed block of land from the Natives. In this correspondence it privately gave them information as to the terms on which it would be disposed to allow the purchase to be completed by private persons; and whilst it allowed the Proclamation to remain over the block, which rendered it unlawful to acquire any right, title, or interest in it, the Government aided them in several ways in acquiring the land.

The present Government had a distinct statement made to it by the law agent of the purchasers that they were using every means in their power to acquire the whole block from the Natives, and at the same time he also told the Government: "We cannot trade with the Natives, or pay moneys, or obtain signatures, as such would be illegal, and could not be made good by subsequent removal of the Proclamation." Yet the Government had been told by the highest authority that the persons making these representations had at that time already unlawfully, and in breach of the rights of their fellow-subjects, paid moneys and obtained signatures; whilst those who respected the law could not move a step in the transaction until the Proclamation had been revoked and a period of two months had elapsed from the date of its revocation.

But not only did the Government favour the purchasers of the land by giving them private notice that it was prepared to revoke the Proclamation, and by other means, but it acquiesced in a plan by which it was sought to remove a difficulty raised upon a question of whether Native land under Procla-