

nearly two months were spent in taking evidence upon the Bill. Some of that evidence was of a very valuable nature, and threw much light on the provisions of the measure. At the same time Mr. Wi Pere suggested a number of amendments, while Te Puke te Ao and Wahanui drew up some amendments of their own. I ventured myself also to suggest some amendments. Now, there was no time for the Bill to pass through last session, because the evidence was taken up to within four or five days of the end of the session; and so the Committee agreed that the evidence and Bill, with the amendments suggested by the Maori members and by myself, should be printed, with the object of having the measure further considered next session. I have mentioned these matters so that you may see that I have adopted every means in my power to make the Native people fully informed with regard to this important Bill. You will now be convinced that there has been no attempt to pass in the dark a measure so closely affecting your interests. We have sought to have the fullest light thrown upon the Bill; and with that object I am here before you to-day. I do not begrudge any time spent in considering this measure, so long as we are likely to take a step in advance; for my opinion is that in this matter we cannot afford to stand still. You have seen large tracts of your land passing away from you into the hands of speculators, and you have derived very little benefit from the transactions. It fact, it appears to me that the best and most frugal man in the tribe is very much at the mercy of the most extravagant men. It has long been my opinion, therefore, that something should be done to place larger powers in the hands of the Natives themselves, and, at the same time, that what is done may be for the benefit of both races. If that object can be brought about then you will have the assistance of the best Europeans in the colony to place upon the Statute-book measures which will be for your lasting benefit. I shall say nothing about the opposition to the Bill, but I have no doubt that you have been informed by your members and by others that there was very fierce opposition to this Bill. But I will say this: that I think the opposition came entirely from those Europeans who have been for a long time living by speculations in Native lands. Now, the question which we have to consider with regard to the Bill is this: What does the Bill do? We may differ upon this point, but I will tell you what my intention is, and I will also say at the same time that I think that the Bill, with the amendments suggested, will carry out that intention. In one word, the intention of the Bill is to place in the hands of the owners of the land, through their Committees, absolute power to control the disposition of the land by sale or lease. It does not place in the hands of the Committees absolute power; if it had done so there would have been this danger: that the Committee would have been very much in the position of the ten trustees in their absolute control over the land. The Committee is subject to the veto of the owners, who elect it. The owners may at any time have the Committee dissolved by a majority of two-thirds. Any owner of land who is not on the Committee may have his own share of land cut out, and not dealt with by the Committee. It has been said that the best men may not be elected to the Committee, but, even supposing that the best men are not elected, still every man is protected because he can have his own share of the land cut out and not dealt with by the Committee at all; and here I am bound to say that this provision was not originally in the Bill, but was suggested by Mr. Wi Pere and by Mr. Carroll, and after considering the matter I thought it was only right, and proposed it myself as one of the amendments. Now, I have told you what the main principle of the Bill is—namely, to place the control of the land entirely in the hands of the owners of the land, and I am sure that no Maori can possibly object to that principle. It may be said that the Bill does not do that, but I am prepared to argue the question with any person who says that, and to show that it does do that. I am not prepared to say that the Bill is perfect. No Bill is perfect until the minds of all the people who are interested in the question have been fully informed, and have been expressed. For instance, my own opinion—arrived at since last session—is that possibly we can do without the Boards: so long as the local Committees have perfect control the Board is not required. Now, objection has been taken to the powers given in the Bill to the Governor in Council; but if you come to look into this matter you will see that the power given to the Governor in Council is absolutely necessary to enable the machinery of the Bill to work. I say, deliberately, that no important measure that has been passed in recent years gives less power to the Governor in Council than this Bill does. This is the power that it gives: the Governor may make such rules and regulations as he may think fit for the better enabling of this Bill to be given effect to; for we have found by experience that after Acts are passed some hitch may occur which would prevent the working of the Act unless there were a provision of this kind. I may say at once that I agree with most of the amendments which have been proposed by Wi Pere and Puke te Ao. There is, however, one amendment which I think will have to be discussed between us. It is proposed in the Bill that there shall be a reduction of 5 per cent. for management, and a sum for the cost of surveys and roads. Now, my own opinion is that 5 per cent. is a reasonable amount to pay for the cost of managing the Native lands under the Bill, and that no one ought to object to it. No commission agent will manage European lands for less than 5 per cent., and you ought to be as willing to pay that small amount for the management of the lands as to have them managed free. Then, with regard to the cost of surveys and of roads, I would put this to you: lands cannot be disposed of unless they are first surveyed and some kind of roads made to them, but the amount to be expended in roads and surveys might be left to the Committee, and the Committee might agree with the Commissioner what proportion of money should be taken out of the proceeds of the land for these purposes. Passing on from that, there are provisions in the Bill called remedial clauses, which give the Commissioner power to lease the land for fourteen years where Europeans have obtained possession of the land without any legal title; and then, again, there are provisions with regard to restrictions, and so on. I do not think that these should form part of the Bill, and I am prepared to cut these portions out. In fact, I am not myself anxious that they should be embodied in any legislation. I should like to say one word with regard to restrictions. I have always considered that restrictions were placed on land to prevent the land from being alienated from the Native people. During the administration of my predecessor a great many restrictions were lifted in order that the land might be sold, but since I have been in