

Council should be expunged from the Bill. There has been a discussion about the Native Land Court, but that discussion has not been completed yet; that subject has been adjourned for the present. These are the subjects which have been discussed so far by the meeting. I shall now give my own individual views regarding this Bill. I object to certain principles in it, because they do not accord with my views. Possibly, however, it can be altered to suit. I do not attach much importance to the title of a Bill. I think that the main point is the matter it contains—the meaning of the various clauses; but I think that the objection made to the Board is a legitimate one; there is no reason for having that Board; I think that the Commissioner will be quite sufficient. I do not think it would be for the benefit of the Natives to retain the Board. I think that, if the Board is to be placed in a superior position to the Committee, your wishes that this Act may be for the good of the Natives will not be carried out. The one point that the Natives insist upon is to have the absolute disposal of their lands. If the Board is done away with, the Natives will then have a more direct control over their land. Now, with regard to the Committee, the Natives have many reasons for being extremely cautious about the powers they give to the Committees. There should be some very clear provision inserted in the Bill, which would enable the owners to direct the Committees what to do, lest the Committee should act as the ten trustees in the grant acted, who pay no heed whatever to the desire of the owners. It may be that, when an election of a Committee takes place, some will approve of the election and others will oppose it; but the Bill provides that the majority carry the day, and that the minority have to give way. Now, this difficulty would be met if you could suggest some machinery for cutting off the portion belonging to the dissenting owners. If there is only one dissident the course would be quite clear; but it might happen that there are ten. Are they to have a separate Committee to administer their ten interests, or what is to be done? What are the ten dissidents who have their interests cut off to do? How are they to administer their land? It is true that there is a provision in this Bill which states that, if the owners in a block happen to be less than eight, it will still be legal for them to elect a Committee. My own private opinion is that, where the owners of a block are less than eight, it would be quite superfluous to have a Committee elected, because you may say that that land is individualized, the number of owners is so small. In my opinion, the principle of having Committees is only meant to apply to blocks where there are a great number of owners, so as to facilitate the dealing with such lands. However, the meeting is in favour of having Committees. I shall now speak of the clauses relating to the deduction of a certain amount for expenses. Perhaps it is only right that 5 per cent. should be deducted for paying expenses, but it should be considered that Native lands already pay very heavy taxes, which ought to be quite sufficient; and if 5 per cent. is deducted from these lands a corresponding reduction should be made in the heavy duties that the Maori lands have to contribute. The Natives now have to pay 10 per cent. on the value of any lands sold or leased. It is true that the Natives do not pay that money directly, but it is deducted from the price of the land. Then, again, rates are imposed on Native lands. Could not a reduction be made in these rates? With regard to the deduction of a certain amount for the cost of surveys, the Natives are now in the habit of paying for surveys themselves. They also pay the Court fees fixed by the Court for the adjudication of their lands. I think it would be a good thing if these clauses could be expunged from the Act, because they create distrust in the hearts of the Natives. I cordially indorse what you have said with regard to the removal of restrictions from Native lands; and I earnestly hope that the Government will consider this matter very carefully, and take into consideration also the question of sending a Commission to all Native districts, and making permanent reserves for the Natives. I think that the objections raised by the Natives to the large powers taken by the Governor in Council under this Bill are not unreasonable, although you have explained that not nearly such large powers are reserved to the Governor in this Bill as in some others. That may or may not be the case. These are my ideas with regard to the Bill. I think that we ought to come to some mutual understanding as to what is best to be done. The thing to be considered is whether we shall adopt this Bill as it is, or some other measure. This Bill has been given to us because it is considered an improvement on the Acts passed formerly; but we should consider whether this is so. I indorse what Henare Tomoana said about the evils that have resulted from former laws. It is perfectly true that, under the law which provided that only ten persons could have their names in the grants, mortgages and other transfers were legalized which resulted in the land passing away from the people. Then, with regard to the next law that was passed, which provided that no more than ten persons should have their names in the grant, and that the names of the other owners should be registered on the back of the certificate; it was thought that this law was devised in the interests of the Natives; but it was found that these ten persons appropriated the whole of the proceeds, and there were no means by which the registered owners could bring them to book. That law was altered; and a law passed subsequently provided that the whole of the owners should have their names inserted in the certificate or memorial of ownership. Many of the former evils have been remedied; that is to say, the provision whereby only ten persons were placed in the grant was replaced by the Act of 1867, by which the bulk of the owners were registered. Also mortgages and such transfers have been made illegal. Another Act that has been passed for the benefit of the Natives is the Native Lands Frauds Prevention Act, which provides that before a man can sell or lease his land the Trust Commissioner is to make full inquiries. In my opinion, the Natives are protected to this extent at present: every man who has an interest in a piece of land can have his name put in the certificate; and every man is protected by the Native Lands Frauds Prevention Act. They are also protected by a provision of the law which says that it is illegal to buy land until three months after it has passed the Court. Would it not be well to add to the benefits which the Natives now enjoy by improving the present laws? Would that not be better than making a radical change? Which would be the better plan? I will not answer that myself. I think it is a point on which every man should speak for himself. Some say that if the present Native land laws were improved and amended many of the grievances now existing could be done away with. Some again say that if the Native Land Court were made to do