

can be done. We, the chiefs of the Island, have given way and accepted your suggestion about the 5 per cent., and we hope that you will be able to do something for us in return, by having a reduction made in the duty. This is a matter which emanates from myself alone. There is a part of your speech about which I am not perfectly clear. What I asked yesterday was that the Chairmen of the Native Committees should be associated with the Commissioners. I understood you to reply that you agree that the Native Committees should be associated with or assist the Commissioners.

*Hon. Mr. Ballance* : Perhaps it would be as well for me to reply to what Tomoana has just said, so as to make the matter perfectly clear. I am very glad to hear that the meeting has agreed to the proposal contained in the Bill with regard to the 5 per cent., because it will greatly strengthen my hands when the Bill comes before Parliament. Tomoana has asked whether I am prepared to recommend a reduction in the Native land duty. There are two ways in which a change might be made for the better, so far as the Native people are concerned. A suggestion was made yesterday that, instead of the money being paid down all at once, we should return to the former custom of having it paid annually. The effect, in my opinion, of the money being paid down at once is to reduce the price or rent of the land. Of course you are aware that it is the purchaser or lessee of Native land that pays the duty ; but, in the case of rented land, if a man has to pay down a large sum at once—say, the whole of the duty for twenty-one years—he will very likely deduct the amount from the rent he pays to the Native owner, for the large sum is of course felt by him, and he makes a harder bargain with the owner of the land ; but I am inclined to think it is different when he only pays the 10 per cent. every year. In that case I think the Native can exact nearly if not quite as much rent as he could if there were no duty ; for this reason : the amount of the rent is governed by the number of people who wish to get the land. Besides, to pay a large amount of money down at once injures the lessee, who may be a small man without much money, and he may have a difficulty in getting so much money paid down, and therefore it reduces the number of competitors for the land. Having considered this question, I am prepared to urge strenuously that the request made yesterday by Tomoana should be complied with, and that the money should be paid annually. Then, with regard to the amount, I am inclined to think that 5 per cent., if the money is paid down at once, would be enough, and indeed that 5 per cent. would be enough any way ; and I am prepared to press that matter on the Colonial Treasurer and the Government as a concession to the Native people ; but I will say at once that I should very much like to see the Native Land Rating Act, which applies to lands which have not passed through the Court, repealed ; and I think it would be better for the Maoris to adhere to the 10 per cent. if they could get that Act repealed. The matter is this : it is not a question of what I or the Government are willing to do, it is a question of what Parliament will do ; and that is the reason I speak to you about getting greater power in Parliament that will enable you to carry through legislation. I feel convinced that if the Natives were to exercise the power they have under the law as it exists, in the way of placing themselves on the rolls, that they could get in reason whatever legislation they want ; because it will not then be only the four members who will be in the House, but they will be able to affect half the seats in the North Island, and in some instances they will actually be enabled, so strong are the Natives, to put in their own member. When that time comes you will have every European candidate coming to address the Native people, and making promises as to what he will do for them if he is returned to Parliament. That is my view of this question. I shall explain at another time how simple this matter is, if you will only take it up earnestly. Now let me explain about the Maori Committees—the Chairmen assisting the Commissioners—I said this might be brought about by referring the allocation of the money to the Committees instead of to the Native Land Court, and I promised to have the Land Court struck out and the Committees put in, but that the people should have the right of appeal to the Land Court if they were dissatisfied with the decision of the Committee. And then I said further that I would consider carefully in what other ways the Committees might be useful in assisting the Commissioner ; that matter I have not yet fully thought out, but I intend to give it a great deal of thought, and put it in the amended Bill, which I intend to submit to you before Parliament meets. I think the suggestion is a very excellent one, and I am perfectly sure that the Chairmen of Committees can render valuable assistance. Now, with regard to the misrepresentation in the newspaper report, I noticed that, and I was very much surprised at it. I cannot understand any man sitting down deliberately as a reporter, and conveying a wrong impression. I cannot believe that any man is so dishonest as to deliberately convey a wrong impression. It is a case of either stupidity or of dishonesty. However, I do not think it will do any harm, except that it gives the Europeans a wrong impression altogether with regard to what the Natives have done ; but I have got my own report, which will be a correct one, and I shall take care that the right impression goes forth. I have now touched on the various matters referred to by Tomoana, and perhaps it will be convenient if I wait until some other speaker has expressed his views before I say anything further.

*Mr. James Carroll* : With regard to the newspaper misrepresentations I agree with what you said yesterday that if you were influenced by such statements you would not be fit for the office of Native Minister. It is quite true that his meeting did object to a number of the provisions of the Bill as it was brought before Parliament, and the object of this meeting has been to improve the Bill and suggest amendments. I thank the Native Minister for the explanation he has given us regarding the 10-per-cent. Native duty and the imposition of rates on Native lands. It is quite true that if the 10-per-cent. duty is to be paid in advance there will be a reduction in the rent of Native land, but if it can be paid annually as proposed it will be a great relief to the Maoris. I think if we could get this done we should withdraw our request for a reduction in the amount of the duty, for it would be a more difficult matter to get a reduction than to have it arranged that the amount should be paid yearly. Now, with regard to the proposal to make the Chairmen of the district Committees assist the Commissioner, I am not clear as to how that will be arranged. If the Chairman of a district Committee is appointed to assist the Commissioner to distribute the