

28. *Mr. Ballance.*] Was not the commission more than 1s. 6d. at one time?—Yes; I have explained to the Committee that the Trustee's charge was at one time 2s. in the pound. Mr. Ballance considered the charge too high, and said he would try and arrange to have it reduced.

29. Were there not charges for travelling-expenses and other things beside made by the Commissioner?—It actually exceeded 2s. in the pound. Mr. Reynolds told me it was not to exceed 2s. in the pound, but when they produced the accounts, and I came to Mr. Hamerton, he told me that it was a little more than that.

30. *The Chairman.*] Suppose there was no Public Trustee, would the Natives themselves be able to collect from those Europeans their rents, and divide them in the same way as they are divided by the Public Trustee, without any dispute or trouble?—Yes; they would be quite competent to collect the money and divide it satisfactorily. We should be quite capable of doing this, because we are all closely related: we all belong to the one hapu.

31. Am I to understand that you would all be agreeable to adopt that system?—I can only speak for my own hapu. We are willing and anxious to have the collection of our own moneys. As to the arrangement made by the Trustee, I think that the moneys should be paid to the Natives at once by the Trustee. In the case of any tenant being behind with his rent, the land should be given up and the lease be cancelled.

The Chairman.] Whatever the arrangement was with the Public Trustee that will be carried out. As to cancelling the lease, a legal course of action must be adopted before you could cancel a lease.

Mr. R. C. HAMERTON, Public Trustee, examined.

32. *The Chairman.*] What quantity of land, Mr. Hamerton, do you administer under this trust; is it extensive?—It is a very extensive block of land. I should state that there are two distinct systems as regards the reserves: one, a very large area, has been leased by the Public Trustee; the other is a large area, but much smaller, and was originally leased by the Natives, but under the Act of 1884 the rents under the lease are payable to the Public Trustee.

33. Have you any idea what the rents amount to annually?—I would have prepared myself with all the requisite information, but I did not know what I was summoned for. I should say it amounts to £4,000 or £5,000 a year. I could let you know the amount exactly.

34. Will you tell us to-morrow the number of Natives that receive rents, and the amounts?—Yes, I can do that.

35. Do you know anything about this lease?—Yes. If that is the lease shown to me in my office it is still in full force.

36. With the exception that the land is reduced by 73 acres?—I know nothing about that at all.

37. There were 73 acres taken from the block for school-purposes and some other purposes; the tenant, therefore, pays so much less in proportion?—The rent is payable to Mr. Rennell in New Plymouth, so that I have not at the moment the knowledge to enable me to say what amount has been paid.

38. Have you heard what Mr. Ballance has said, that the Natives are supposed to get their money on the date it becomes due, and that there is a regulation to that effect?—Yes, I heard what Mr. Ballance said, and would ask if it was an Order in Council.

39. *Mr. Ballance.*] No; it was a regulation made in accordance with my memorandum—a memorandum which I wrote to Sir Julius Vogel as the head of the Trust Department: has it been adopted?—It has not been adopted. I pointed out that it might land the office in a tremendous loss. The order received and acted on since then is, that we should pay the Natives their rents on the 1st January and the 1st July, instead of October and April.

40. Has that been carried out?—It has been carried out to the letter; but, of course, when a man has not paid his rent we do not pay it for him.

Mr. Ballance.] I think the order was that you were to pay this rent whether the man paid his rent or not. The matter was carefully considered. The Trustee has always a large amount of money in his hands belonging to Natives, and it was felt that some concession might reasonably be expected on that account. There would be no loss whatever incurred by the Public Trust Office.

41. *Mr. Monk.*] You charge $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. for collecting these rents: is not that very high? I have heard that similar duties have been performed for $2\frac{1}{2}$?—There are expenses connected with the collection: we have to pay a man's salary; when a tenant is in arrear we have to pay for legal costs.

42. Would not the tenant have to pay that?—Yes, if we could recover it. As a matter of fact, at $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. the collection is landing the office into a loss now.

43. *The Chairman.*] You are working under the Act of 1884, and you are limiting yourself entirely to the provisions of that Act?—Yes.

44. *Mr. Ballance.*] There is a wide distinction, is there not, between the block of land represented by these petitioners and other blocks of land leased by the Public Trustee further up the coast?—Yes, a very great difference.

45. The question arises whether it is desirable to allow these Natives to administer their own property?—If you ask me for my own opinion, it is that it would be better to do so.

46. That applies to those Natives who have confirmed leases?—Yes.

47. This is one of the confirmed leases?—Yes.

48. Do you see any reason why this land should not revert to the Natives, to deal with as they please, after the expiration of the lease?—None whatever.

49. Has any promise been made, or is there any obligation that these leases shall be renewed at the expiration of the term?

The Chairman.: By the Trustee?

Mr. Ballance.: By any one?