

administration of their lands to the Natives, so that property might come to them. [*Hansard*, Vol. lix: passage read.] The reason why I withdrew my opposition to that Bill of 1887 was because of the Premier making this promise. It is this statement of his which has caused so much confusion among us. Another thing the Natives complain of is the conflicting regulations and laws dealing with these Native reserves. First a law is passed to administer these reserves in a certain manner; then, some time after a different measure is passed. One law provided that no person should lease more than 640 acres of these lands. I have already pointed out that since then people have been acquiring very large areas—1,000 or, perhaps, 2,000 acres.

2039. *Mr. Bell.*] That has nothing to do with the reserves?—All I can say is that the lessees are acquiring much larger areas than the law allows them. Another complaint that the Natives make is that a large portion of their rent is being stopped to pay the expenses of the arbitration.

2040. *Mr. Sinclair.*] Did you have anything to do with the arbitration proceedings yourself?—No, I did not.

2041. Was an attempt made to get you to act as an arbitrator?—I took a part in the subdivision of the West Coast lands. The Premier asked me in the House if I would act as one of the arbitrators, but I would not agree to it.

2042. Why would you not agree?—I did not think that duty was compatible with my duty to my constituents as a member of the House.

2043. Was there any other reason?—That was my main reason: I had a great deal to do as a member of the House.

2044. Have you seen any of the results of this arbitration?—I have seen that this arbitration has resulted in great injury to the Natives. I should like to quote something I said about this matter in the House upon that subject:—"Block VII., G. Johnston: Old rent £15, new £14 18s.—reduction, 2s.; cost of arbitration, £39 14s. 3d. Block XIX., Wilson and Frere: Old rent £55, new £52 11s. 4d.—reduction, £2 8s. 8d.; cost of arbitration, £56 17s. Block XL., J. Ross: Old rent £300, new £252 8s. 9d.—reduction, £54 11s. 3d.; cost of arbitration, £166 15s. 5d. Block LIV., F. Riddiford: Old rent £5 3s., new £4 4s. 2d.—reduction, 18s. 10d.; cost of arbitration, £51 9s. Total cost of arbitration in the case of thirty-five leases, £2,713 16s. 8d."

2045. Do the Natives also complain, not only that their rents have been reduced, but that they have to pay for their being reduced?—Yes: evil is heaped upon evil, wrong upon wrong.

2046. *Mr. Seddon.*] Where did you get those figures from which you have just quoted?—They were all obtained from documents furnished by the Public Trustee.

2047. *Mr. Bell.*] You are yourself, or were, a member of the Public Trust Board?—Yes, I am a member of the Public Trust Board. What I am about to state is what I have been informed by the Natives. The Natives complain that the cause of their suffering is this: The Premier comes from Taranaki; he represents that district in Parliament; he makes it his business to get all the benefits he can for the people who send him to Parliament. The Natives are continually making this statement to me. This is why the whole of the benefits have been bestowed on the Europeans at the expense of the Natives. The Natives make the very same charges against the Public Trustee, Reserves Trustee, and the arbitrators themselves came from Taranaki and are interested in the benefits which the European lessees derive. My own experience carries out the justness of this statement which the Natives make. I have received documents from the Natives bearing on this subject.

2048. *Mr. Sinclair.*] Do you consider the Natives capable of managing their own affairs in this district?—I believe they could manage their own affairs in regard to their land with the assistance of a competent officer.

2049. There are two propositions suggested: the first is that a committee should be elected, the second is that the Receiver of Land Revenue should be appointed?—The best proposal, in my opinion, is to take the administration entirely from the Public Trustee.

2050. But what would you put in his place? would you have a committee or the Receiver of Land Revenue in the place of Mr. Rennell?—I think it would be best to place the administration in the hands of a Native committee; then all the money paid into the Public Trustee's Office would be saved, for the Native owners would not make any charge for managing their own affairs.

2051. Have you any past experience of Native committees?—I have had experience of certain Native committees.

2052. Has that experience been satisfactory or otherwise?—The work of some committees have been satisfactory; in other cases it has not been satisfactory because there were no powers given to them by law.

2053. *Mr. Bell.*] You were in your place in Parliament during the first session of 1887?—For a short time: I was elected to fill a vacancy caused by the death of the member for our district.

2054. But you were a member of the House when Mr. Ballance, the Native Minister in Sir Robert Stout's Government, brought in a Bill dealing with this subject?—No, I was not in the House then—at least, I think not.

2055. Did you not see the Bill that was brought in by Sir Robert Stout's Government in the first session of 1887—that is, the Bill of 1887—of the first session?—If I were shown a copy of the Bill, I could tell you whether I saw it or not.

2056. It passed the House of Representatives and went up to the Legislative Council. It is very much like the Bill passed in the second session of 1887: there is very little difference. It was translated into Maori and sent up to the Council. Do you not remember it?—Yes.

2057. Then there came the dissolution of Parliament in 1887?—Yes.

2058. Did you go and address your constituents on the West Coast?—Yes; I went to Patea.

2059. And you addressed them there?—I did.