reserves, and I think that there has been nothing brought against the office except of a very light character, so I pass that. But I am directed to point out that, whilst the Committee has gone into what I call the Public Trustee's leases, none of the lessees have come forward, or have had notice; so that in a sense the Public Trust Office has, as lessor, to protect their interests. And I would wish in a few words to say, first of all, that the title of these Acts is "The West Coast Settlement Acts," showing that it was never intended at any time to alter the fact that they were reserves of a permanent character and for a very long and indefinite time. That being so, all that was done was done on that idea. I would point out that until after the Act of 1887, and the actions were instituted, nobody found fault with the legislation of 1881 or the regulations of 1883. I will not say there were no isolated cases, but there was nothing brought forward, and each year they (the fault-finders) took advantage of what they ascertained the preceding year to make more definite charges. Now the interests are very large and varied. There are said to be 231 leases, and with a very few exceptions these are separate leases, and several of them are subdivided, so that there may be said to be at least that number of separate lessees. They have families, and their whole interests are bound up in these leases; and they have contracted, subcontracted, mortgaged, and the like, to a very large extent upon the security of tenure. If the regulations of 1883 are going to be upset so far as the leases are concerned, in regard to compensation and qualified renewals, then the interests of the large district which was intended to be settled will be altogether upset and unsettled, and things will get into chaos; and therefore, so far as the Public Trustee's leases are concerned, I would respectfully submit they are within the meaning of the Act and of the regulations, and that if the regulations are in any way *ultra vires*—I know a good deal can be said on the other side—then they should rather be validated than invalidated, because the largeness of the European interest involved in this question has to be considered, without saying a word against the Maoris as fellow-colonists. They are a decreasing race; their interests are really looked after to a very large extent; and the policy of these Acts was undoubtedly to give them an annuity. The error which has been committed, first to last, is in giving them possession of parchments called Crown grants they ought never to have issued to them. Then in regard to those, sir, the question behind this is very large. I do not hesitate to say that with one or two exceptions the titles themselves, in the lawyers' meaning of the word, are in thorough mutual agreement. Several of the grantees go up to the number of 200 in a grant. Past experience has shown that in the larger grants some of the Natives have never existed, or cannot be found since. The titles are all tenancies in common; there are many Natives in duplicate names—that is to say, if A is in one part of a grant, B, the same individual in fact, is in another part of the same grant. I am not aware of anything more than a duplication. I have not found in any instance a triplication; but duplication is not at all uncommon. Then a great number of the original grantees have died. To these, succession orders have been obtained and not registered, and the titles are simply in a glorious mess, and they have been increasing every day, so that it is almost impossible to know who were the original owners of land under the Crown grant. The question is therefore simply this, as appeared in the evidence—because to go to the root of the matter, I believe the easiest way would be to call in all the Crown grants and have a reissue of the titles. I am not here to defend the confirmed lessees, only so much of the action as has been under the statutory authorities given in 1884 and 1887; but I would point out that the idea which it seems to me that the Act of 1887 had was to put these confirmed lessees in exactly the same position as the Public Trustee's lessees were at the time they first took up their leases, and then to let both start on a uniform basis, because they are all in the same group of land—they are all under the same law, under the same Crown grants, subject to the same restrictions, and, I imagine, Parliament in its wisdom, by the Act of 1887, put them all on the same footing.

Mr. Stewart: Do you mean to say the twenty-one years' leases?

Mr. Wilson: It would be thirty years. Now, if it were not so, there would be no sense or reason in the unimproved value, because it could not be argued for a moment that by the enactment of section 7 of the Act of 1887 something was taken from the Maoris after the provision of section 13 of the Act of 1884. That must have been the policy of the Legislature in so doing.

Hon. the Chairman: Do you consider, Mr. Wilson, that the compensation clause, we may call it, in the confirmed lease and the compensation clause in the Public Trustee's lease are identical.

Mr. Wilson: It would so seem.

Hon. the Chairman: Do you say they are so?

Mr. Wilson: They are so in the leases issued, and they would be in the others if issued.

Hon. the Chairman: There is no difficulty in them at all.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, there is this difficulty: Under the regulations of 1883 it is stated on the Public Trustee's lease that the renewal shall be by public tender. The statute says by public auction or public tender, and I require that the alternative should be put in. Well, I do not know that I need say more on that, except to point out, as I have said before, that the attack now made upon the Public Trustee's leases is to upset and invalidate the rights created by the regulations of 1883, which are undoubtedly upon the lines of settlement, and permanent settlement, and which the Legislature has recognised by giving similar rights under "The West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1887." Then, sir, again I would point out that nothing was heard against the interests of the lessees until the agitation commenced under the Act of 1887.

Mr. Stewart: What do you mean by agitation?

Mr. Wilson: Maori petitions. I say nothing was heard of this until after the Act of 1887, and the Maoris, under the original confirmed leases, had no rights at all, because the leases are declared by statute to be illegal, and their being made legal did not give any rights to the Maoris under them, but it simply gave certain rights equivalent to the rights which they had under the Public Trustee's lease. That is the meaning of the statute, undoubtedly. As regards the management by the Public Trustee—although I have no authority to say so, though it is an open secret—he would be better pleased to have the administration taken away from him than to retain it.