

by the Government to recoup them for the payment of these taxes, together with interest on the same, the Natives will then for the first time learn what they have to pay. I wish, therefore, that a provision should be inserted in the law, whereby the Natives may be enabled to become members of the County Councils, so that they may see into these matters. That law affects all parts of the districts that come within the operation of the County Councils. According to our idea, it is very necessary that the Natives should know what is being done in these local bodies. That is all I desire to say with regard to Acts affecting the Natives. There was another question put by the Commissioners last evening with regard to the Native Land Court. The chiefs and the people were asked if they were satisfied with it, or did they object to it and wish any alteration to be made. We have also considered this matter at our assembly, and we do not see that any other means can be adopted for the end in view than those afforded by the Native Land Court. We had the Native Committee plan arranged for in 1884. These Committees sat in different places among the Native people, and were not able to do anything. The Natives acted very cordially with these Committees, but their decisions were not satisfactory. We think that the Native Land Court should remain, but with certain modifications in the way of simplifying the business, and that the matter of paying fees should be made easier. As I said in the beginning, we are speaking purely from the Native point of view. We think that the fees should be reduced to 10s. a day. Then, too, there is the question of objectors to claims being required to pay £1 per diem as a hearing-fee. The opinion of the chiefs is that it is only when their case comes before the Court for hearing that they should be asked to pay a fee—that is to say, only paying when their own witnesses are called, or when they are examined. Then, again, there is the matter of a fee of £5 being demanded as deposit when applications are made for rehearings. The chiefs say that this is too heavy a fee. Some are able to pay that amount; others are not. In some cases a person may have very good grounds for applying for a rehearing, but he may not have the necessary money, and for that reason we say that this fee should be reduced by one-half. Those are the things that we say are objectionable with regard to the Court. With reference to what the Commissioners said as to the appointment of Native Committees to do the work that they mentioned, they do that at the present time. The Court now confirms any arrangements that are come to outside, and the law of 1890 lays it down that such arrangements, when come to, are to be reduced to writing. Therefore there is no necessity for any alteration with regard to that. As to the question put by the Commissioners, whether the Natives like coming from a distance to attend the Court, or would rather have the Court sitting near their places of abode, we say that of course the Natives would much prefer the Courts to hold their sittings near their places of abode. But the difficulty there is that many of these places are such a long way from the land that is being adjudicated upon. If the Court were to go to one Native place, the people from other places would be inconvenienced, and so on, and that is the reason why we are not clear as to the views we ought to express on that head. What we really prefer is that the Court should be held as near as possible to the place of abode of the people whose case is under adjudication. That is all I need say on that head. Now, with regard to the suggestions which the Commissioners threw out last evening about going back to the old way of dealing, the chiefs have carefully considered that matter, but they think it would not work well—that it is right enough that at one time the people of the hapus and tribes would look to their older people, and the chiefs would have great regard for their people; but now the feeling has changed, and the people do not look so to their chiefs, nor the chiefs to the people. That suggestion which the Commissioners made last evening is somewhat similar to that proposed by Mr. Ballance in 1886. To that Act of Mr. Ballance the whole of the Native people in the Island were opposed. It is questionable whether they would be able to choose the best men for these Committees; and then, when they did so, matters would be solely in the hands of the Committee, and the Commissioners and the people themselves would have no voice afterwards. We also think that the expense of management and of having these Commissioners throughout the country would be heavy. I think I should say, further, that this matter has been brought very suddenly before our minds, and we have not had an opportunity of thoroughly considering it in all its bearings, but I would merely remark now that, on our first impressions, we would object to it. We think that, when the title to the land is ascertained, and the owners are ascertained also, it should then remain. We say that no one should have any extra power in regard to it; that the Natives then should consider what proportion of the land they would reserve for themselves, and what proportion they would lease. What we, the Natives who have cases brought before the Court, seek for is to get a Crown title for our land. Then, when we get a Crown grant, why should we have any one to tell us what to do with it? The lands of the Europeans are not dealt with in that way. This is our reply to what has been said by the Commissioners. That is all I wish to say. Perhaps the Commissioners would like to put some questions to the chiefs.

*Mr. Rees:* In the first place, the Natives do not quite clearly understand, unfortunately, how it was proposed to deal with the land. What Pepene has just said about Europeans dealing with their land in the way he suggests is a mistake. They never do. For instance, in the case of lands held by a number of Europeans, the individual Europeans never sign the deeds. They always appoint a certain number to act for them, and it is they who have the power of sale, and the individual owners of the land never dream of signing any of the deeds. Thus the Europeans in Cambridge have not the opportunity individually of any direct dealing in respect of what they call the reserves belonging to the whole people in Cambridge. You may call these people the Ngati-Cambridge. If they are going to sell or lease a portion of that land the people in Cambridge do not sign the deeds for that purpose. The Mayor and one or two of the Town Councillors sign the deeds, and put the seal of the town to them. If a number of Europeans own, say, the Patetere Company's estate, or the Agricultural Company's estate, there would be perhaps a hundred and fifty or two hundred owners for that land. But the individual owners never sign any of the deeds. They appoint directors—that is to say, a committee of themselves—who always sign the deeds. So with