

Then, the meaning of that is, shortly, that the majority of owners in the block should assent to the sale by an individual owner?

*Mr. Rees* : What has just now been said by Edwards is exactly contrary to what Taonui said this morning, and to what Taonui said to the Native Minister the other day. This system of allowing individuals to deal with Native land has been a perfect curse to New Zealand from the very commencement; and if the restriction had been taken off this land by the Government all the lands now possessed by this people would be in the same condition of litigation as the lands at Gisborne and Napier. It is impossible for us to say who has advised the Natives in this matter, but such advice as that now given expression to by Edwards is bad advice, wherever it comes from. And the very worst argument the Natives can bring to the Government, in asking them to take off the restriction, is to say at the same time that each person is to be allowed to sell and lease as he pleases. That sort of thing has involved the whole country, both Maoris and Europeans, in difficulties; and I, for one—I am speaking now as only one of the Commissioners—do not believe that either the Government or the House of Representatives would take off the restriction if they believed that everybody was going to sell individually to Europeans—if, in fact, we were going to have the same condition of things here as has prevailed in other parts of the country. The feeling of many of the Europeans is getting very strong about this Maori-land question all over the colony. The Europeans are most anxious to do what is right and proper for the Maoris, and if the Maoris will themselves help in guarding their own interests the Parliament will be the first to assist them in doing so. But if the restriction is to be taken off only to allow men to get money by selling individually their interests all over this land to Europeans, the Parliament is not likely to take off the restriction. The result will be that the opportunity which is given to the Maoris now will be lost; and if it be so the Maoris will have themselves to blame. And then they can reckon with the advisers who have given them such advice. I should like to hear Taonui, because he spoke this morning, as well as before the Native Minister, in a manner which seemed to everybody to be sensible and clear. But this speech of Edwards now is going back to the very worst advice with respect to Maori-land dealings—advice which has led to war in the past, and to everything else that is evil. It is different also from the speeches made by the chiefs of all the other great tribes which we have met. If the restriction were removed, and every man and woman were allowed to sell their shares in the lands, not knowing where the land represented by those shares was, or what their true value was, it would mean trouble, and loss, and legal proceedings without end.

*Henry Edwards* : It appears to me as if the Commissioner is angry with what I have said. Do not let him be mistaken in thinking it is my own thoughts I am expressing. It is the result of the deliberations we have had. What I said with regard to individual and collective dealings with land is the result of the questions that were put to me. It is not that we of our own accord gave that matter consideration. But I am very glad, nevertheless, to hear what you have said. With regard to individual or collective sales, our fixed opinion is that we do not approve of them. We have no desire for individual or collective sales. That is our opinion at the present time. But the subject was mentioned, and it was thought better that each individual should deal with his land, and that the majority, or the Committee, or the Commissioner should not act.

*Mr. Carroll*.] Is that your opinion—you do not approve of sales?—Yes.

But that if any individual desires and persists in desiring to sell, his portion should be cut off, so that no trouble may result to the non-sellers through his sale?—Yes.

That, then, is with regard to the question of selling. Now, are you favourable to opportunities for leasing being granted?—We are agreeable to leasing in accordance with our own arrangements and terms.

Then, the meaning of what you say is this: that you should lease your lands as you think fit?—Yes.

With regard to leasing, should the lease be by an individual of his interest in a block be allowed, or should the consent of the whole of the owners or of the hapu that owned the land be gained?—We will know that when the time arrives for the desire to lease.

The probabilities are that in the next session Parliament will pass a law in accordance with what it thinks proper on the subject. Now, before Parliament does that—before it sets to work to pass a law—it has adopted the course of ascertaining your views on these matters. Then, if you understand what course should be pursued with regard to leasing the land at the time you may desire to lease, now is the opportunity to make known those views to the Commissioners, lest it should so happen that when the time arrived for you to make up your minds as to how the lands should be leased Parliament might already have passed a law, and that law might not be in accordance with what would suit you. That is the reason why you are asked to let the Commissioners know to-day what course you will adopt, supposing that in the case of a block with a hundred owners in it it was desired to lease at the present time. On what principle, then, would you have it leased—by the individual owners, or by the consent of the hapu or the whole body of owners? Because Parliament might put such a question as this to the Commissioners: “What are the views of the Natives of Otorohanga with regard to this question of leasing?” And in case that question was put, the Commissioners now desire to be placed in a position to give a definite answer, so that if you wanted to lease your lands it would be understood what course you desired to adopt?—Any one understanding the European custom will understand that we have been speaking from the Maori point of view. We have not arrived at a definite conclusion as to what course we should pursue in the future with regard to leasing. We are not in a position to lay our views before you. We have not expressed a desire to sell or lease our lands. The subject has not been considered by us. The first thing we require done is to have the restriction removed.

*Mr. Rees*.] What for, if you do not wish to lease or sell?—What we mean is, that after the restriction is removed, then we would consider the question of leases.

*Mr. Carroll* : Then, your view would be this: We will solely consider the question of removal—E—G. 1.