

As for instance, in this way: If they let the lands for a certain number of years, that at the end of the term they should revert to them?—I am not aware of any such promise.

As far as you know, they were simply leases made for the terms for which they profess to be made?—Yes.

Then, the leases, from the earliest time down to the latest, were simply made for the terms which they bestowed, without any provision for the future?—Yes.

Do you think it would be in the public interest of this district that such a plan as you propose should be adopted, irrespective, I mean, of the mere individual interests of the parties?—I do not know that it is in the public interest, because the reserves are comparatively few; but to the class of tenants concerned, it would undoubtedly be of great interest.

Of course, they are a part of the public?—They are a part of the public.

Can you suggest any other method by which the interests of the parties could be conserved than that which you proposed?—No; I do not think I can. I think that to give them the right of renewal at a fair rental would suffice.

For what term?—That is a question which never entered my head. I presume that if legislation took place in that direction it would give them a kind of perpetual right.

I was just going to ask you whether you consider that, under the restrictions imposed by the law with respect to this perpetual-lease system, it would be a fair thing to bring these cases under it?—I should say so, but not on the basis of the unimproved value of the land.

You would make some difference? You would not exact the whole value of the improvements, but only a portion of it?—Yes; it should be a compromise, in fact.

I see that to the Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament, before which you gave evidence last year, you stated that the Natives had for themselves—for their cultivations, and so forth—amply sufficient reserves: have you any reason to alter that opinion now?—None whatever; but it related to West Coast Commission reserves.

You still say that, notwithstanding those reserves which have been leased, the Natives have an ample area remaining for their own wants?—Much more than they require. I will not say in every particular, but generally.

More than they use?—Much more; thousands of acres more than they ever will use so far as present appearances go. A great deal of the land is bush-land, and I am afraid poor bush, and I do not believe that the Natives are at all likely to interfere with it. They might, if forced by circumstances, fall back on it, but not so far as present appearances go.

*Mr. Mackay.*] They have an ample area of open land for themselves in their present reserves?—You are speaking of the West Coast Settlement Reserves? Yes. They have ample reserves in that land. In fact, in some cases the only open lands have been reserved for them.

*Mr. Rees:* Is there anything, Mr. Smith, in addition to what Mr. Rennell has stated, that you wish to say on behalf of these gentlemen, or that they would like to say for themselves, because, if so, we should be very glad to hear either you or them?

*Mr. E. M. Smith:* I think that the questions you have addressed to Mr. Rennell have had the effect of putting the matter very fairly. I can safely say that these gentlemen are really very industrious men—that they are really a great acquisition to the place, and that it would be cruelty to drive them from their holdings, of course taking into consideration the necessity of acting fairly towards the Native owners. There is one point, however, that Mr. Rennell has not touched upon, and that is, that these particular leases are dealt with differently from the manner in which the Native reserves are dealt with on the East Coast of this Island. There, I am informed, the Commissioner has power at the end of the term to renew the leases, or else to put these leases up for competition in the interest of those who made the improvements.

*Mr. Carroll:* That refers to the leases in the South Island, as at Greymouth for instance.

*Mr. Smith:* I merely mention this as showing you the particular grievance of which these gentlemen complain. I quite agree with Mr. Rennell that if you can bring them under this perpetual-lease system and reassess the property, taking the evidence of both parties, you would be likely to meet the case. Again, you asked Mr. Rennell if he thought the Natives had sufficient land reserved for their cultivations, and for keeping them in a manner in which they ought to be kept, and if they had any surplus land that they were not dealing with. In order to satisfy yourselves as to that you have only, if you can find the time, to travel over this district and pick out the sections that are in the hands of the Europeans and contrast them with the lands that are still in the hands of the Natives. You would then find that something ought to be done in the direction that we have indicated.

*Mr. Rees.*] You are speaking of the surplus land in these reserves for the Natives over and above what they require or use for their cultivations?—Yes. Maoris come to me every day clamouring to have an alteration of the law so that they may be enabled to deal with their surplus land. I am quite of opinion that the time had come for this Commission to be appointed, and I hope that, as a consequence of its work, things will be better in the future than they have been in the past. The great grievance here of those who occupy the land is that so much of these Native lands are lying idle and yielding no return in the way of rates, the result being that if any roads are required to these lands the industrious settlers have got to make them at their own cost. I might mention, as a particularly hard case, that of Mr. Mitchinson. No man in this country has put more labour, skill, and energy into his particular land than has this gentleman, because, as a gardener and nurseryman, he is not to be excelled. He has been promised over and over and over again that something would be done to meet his case. He has gone already to considerable trouble and expense over his gardens, but he would have improved these gardens still further if it were not for this continual doubt in his mind as to the uncertainty of his tenure. I hope you will so draw up the report resulting from your labours as to induce Parliament to give him and these other people who are in the same position absolute relief.