

You think the Public Trustee ought to be authorised to pay that, and distribute the charge for it over a number of years?—No; but to take it out of the first payments made in respect of the land, and let it then be done with. I think that would be better. The Natives would not feel it so much as if it were spread over a number of years.

Are all these reserves made under the Act liable to the 10-per-cent. duty, with the lands generally of the Natives in their districts, on the first transaction?—I think not, but I should not like to give a positive answer.

*Mr. Mackay* : No; the Public Trustee's leases are not. West Coast Settlement Reserves are specially exempt, but not the other Native reserves. It is provided that where Natives themselves carry out sales or leases they are subject to this duty.

*Mr. Rennell* : Of course the rates have to be paid, and at present the tenant must pay that before he can register his lease.

*Mr. Carroll* : The Native lands on the East Coast are subject both to the stamp duty and to the rates which have accumulated under the operation of the Crown and Native Lands Rating Act.

*Mr. Rees*.] Then, acting for the Public Trustee, you do not lease land comprised within these reserves unless the Native owners, or a majority of them, are willing that it should be so leased?—No; and the majority are simply guided by a few of the leading men. If you ask the Natives to agree to let the land, the majority will tell you No. A great many of the Natives of this coast belong to Te Whiti and to Parihaka, and are not at all inclined to let.

Is there anything else you wish to say? Is there any reform which you can suggest that with advantage might be incorporated in any new Act?—I would like to say something with reference to the succession duty.

*Mr. Mackay* : That had better come afterwards.

*Mr. Carroll*.] Those Natives who are under the influence of Te Whiti are against the leasing of land in any form?—Yes.

Can they be reasoned with at all?—No; they are perfectly willing that any Native should do as he pleases with their shares, but they are not willing to sign. That is the feeling.

Do you think, if they could be induced to throw their land open to lease through the channels prescribed by the Act, that it would obviate any of the difficulties which at present exist?—Yes.

That is really the stumbling-block?—I think so. There is a strongly-expressed opinion that the Natives should be allowed if they wish to deal with the land themselves.

And you think, in view of their reticence to deal with their land at all, that some system should be devised whereby the land should be leased, and whereby the land could be brought under the operation of the Act for their general benefit?—I think it would be to their advantage hereafter, at all events, and also to the advantage of the European settlers. But there is a great number of these lands—isolated reserves—which nothing can be done with at present. People ask me to try and make the Natives let or fence these lands, but I have no power to do so.

*Mr. Mackay* : There is no clause in the Fencing Act which compels the Natives to fence.

*Mr. Smith* : That is the great stumbling-block in this district, and the great grievance of the settlers. They cannot compel the Natives to fence or compel them to act under the Furze Ordinance, or take a portion of their land for a road, as they can with European land. If you could see your way to individualising this Native land first of all, you would get over a lot of the difficulties.

*Mr. Rees*.] I am afraid we cannot do that. That has been a bone of contention for a great many years. My colleague, Mr. Carroll, made a wiser suggestion, which would effect what is desired if we can get the Natives to act together. Do you think, Mr. Rennell, from your intercourse with the Natives, that if they themselves were allowed to elect Committees which should have partial power of working with you, for instance, they would be inclined to accept such an arrangement?—I think that such a Committee would be only one in name, the same as now exists. I am guided now by what the leading men think.

The Committees to which you refer are not elected by the people; the people have no voice in it?—Practically they are not elected.

Supposing you go a step further, and get a real election—have these men elected by the people, and clothed with the necessary responsibility and power—could they do good work, acting along with you?—I am not prepared to say how it would work, because it has never been tried. We had an election once of a Committee for the district; but because it was held at Opunake, the three men elected were chosen from that place, but they were not of a representative character. None of the other Natives joined in the election. I am afraid the District Committee would not be of a representative character.

*Mr. Carroll* : The Natives here, as I understand, are under this Te Whiti craze, and have thereby placed themselves under a disability legally. They are not capable of administering their own land—in fact, they will not. They would not vote in the election for a member of the House of Representatives, nor would they, I think, in respect of a question of this kind. They would simply stand aloof.

*Mr. Rees*.] However, any change in the direction of giving them an active share in the administration of their land, and of affording them the assistance of a Commissioner or a trustee like yourself, would be a bit better than the present state of things?—Undoubtedly, if you could only get them to do it and to take an active part.

Then, you find great difficulty in getting the Natives' assent generally to anything like fencing or letting their lands, or letting roads be carried through them?—Yes. Of course, with reference to roads, the local bodies have the power to take land for roads, but if they carry a road through Native land they improve that land, and yet get no return for their expenditure. Still, I think they have the power to make the road.