

*Tutange*: Salutations to the Premier. There is nothing I have to say, but merely support what those two have already stated. I merely support what they have said, because it is not only their words, but the words of the whole. We have come to-day into the Premier's presence—we and all the people of our class. I want to speak what Ngarangi and Ngapaki have spoken. That is all I have to say. May the Premier live for ever!

*Hon. the Premier*: I am glad to have met you all here to-day, and to have heard the expression of your opinions, although I must say I am rather disappointed with those opinions. It appears to me you are in a state of war, with the war-paint on. You are not prepared for any compromise, or any agreement, or to make any concessions. The speeches remind me of the war-dance—I do not mean the actual war-dance, you know: I mean you are prepared to show no mercy to those unfortunate people. And no doubt you think you are powerful—all-powerful—by virtue of the judgment in the Supreme Court; but I would remind you that the powerful ought to be merciful at the same time. It may be found, too, that there is a wise policy in being merciful. You have not secured the victory altogether yet, even in the Supreme Court. The settlers have rights which you have not fully considered: there is a law still which affects them. My object in coming here to-day was to arrange, if possible, some kind of agreement which could be based on equity and fairness—some agreement that would be fair to both races. I do not wish to take from the Natives any rights they now possess. And I will now go through the points raised by Mr. Broughton. First of all, with regard to the improvements, I am inclined to think that there is a great deal to be said for the Native view of the case. When I brought in my Bill in 1887—that was not the Bill that became law: the Bill that became law was Sir Harry Atkinson's Bill. Before we left office in 1887 I brought in a Bill which secured to the Natives their improvements, with one exception; that exception was houses—private houses. These houses were put up by the Europeans on the understanding that they would have renewals of their leases; for the Act of 1884 did give them power, apparently, to have their leases renewed. It did appear to me, therefore, that it would be fair and equitable that the Europeans should have the benefit of the houses which they had erected; but all other improvements—such as fencing, and grassing, and draining, and so on—were, in my opinion, the property of the Natives. Well, now, I cannot say, of course, what would be done with regard to these matters; but if we do legislate upon these matters we shall legislate upon the lines I laid down in 1887. My opinion has not changed since then. And now, with regard to the question of the rents accrued. The Public Trustee has taken action to recover the old rents—the rents which are due up to the present time. He has a considerable amount of money in his hands: that money is the property of the Natives, and will be distributed amongst them forthwith. There will be no delay in that matter. Therefore the rights of the Natives have been upheld by the Public Trustee in seeing that these rents have been paid; and the Public Trustee considers it his duty to enforce payment of these rents—a duty imposed upon him by law—and to pay the rents forthwith over to the Natives, who are the proper owners. Now, with respect to the expired leases, I do not draw any distinction between the leases that have expired and those that are unexpired. It appears to me that they stand in the same position. I will come, however, afterwards to the question as to the renewal of the leases. The law that Mr. Broughton says he wants, and that the people want, is to take the lands from the Public Trustee. If we agreed with you that the lessees had no rights, we might take the land from the Public Trustee's hands, and hand it over to you; but, as we believe the lessees have rights, we think, in order to protect them, it is necessary to retain the lands in the hands of the Public Trustee. Now I come to the heart of the question. Mr. Broughton says he will not agree to new leases—to any consideration or reconsideration of the position of the tenants as far as the leases are concerned. My own opinion is that the Natives ought to agree with the lessees for a fair rent on the present value of the land, less the houses erected upon it, and that that should be validated by law if necessary. We are not sure it is necessary. We are inclined to think that the law as it stands does give the Public Trustee power to lease for twenty-one years. I have put that matter before you simply, and without many words. I want you to carefully consider it. The desire of the Government is, as I have said, to deal fairly with both parties—to get the Natives a fair rent for their lands, and to obtain for the lessees a reasonable tenure. I do not know that I have anything more to say. I do not come to you for a decided answer to-day. I want you to consider the whole question fully and fairly. There is plenty of time between now and next session to have the matter reasoned out. I shall always be glad to receive any of your chiefs who should be sent to Wellington, and have the matter fully discussed. I do not wish to do anything in haste, and I thought it would not be fair to you to introduce a Bill next session without having met you face to face. You will now have an opportunity of considering the words I have said to-day. They are friendly words; and, although they have not been such as Mr. Broughton would seem to expect, still I believe that they are in the interests of the Natives, and it will be wise for the owners of the lands to consider them fully before they come to a final decision to oppose them. There are many men in the House who are desirous of passing legislation of a very different character from what I have stated to-day; but the Government desire to stand between both races, and to deal fairly between them. I have nothing more to say; but, if any Native has any question to ask, I shall be glad to answer it, and to explain anything I have said.

*Ngarangi*: I have heard all that you have said, and it is clear to me. I said to you a little while ago, "Let the Public Trustee be done away with in regard to our lands." As soon as they got into the hands of the Public Trustee there was trouble, great trouble. Our money and all have been lost. This is one of the things that caused the trouble: Some of the leaseholders go two or three years without paying. How is it the Public Trustee does not step forward and see to this matter? This is another word I have for you: This lease I hold in my hand—the money for the first five years has to be reduced.

*Hon. the Premier*: What lease is this?

*Ngarangi*: George Gower. These leases have been let at a low rental because the house and