

entered into subsequent to December, 1879. But the lessees in all matters have followed, as far as practicable, the law in existence at the time; and the regulations made by successive Governments led up to the Act of 1884. This Act allowed confirmed leases to be issued on the surrender of the old leases. But the Act of 1884 was found to be inoperative, and the Government then, to remedy this, passed the Act of 1887, forcing the surrender of the leases and the issue of new ones, on certain rents and conditions to be arrived at by arbitration. This Act also empowered His Excellency the Governor in Council to make regulations for carrying into effect the arbitration. The regulations were issued, and the arbitrators appointed—one by His Excellency the Governor, and the other by the lessees. These arbitrators proceeded under the regulations that were issued, and held Court, took evidence upon oath, and made their award, and, as is well known, at a very heavy cost to the lessees—something like between £4,000 and £5,000 for the costs of the arbitration. The lessees accepted these awards as binding, and conformed to them; but subsequent to this appeals were made by the Natives to the Supreme Court, and the matter was afterwards carried to the Court of Appeal, and it was decided that the regulations issued by His Excellency the Governor in Council were *ultra vires*, and all the awards in consequence invalid. This decision has been appealed from—at least, the necessary preliminaries have been taken to carry it to the Privy Council. A great many of the leases, I believe, have expired, and something was required to be done to keep them floating. Of course the Natives will attempt to eject the tenants. In many cases actions have been already commenced against them.

*Hon. the Premier*: Not by the Natives.

*Mr. W. Symes*: By the Public Trustee as representing the Natives.

*Hon. the Premier*: I understand, Mr. Symes, that is for non-payment of rent; not to eject the tenants because the leases have expired, but through non-payment of rent.

*Mr. W. Symes*: And not through the leases having expired?

*Hon. the Premier*: No. So I understand.

*Mr. W. Symes*: Petitions were made to the House of Representatives in 1890 and 1891, on which reports were made, which I need not refer to. We think that, seeing it is impossible to carry out the promises of successive Governments; that the Acts give thirty-years leases to the lessees; that they have been put to considerable cost in the matter—the cost of the arbitration, law-costs, and then again to considerable expense in further improvements on the strength of those Acts—we think that, as it has been admitted in the House by the heads of successive Governments that the lessees were entitled to some compensation in these matters, we would ask that it be considered as one of the points. And on behalf of the leaseholders I say we are willing to accept ordinary twenty-one-years leases, at a rental of 5 per cent., computed upon the present land-tax value, less improvements; so that I think it will be clearly seen that the leaseholders are quite willing to meet the Native owners on liberal terms, and in no way are they hostile to them, so far as I am aware. In fact, so much the contrary that in many cases the Natives have themselves expressed a desire that the present lessees should have new leases. It is now only a very short time ago that my principal landlord himself was very desirous that I should have new leases, and I have heard many others express themselves in the same way in other lessees' cases. So that I think it is clearly shown we are not in any way hostile to the Natives, and that we are quite willing to meet them on fair and reasonable grounds, and we ask nothing but what is considered fair, and reasonable, and just, as far as it can be granted. We ask for nothing unjust or unreasonable from them. I think that is the main point. If any of the lessees can help me in anything I have forgotten, I shall be very pleased.

*Hon. the Premier*: Would any other settler like to offer any observations?

*Mr. Riddiford*: I believe you said just now that your view of the way to settle this question—I may be wrong—would be to allow for the houses and buildings put upon the land, and for the tenant to pay upon the improved value. I may state that in some cases the houses would be a very small matter on a farm. I will take my own case for instance—and I am not singular. I have principally a bush farm, and most of my money has gone in felling this bush, and if I were to pay on the improved value, I should stand in no better position than any outsider would. I presume if I paid on the improved value I should be paying the market rate, and I should not be protected in the slightest. As far as I am concerned, I think that would be rather unfair. It looks to me like a sort of rack-rent, because my neighbour, who has not improved his farm, and left it mostly standing in bush, would be rated on the unimproved value. I who have spent my money and energy in clearing this farm—I should be paying on my own exertions. It seems to me that would be very hard.

*Hon. the Premier*: How long have you had the land? For what time does your lease run?

*Mr. Riddiford*: How long to go?

*Hon. the Premier*: Yes.

*Mr. Riddiford*: I hold various leases: six years is the shortest.

*Hon. the Premier*: How many years have you had it?

*Mr. Riddiford*: Twenty-one years. I have occupied it from the first.

*Hon. the Premier*: I may say, gentlemen, that, although I gave my views, I did not go into matters of detail. It may be a great hardship in a case of that kind; but the settlers agreed with the Natives that they were to pay on the improved value of the land—that is to say, they were to hand back the land at the end of the term. That was the condition of your leases, was it not?

*Mr. Riddiford*: That was the condition; but I had a verbal arrangement with them that I should have a renewal. But that goes for nothing, as it is not in the lease to verify it. I might mention that there was a piece of land adjacent to mine occupied by men whom they termed speculators, and who did not improve it, and they came to me and offered me, if I would take up that land, they would forego any rent—if I would buy it from the then lessee, they would forego the rent. They were pleased, I presume, with the way in which I had improved the land, and I contented, unfortunately for me, and took it up.