

opposed the measures which were introduced in the House. That has been the chief reason why you have not had legislation before now; and you will all recognise the difficulty we have in getting legislation of this kind through the Legislature.

*Mr. Davidson*: We have been trying to deal with the Natives all along; but with them it is not so much a matter of leasing the land to the Europeans as it is a matter of getting the land back into their own hands, under Te Whiti's direction. I may be wrong, but I do not believe that a single objection has been raised in the case of the awards in the Patea district.

*Hon. the Premier*: I can only say I am not under Te Whiti's influence. You will admit that?

*Mr. Davidson*: I do not think so. I hope not.

*Hon. the Premier*: Any legislation that passes through the Legislature is not at all likely to be influenced by Te-Whiti-ism, and we are not likely to allow the lands to pass into the hands of the Natives. I have told the Natives all through that the settlers have rights, and those rights must be respected. I have not for one moment expressed doubt on that point. I am prepared to defend the settlers up to what is fair and right in this matter.

*Mr. J. R. Lysaght, sen.*: I am afraid one of the propositions—that the settlers should treat with the Natives themselves—would so far be utterly unworkable, simply on the ground that Mr. Davidson alluded to just now—that the Natives are looking forward to resuming possession of the land, and dealing with it themselves. But for various reasons I do not think we could rely upon anything like unanimity amongst the Natives. In fact, none of the large bodies of Natives would consent without the concurrence of the leading Natives; and they are looking forward to getting the lion's share of the land, and the rental as well; and that proposition, I am afraid, however much we might wish it, would be utterly unworkable. I appeal to the body of leaseholders with whom I have been in the habit of acting if that is not borne out by fact. With respect to valuation upon property-tax returns, that might be workable in regard to those leases which have expired, but in the cases of those gentlemen who have further terms to run, of course, subject, as you said just now, to a valuation as to what the remaining term was worth, a valuation could no doubt be arrived at. I am afraid the other proposition as to treating with the Natives would be utterly unworkable.

*Hon. the Premier*: I do not say that I have been fortified by legal advice in the matter, but I throw out the suggestion that most of the settlers, if not all the settlers, have what may be termed good holding titles—that so long as you pay the present rent you can hold your land. That is a consideration for you. I do not say that is good law; but I am inclined to think you have good holding titles as long as you pay your rent. There has been no process served upon any lessee to turn him off his land as long as he pays his rent. Some settlers have not paid their rent, and the Public Trustee is advised that he would be acting contrary to the law in allowing the lessees not to pay; and he has enforced payment in order to hand the money over to the Natives. But he does not interfere with the tenure so long as the rents are paid. If it is true that you have good holding titles while you pay the rents, the Natives would be just as anxious as you are to make fresh arrangements. All these are suggestions I am throwing out for your consideration. I do not say you should take that particular course, and open up negotiations. That is one of the many courses you might think over before the time comes to legislate.

*Mr. Siggs*: In my own case there are 350 Crown grantees, and I only know three—

*Mr. J. R. Lysaght, sen.*: I am very much of opinion that if in your interview with the Natives you distinctly gave them to understand that it was hopeless on their part to enter into possession of the land—that they will be more amenable to reason. In that case I think the bulk of the Natives would be able to come to some other arrangement; but as long as they have got the idea that at the expiry of the leases they would be able to resume possession, I am afraid it would be futile.

*Mr. A. S. Hobbs*: I would like to make one remark in reference to the leases—that, knowing some of the Natives, and some little of the people that mix up with them as interpreters, and so forth—suppose my lease is out, and So-and-so's lease is out, I wish to treat with the Natives to get it on a fair rental—at the rental you suggest—with the improvements, houses, and so forth: what is to prevent the same thing taking place as has taken place in respect to the old leases? If I wish to renew it, another person comes to the Natives, and says, "I can give you 9s. or 10s. on it. I will give you more." So that the present occupier has no chance with them if the Natives have to deal with it themselves. I certainly suggest that the matter should be entirely left with the Public Trustee. I know there are some in this room who have done it, and will do it again.

*Mr. W. Symes*: There seems to me some slight misapprehension as to the improvements. It was not a hard-and-fast rule laid down, but it was what the Government considered just improvements. We do not take it as land-tax improvements, but what the Government considers just improvements. I think I understood you suggested buildings as an improvement. If the Government consider that to be the only just improvement, I think I can speak authoritatively for the lessees that they are quite willing to submit to that. We have laid down no hard-and-fast rule as to the improvements whatever. Several have also spoken about attempts to get the lands from the Natives, which you, sir, have so clearly explained. I think, myself, it would be quite useless. In my case I think I had some nineteen out of about twenty-seven, or something like that, of grantees at a meeting who consented. They wanted to know what *homai nomai* I would give them. I said, "Nothing." One of them suggested that I should give them £100; but they were quite willing I should have the leases if I would give them *homai nomai*. That was all they wanted; and I think that a lot of the other cases are the same. They all want to get the money. They would give leases three or four times over in my case if they got *homai nomai* each time. I myself would leave it entirely with the Government to consider what should be just and fair improvements.

*Hon. the Premier*: If you have no other observations to make, I would simply conclude by suggesting that before next session you should appoint a committee. I believe there is a committee appointed, but you should make up your minds as to what course you think should be pursued,