

The Premier, in reply, said,—I feel greatly pleased at being present to-day to meet you all, and I feel sure that I shall be able to remove the doubts and misapprehensions regarding the Bill mentioned by the first speaker. In being here to-day we are dealing with you the same as we deal with Europeans. When Europeans desire to see the Minister, and to hear an explanation on matters affecting their interests, they request him to meet them. I am here, and feel sure that good will result from this interview. Now, there is just one thing that I should like to say to you. The first speaker to-day is not of your tribe and not of this district—he is a stranger. I do not think it was right that he should speak on behalf of the Natives of this place. I came at the invitation of the Poroti Tribe to see them, and not to meet agitators from the eastern coast. To show you how unreasonable he is, when I asked the question, “On what grounds do you object to the Bill?” he could give no reasons—he simply said, “We object to everything.” Now, the speakers direct from the Poroti people are more reasonable, because they said, “We do not understand it—we are prepared to listen,” it has given us some trouble because of our ignorance, will you explain? Now, there were a people many years ago, when the greatest Being that ever came upon earth came amongst them and told them what was for their good, refused absolutely to listen, and in their blind ignorance they committed a great sin. But there were a few who listened and received relief, and through them the whole world. Now, there are a few Natives whom I have spoken to in reference to this Bill. I was down the Waikato amongst the Maniapotos. Now, the Maniapotos and their chiefs have gone carefully through this matter, and they say to the Government it is best for the Natives to have such a Bill passed, and thanked them for passing it. Now, I will shortly show you that it is to your own interest. Formerly, in selling land, you were bound by the Treaty of Waitangi to sell only to the Government. Your forefathers pledged the Native race only to sell their land to the Government. Now, you never had an opportunity before this Act was passed of having this land valued before it was sold, and of having independent persons as representatives of the Native race to fix the fair value before it was offered for sale. Now the persons who have to fix the value of the land are the Surveyor-General, the Commissioner of Taxes, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and the Native member for the district, and the Natives to be appointed by the Chief Judge of the Court. Now, that is the same sort of power, only more potent, as that which is given under the Land Act, which deals with settlement of Crown lands. You are not bound to sell unless a majority of the owners of the land signify their intention to that effect. Well, now, suppose a majority decide to sell—the land is then taken under section 7 of this Act. Under this Act you will enjoy a privilege you never possessed before—in fact, you can sell to any one you like, providing it is for the upset price fixed by the Board I have just mentioned, or for as much above that as you can get. The land is submitted to public auction, and any person has a right to buy. The Natives get the full market value for their land. Consider well this Act, and you will find that it is the most liberal Native-land purchase law ever passed by Parliament. If you do not accept the offer given to you, and the freedom it gives, all I can say is you are doing yourselves a wrong. A question has been raised as to the mode of dealing with lands. Some people advocate the committee system, and others deprecate it. The latter contend that trustees in the past received moneys for the land, spent the same, and never accounted to the owners. Now, the Maniapotos do not want to have committees. They want every Native to have his land, and to deal with it as he likes. But some Natives in the Waikato who have no land say they want to be provided for through the medium of committees or trustees. In respect to these two questions the Government have no strong feeling. They are prepared by legislation to make it cut both ways, so that the Natives can tell the Court under what conditions they would like their title to issue. When telling you so much, that brings me to the question of putting the land through the Court. You have mentioned that to-day because you wanted the Court to sit here. As we stand in the colony at the present time, you Natives know as well as I can tell you that the time has come when we should no longer permit whole tracts of country to remain in a state of nature—unoccupied by yourselves or by Europeans—simply lying in a state of waste. It is no good to the Natives. Although wealthy in land, they are practically poor, living in a state of destitution. The Natives do not know who are the owners, so far as the land-laws are concerned, and they do not know how much land belongs to each Native, and they are forced to live in such a state of uncertainty that all their aspirations to settlement and cultivation are dulled in consequence, and eventually they become impoverished. The young men grow up, and there is no work for them to do, they are anxious to work, but they have no future—they do not know what belongs to them—the result is, they acquire bad habits. They wish to advance with the pakehas. Their fathers and mothers would like to see them do this, but the circumstances which exist do not favour them, you have not got your lands through the Court, and you do not know what you own, individually or collectively. If you knew what belonged to each, or to any corporate body of you, then you would know what to do. You are not doing justice to yourselves, your children, or the colony. This is what the Government want to bring under your notice. We do not desire to force you, but it is to your advantage to have use made of your lands, and we wish you to assist us in putting in the statute-book that which will give relief to you all. The time is opportune. You have a Government in power friendly-disposed towards you. We do not want you to take up a negative position, because if you do it will be detrimental to your own interests. I have now been through the country from Ohingaiti to here. I have met the Natives in all the parts I have travelled, I have spoken to them as I have spoken to you to-day, and the result has been very beneficial. I want my words to rest on you. I want you to ponder over them, and, after going through the matter, submit your views to your member of Parliament, that he may speak for you, and help to pass such laws as will be in your own interest and promote the welfare of the colony. I will come to another question upon which you touched, and that was the question of roads. In respect of roads, from the time of the treaty already mentioned to the present there has always been power