

The Premier Do I understand from you that you have not had the Act, and that you have not read it and do not understand it?

Pene Tauī The only question to answer is, Why is it passed into law? Some have received it, some have not.

The Premier The Native Land Purchase and Acquisition Act was passed last year. It received the assent of the Governor on 6th October, 1893. When the Act was going through Parliament, a number of Natives, who held a meeting at Wellington, expressed a wish for a postponement of the Act, so that the Natives should have an opportunity of knowing its provisions. Therefore it only came into force absolutely on the 1st January last. It has, therefore, been law since the 1st January, and is in operation wherever the Government desire and can effect a Proclamation. So far the Government have not put any Proclamation over the land. We have had applications from Natives to have their land put under the Proclamation, but I thought that all the Natives in different parts of the colony should be fully acquainted with the law before we acted under it. It would not be fair for one district to have an advantage over another. There are some Natives who might object to having a law brought into force and a Proclamation issued affecting their land when they did not know its provisions or anything about it. The principles of the measure are briefly these. By the Treaty of Waitangi the Natives agreed that all lands were to be sold to the Government. When your forefathers agreed to that, they no doubt intended that the Government should pay them a fair value for the land. There has always been in my mind a doubt as to whether the Natives got a fair value for their land, because the Government generally waited until the necessities of the Natives forced them to sell, then, being the only purchasers, the land was bought at a less price than its fair value. Now, there were no means or ways of settling the disputes between the Government and the Natives as to what was the fair value. The Act we passed removed that difficulty and it also facilitates the business of dealing with waste lands. The great trouble in the past has been that Natives would sell their land, but, as a rule, they never completed the transfer and the expenses of partition came upon the Natives who had not sold. Where the interest was small, the expenses of survey and putting it through the Court ate up the land, and the Natives got little or nothing. Now, by the Act of last session this is obviated—a better system is introduced. A majority of the owners of a block, if they come to a decision to sell, say to the Government, “We will sell or allow you to lease this land for us”; and there is an independent Board, consisting of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, the Commissioner of Taxes, the Surveyor-General, the Native member representing the district, and a member appointed by the Judge of the Native Land Court. In this selection there is an independent Board of impartial persons, who decide whether or not a fair value is offered for the land. Of course, if the owners offer to sell they fix their own price; and, so long as the Government consider it a fair price, and the Board also consider it so, there should be no trouble. It is very much the same as the Land for Settlement Act which applies to Europeans who desire to sell their land to the Government. Under this law, if two-thirds of the Native owners do not desire to sell to the Government, or allow the Government to lease for them, they have power under sections 26 and 27 of the Act, to submit the land to public auction. It is sold by public auction under the same law and provisions as though the Government were selling Crown lands. Generally speaking, these are the main provisions of the Act passed, and it is the most liberal law that has ever been passed in the colony affecting the Native race. If there are any other provisions of the Act that require explanations, I shall be only too glad to give them to you. I have a copy of the Act here. I have only now given you the general provisions of the Act. It would shorten business if I confine myself to answering any questions you desire to ask.

Pene Tauī (addressing the tribes) The meeting has heard that this Native Land Purchase and Acquisition Act is now law. We have the Act and have gone carefully through it, and there are some here who can point out the faults we see in the Act.

The Premier I shall be very pleased to hear them. We do the same with the Europeans if a law is passed which is defective, our attention is drawn to it, and we make whatever amendments are required. I shall therefore be very pleased to hear any suggestions you have to make as regards amendments in the law that you think necessary.

Wiremu Komene *Tena koe!* Greeting! You have already stated that the Native Land Purchase and Acquisition Act is passed into law. I will now go into the details; and in doing so we wish you to give a direct answer to any question we put to you. Has the Governor signed the Act?

The Premier Yes.

Wiremu Komene Will it not have to go to England?

The Premier It has already received the sanction of the Queen.

Wiremu Komene In the preamble to the Bill reference is made to the fact that there are seven million acres of Native land lying idle in the colony. There are, I believe, ten million acres of Crown lands in the colony remaining unused. Is it not possible to utilise these Crown lands?

The Premier: The question just submitted is the most simple that has ever been asked. It is quite true that we have nearly ten million acres of Crown lands still unsettled, but we do not settle people upon the bare mountain-top; we do not settle them in the river-beds or in the lakes, and it would be quite impossible to utilise the greater portion of these lands for very many years to come. A good deal of the Crown lands in the North Island is blocked for settlement by the Natives. In the South Island we have to devote a large area to the settlement of landless Natives. Then we have had to go and buy land from Europeans so as to put a large number of our population on the land. So short of land in the South Island are we that we have had to pass a law to buy back from the Europeans lands which had already been sold to them. In the North Island there is a large area of the very best land in the country that is unoccupied by Europeans or Natives. It is lying in a state of waste, doing no good to anybody