

Now, it is unreasonable to expect for a moment that in the South Island we should be obliged to ask Parliament to pass a law to force the owners to sell back to the Government, and in the North Island the land should be allowed to remain unutilised. Most of the Crown land in the North, as you are aware, is of a very inferior quality. You have always taken care to sell us gum-land. We cannot put people on such land.

Pene Tauī The Natives have no jurisdiction over the land now. The Government can buy where they see fit. Why is the law worded in that way?

The Premier The ownership by the Natives has been ceded by the Crown. We have never raised the question, and we have no intention of raising it now, but we are following on the lines of the Treaty of Waitangi in a colonising spirit, when we say that the title to the land must be ascertained, and that the land must be utilised. We have said that a large proportion of the land is suitable for settling people upon, and there is a rapidly-increasing demand for land for settlement purposes. Progress is retarded.—(A voice *Kahore*.)—I say that settlement is kept back, to the detriment of the Natives themselves. If the land were easily settled, the Natives would get fair value for it. I came through splendid land yesterday. There are very many owners to it, but one single owner will not go and improve that land and make it productive, because, if he makes improvements all the others share with him. The consequence is that the land remains untouched as it is. There are six hundred thousand acres north of Auckland not through the Court. So long as the land remains like that, with no owners ascertained, it means that no one will go near it, and the longer the titles are unascertained the greater the danger to the Natives, and the greater the difficulty in ascertaining the titles hereafter. Hence I say the Government have come to the conclusion that it is necessary this state of affairs must come to an end. If you say the law has been defective because of the large expense of the Court in ascertaining the titles, that is a good ground for complaint, and it is right you should ask the Government to remedy it. Last year ten thousand people came into the colony more than went out of it, therefore you will understand the great pressure which is being brought to bear on the Government, and you will understand the very great danger to the Native owners if they permit things to remain much longer as they are. In fact, I tell you plainly speaking for the Government, and speaking for both races, that it is impossible to allow things to remain much longer as they have been. There was nothing stated in the preamble of the Bill which you have read but what is absolutely true, and if I could take you down to the South Island, or over parts of the North Island, and show you the general condition of the country you would come back convinced that what I have told you is absolutely true. Are you cultivating and improving the land? No, because you are uncertain—you do not know what to do, so that the sooner every one knows what is his own, and can do something with it, the better for him. I hope, therefore, you will consider my answer as regards the preamble satisfactory. I have told you the truth—there is the law.

Wiremu Komene One section here, section 3, gives power to the Governor to remove any Maori Commissioner. Why should he be singled out?

The Premier There will only be a revocation where the Commissioner has misbehaved himself. The power is used as we have it in many Acts of Parliament. It is never used when a Commissioner exercises independent judgment and does what is right, but if a Commissioner was to do something wrong—misbehave himself, break the law and misconduct himself—on account of such bad behaviour the Governor would remove him. That is my answer to that.

Wiremu Komene When once a Proclamation is put over a block of land by the Government and the Natives do not wish to sell to the Government, that Proclamation shall remain in force three years. Why is that?

The Premier The answer to this is a very simple one, the same as the other. There must be a time given when there is a difficulty in the minds of the owners as to whether or not they will sell. But you have never read section 26. If two-thirds of the owners desire to sell the land by public auction, all they have got to do is to signify the same to the Government, then it is sold or leased by public tender. Now compare this with the previous law. You talk about three years. Are you aware that under the old law the owners of that land could take £5 from the Government and the Proclamation could stop there for twenty years? Are you aware that by the Treaty of Waitangi, under what is known as the prescriptive right, you could do nothing with your lands except through the Government? As compared with the previous law, you will therefore see, at all events, that the fullest time that a Proclamation can be exercised is three years, that if at any time two-thirds of the owners desire to dispose of the land, they can do so under sections 26 and 27 of the Act. I say this Act is in your favour. If you want to go back to the provision contained in the Treaty of Waitangi, which says that the Natives shall not sell to anybody except the Government, and that shall apply to all lands, if you want to perpetuate the law that any one who takes £5 absolutely ties up the land until the Government have bought—if you want that law, say so. I myself do not wish to do that to you, hence we have made the law more liberal as affecting your lands. The majority can settle the question as to whether or not they will sell or let to the Government. After they have come to a conclusion the Government can withdraw the Proclamation at any time, but the maximum time is three years. I think this explanation should satisfy you that this clause is a very liberal clause as compared with the previous legislation.

Wiremu Komene Why is it, in the case where the Maoris fail to make their appointment to the Board, a Judge of the Supreme Court can make the appointment instead?

The Premier This matter was debated at great length, and the conclusion arrived at was that no person holding a position in the colony would give so much confidence to the Native race as a Judge of the Supreme Court, because he is beyond all politics and beyond all parties, and grave complaints have been made to the Government in the past that the trustees who have been appointed have not done their duty. This only applies to minors—where persons are not of age.