

prevent Europeans taking up land from the Natives. This should all be revised, and the people placed on their own lands. Supposing they were to sell all their lands, where is the portion left for them? We wish that all those duties should be taken off, that we may be able to sell our land to the pakeha. Now I come to the Rating Act. I do not think the Government have any great love or affection for the Natives, because they are putting rates on them. They will never be able to pay the rates—the land must go to pay the rates. I quite agree with you when you remark that the land is the mother of the people. Why should not a piece of land be taken for another? The Act says the land must be within five miles of a road. Why should they be rated when they have no communication with the roads? I am just pointing these facts out to you. These are the oppressions, and we feel them very much. I will give you an instance. Some people have no roads to their places at all—they simply have a canoe and why should these people be taxed when they do not use the roads?

The Premier Perhaps I might save all further speakers talking on the question raised by my friend here to-day. It was just now mentioned by him in his speech that he did not think the Government had any love for the Natives, because they passed a law making them pay rates. Then we have no love for the Europeans, because they have had to pay rates for many years, whether they used a road or not. But I think we show half as much love again for the Natives as for the pakeha, because we only make the Natives pay one-half, so our hearts are one-half warmer to the Natives than to the Europeans. We make the Europeans pay for all their land—it does not matter whether there is a road or not but we only ask the Natives to pay for such land as is within five miles of a main road. The roads are there just as much for the Natives as for the Europeans. I never found the Natives going in the bush when there was a road to travel on. I never saw the Natives swimming a river so long as there was a bridge for them to go across, and the roads and the bridges are a public convenience. If they were to put a toll-gate on these roads, and make every one pay to go through, the Natives would have to pay much more in rates. I have said—and that is the whole trouble—I am sorry the Natives have not more money to enable them to pay their rates; but they keep the land locked up. They will not make any money out of it themselves, and will not let any one else. They are therefore rich and yet poor. The amount they are called upon to pay is not much if they had the means to pay. The Parliament very graciously refused to put rates on the Natives the same as on the Europeans, because we recognise that certain changes must take place before we put the whole amount of the rates upon them, and if they will take advantage of the law passed last session, and help the Government so that they can utilise the lands the same as the Europeans, they will find the rates will not oppress them. If you have any suggestions to make in reference to this question of the rates, the same as you are going to do in connection with the Land Act, reduce them to writing. It is no use three or four getting up and speaking. Reduce what you have got to say to writing, and send it to Wellington. Your late member will tell you that on the Native Committee the Government agreed to let you off with only paying half-rates and we hope to see you improve your lands. Keep as much as you think will be wanted for yourselves and children, but do not think of keeping the country in an unproductive condition that is what everybody complains of. The Government is the strong buffer between you and the power behind. Knowing this to be the case, that is why I want to speak to you face to face, so as to remove these defects, and get you in a better position to do good for yourselves and children. As regards the question you mention, as to the pakehas buying direct from the Maoris themselves, I might just as well let you jump into the ocean and let the sharks devour you, because the pakeha land-shark has been a curse, and would be a curse again. We will not let you in amongst the sharks, you are too good for that, but we do say you shall get a fair value for your land, and in leasing it you shall be protected. The greatest trouble the Parliament has had has been to protect you against these land-sharks. The Native who lately spoke might be able to make a good bargain, and be able to protect himself, but he would not be able to say the same of every Native in this room. What about these children, who have as much right to the land as he has? What about those men who cannot speak English, and do not know anything about the laws, and have never been brought into contact with Europeans? They would not be able to do business the same as he. The first thing that would happen when you let a piece of land by lease would be a dispute about your boundaries, because you cannot let a piece of land unless you know what the boundary is. The next thing would be a squabble about fencing the boundary. Then the lessee would not pay the rent. Then, the next thing, all the improvements belong to him, and by-and-by he takes the land from you, and you get very little money—probably he gets you into his debt, he is the landlord, and he turns you out. Then, when the quarrel becomes so serious, you come to Parliament for a Validation Act. One half of this book is Acts of Parliament—validating Acts between the Natives and the Europeans, and nearly always we find the Natives have been wronged. The Europeans and the pakeha-Maori land-sharks are all round you, and if we were to do what you ask—to give you free trade with your land with the pakeha-Maori and land-shark—they would sweep down upon you as the hawk does upon the little bird. We are not going to let you drop into the talons of the hawk—we are not going to let you go into the maws of the sharks; but it is in the interests of yourselves that any dealings in your lands should be under the same law as that under which we deal with Crown lands, so that they shall be submitted to public auction, that the light of day shall be on the transaction, so that there will be none of these illegitimate transactions. I have known Natives like you who have known our laws. They have received a large sum of money, and have got other Natives to agree to a lease who did not know what they were doing. That has been a Native who knows business and knows our language. I have known these people pay men to do wrong to their friends. I hope I have now convinced you that it is not right to the Native race to allow them to be the victims of designing persons. Of course, I am quite willing to receive from you any communications suggesting an improvement upon the Act as it now stands, but it is no use sending suggestions down asking the Government to agree to free trade in Native lands and