

pass a Bill that they could adopt if they thought fit, but in the meantime to stop the land from being sold or being parted with, and it is a question for the Committee. We can possibly blend our ideas—modify the proposals so as to make them acceptable to the majority of the members of the Committee, and acceptable also to the Native race, so that they could adopt them. There is one of two courses that should be adopted. It will be urged this is a question of policy. There is a policy involved I admit, and while the responsibility in respect to policy rests upon the Government, yet the question is of such grave moment that I hope that all party feeling will be thrown aside, and as there are on the Committee those who have experience and expert knowledge I ask them to assist us. If that assistance is rendered I feel satisfied that we could pass this session a short measure fixing the dealing with Native lands, the manner in which it is to be administered, giving in the administration a representation to the particular landowners whose lands are being dealt with, and having the Government represented by experts and those who are accustomed to deal with lands and with the administration. This measure should be as far as practicable consistent with our Crown-lands administration, the Government finding the capital with which to place the land for settlement purposes, the proceeds to go to the Native owners. This is consistent with the legislation now existing, because we have power for the Natives to hand their land over to the Commissioner of Crown Lands. This has got to be done by deed in each case. It is found to be expensive, and it is also found that in handing it over simply to the Commissioner of Crown Lands—I allude to the Auckland Commissioner of Crown Lands—as trustee he claimed to have a responsibility, and with the law, expenses, and the difficulty and time lost, no doubt, it practically set aside the legislation. Now, what is wanted is to do away with the trust conditions—to do away with the necessity for the Maoris in each case having to be a party to a deed and adopt a principle generally to a district—that the lands in that particular district if the majority of the Native owners decide—that you deal with them as though they were Crown lands, but maintaining the ownership of the Natives and simply administering by a Board. You could then group blocks of lands with Maori owners in it, and the only trouble would be paying the amount from the proceeds of the lands to the owners. Now, I have said there is one of two courses open to us—one is to put a short Bill through extending the provisions of the Act that I have mentioned. The other is, if there is no chance of getting that through, to pass a short measure saying it is beyond the completion of purchase now—undertaking that no further land should be bought until Parliament has definitely settled how the land should be dealt with. The former course, I think, is the best, because we, the present Committee, have heard the evidence. We know now pretty well the points upon which to go. If it is left over it means, of course, nothing will be done for a year, and then another Committee will have to take evidence and go through the course that we have gone through, and that will be expensive and cause some dissatisfaction. Now, to put in a concrete form what I think should be done: I think a Select Committee should be appointed from this Committee, and that they should take the evidence and bring up a report—or an amended Bill practically—for submission to the Committee, and then submit that Bill to the Committee as a whole, and if we then agreed upon it we should submit it to the House, and I think the House would accept it. I do not think I can do or say more. The fact of taking any further evidence is unnecessary. We pretty well all know what the minds of the Natives are, I think.

*Mr. Stevens:* The Native Minister has said that if a Bill failed to pass for the purpose of preventing any further purchase of Native lands by the Crown: does that mean that the Crown shall be enabled to complete the purchases of all blocks over which there is a proclamation or of blocks in which they have obtained one, two, or three signatures?

*Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon:* Say, where there are any negotiations for certain blocks at the present time—we have bought interests in those blocks. It might be necessary in those blocks to get those interested to partition. The blocks are not in a position at present to be partitioned. It simply gives the power to complete purchases already commenced and partition interests already acquired, but otherwise not to enter into any fresh negotiations.

*Mr. Stevens:* That means any block in which the Crown has a signature—that would meet the position, I understand?

*Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon:* To purchase sufficient area to warrant it. You would not leave the acres with a piece here and there—you had better return the money.

*Mr. McLean:* Supposing a block is 100,000 acres.

*Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon:* That is a matter of detail which, in going through the Bill, we could fix by a sliding scale—as to the proportion. What I want to be clearly understood is this: I am myself firmly convinced that if we go on as we are doing now—take the quality of the land that remains in the hands of the Natives; take the number of the Natives, allow that they will not increase—if we go on as we are doing there is only one end to it. We would like it to be settled some time.

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TUESDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1899.

Mr. HONE HEKE examined.

*The Chairman:* When the Committee adjourned on Friday last it was with the intention of hearing to-day the views of Messrs. H. Heke, Wi Pere, and T. Parata (Mr. H. Kaihau having already expressed his opinion), representatives of the Maori race, on the petitions relating to proposed amendment of the Native-land laws now before the Committee.

*Mr. Heke:* This is an expression of my opinion given with a view of suggesting to the Com-