

mittee the direction in which legislation should go. I desire to give my own personal views with regard to what legislation I consider necessary to deal with Maori land. I believe in the assimilation of the laws controlling Native lands with the laws operating over European lands or the property of Europeans, because under such laws each man retains his independent rights of control, and can administer and dispose of his own land as he pleases, and has access to the outside general market. There would be nothing to confine the price payable for Native lands to any particular figure, as is the case now under the Native-land laws. The European population are very lightly dealt with under the laws which control their property. They are not put to any very considerable expense, monetary or otherwise, in their transactions in the matter of land, but the Maoris are on a totally different footing. I will show the main points in the Native-land laws to which I object. I object to restrictions upon the Native lands. I look upon the existing restrictions as a form of tax on the land. It is this restriction which prohibits the Maori from placing his land upon the outside market, and confines him to disposing of his land to the Government only. That being so, the natural consequence is he only gets a very small price per acre. In support of my contention that this restriction is a form of tax I will cite a case. One million pounds was borrowed by the Atkinson Government for the purpose of making the North Island Main Trunk Railway line. Now, out of that million loan the sum of £200,000 was set aside for the purpose of purchasing Native lands. That £200,000 has been expended upon the purchase of Native lands, and the lands which the Crown has acquired for that sum has been valued at £800,000. This will show that the present valuation placed upon that land is no less than £600,000 more than the money which the Crown gave for it. Therefore I say I am justified in looking upon this restriction as imposing a tax directly on Native lands. The State benefits by restricting Native rights. Now, there are many tracts of Native land which the Crown has purchased for 5s. an acre, and for which the Maoris, if it had been competent for them to avail themselves of the outside market, could have obtained from £1 10s. to £2 per acre, and the Government only paid 5s. That is one phase of the question. Now, with regard to other disabilities which the Maoris are called upon to suffer in connection with their lands under the laws which now exist. We have a Stamp Act which affects Native lands. This is a very, very heavy tax. Under that Act the Maori has to forego no less a sum than £10 out of every £100 on the value of lands he sells. A European landowner selling his land has not to pay anything like the amount of stamp duty which the Maoris have to. All a European has to do is to pay at the rate of 15s. per £100. So you will note the difference. Now, sir, taking into consideration these burdens and disabilities, I am satisfied in my own mind that the most desirable step we should take to meet the necessities of the present case is that the existing land-laws with regard to lands owned by Europeans should be made to apply to lands the property of Natives. I do not here take up a sentimental view. I will come to another point. Why should Maoris be debarred from sharing in all the benefits the Europeans derive under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act. If the Crown decides to take a European's land under the provisions of that Act, it, first of all, calls upon the European owner of that land to name the price which he is prepared to take. If the Crown is not prepared to give the European owner the price he asks for his land, it then makes him an offer. In the event of the European landholder not agreeing to the price offered, and the Crown refusing to take the land at the price placed upon it by the European owner, the matter is placed before an Arbitration Court to decide upon the price to be paid for the land as between the European land-owner and the Crown; the Crown then has the privilege of either purchasing or refusing to purchase the land when they know what has been the award of the Arbitration Court. Now, that is quite right. It is very different in the case of Native lands. All that the land-purchase officer does is to simply state the price the Crown are prepared to give, knowing that there is no other person who can bid up the value of the land, and further knowing that there is no arbitration Court into which the matter can be taken to ascertain the proper price of the land. Then, again, when the Crown has acquired a block of European land, under the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act, such land is surveyed and cut up. It is roaded, and the money expended upon this survey and upon the making of the roads is found by the colony. It is not deducted from the amount which has been agreed upon as the price to be paid to the European owner of the land.

*The Chairman:* I understand that the prayer of this petition is to prohibit the sale of Native lands. Now, Mr. Heke is advocating the principle of selling the Maori lands. If the sale of Native land was to cease altogether, then this would have no bearing on the case whatever.

*Mr. Heke:* I want to express my own opinion about it. Now, when Maori land is purchased an entirely different system is practised. In that case the Maoris' land is called upon to bear the expense of the survey and the subdividing and the roading. I say that all these things seem to me to be a form of taxation. I might go into this matter at very much greater length, and point out a great many other disabilities and grievances which affect the Maoris under the existing Native-land laws. However, I propose now to speak about the Acts passed in the year 1894. When the Crown decided that it was desirable Native land should be restricted they passed the Native Land Court Act of 1894, and since the passing of that Act it has been recognised as the basis upon which all subsequent Native legislation has been passed. Well, that being so, in order to come to a starting-point, we know the Act of 1894 says the Crown's right of preemption must exist. I now say this right of preemption is detrimental to the Natives, and should be done away with, and a system of leasing should be adopted in its stead. It was exceedingly pleasant to hear the Hon. Mr. Carroll and the Right Hon. the Premier, the other day, say that the Government did, at the present time, entertain such a view as that which I now advocate with regard to the desirability of ceasing to purchase any more Native lands. Well, now, that being a satisfactory answer to one of the views which I advocate, I am ready and willing to give any measure brought down to the House to that effect my hearty support, and I hope that it may be passed this present session. Even though the desires of my constituents—the Maori population of the district which I repre-