

7. When the proceedings opened the Maoris made a request that we should hold sittings also in such places as Mangonui, Russell, and Kaitaia. Upon our asking why such sittings should be held, the only answer was that some of the "surplus lands" were in those localities. If any witnesses had had to be called who lived in those neighbourhoods, we should certainly have been disposed to accede to the request; but that was not the case, and counsel for the Maoris said quite frankly that they could see no advantage to be gained or useful purpose to be served by holding sittings in any other places than Kaikohe. They agreed that, inasmuch as the presentation of the case consisted wholly of documentary matter and addresses, and no oral evidence would be, or could be, tendered, the ends of justice did not call for any sitting outside Kaikohe.

8. We accordingly proceeded with the inquiry and sat on the 10th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 21st, and 22nd days of October, 1947, when counsel addressed us at considerable length, and those addresses involved an examination of hundreds of files as well as other exhibits. The opportunity was also taken at the commencement of the sitting of explaining to the Maori audience the purport of the addresses that had been made in Auckland in February, and this was done partly by the oral statement of counsel and partly by the reading of a Maori translation by the Commission's interpreter.

9. Even the sittings at Kaikohe were not sufficient to conclude the inquiry. Counsel explained that there was still a great deal of research and investigation work to be done in order to place before the Commission all the information that would be required to enable us to complete our inquiry and make our report, and in order to prepare their final addresses counsel required information which involved the necessity of a further and complete examination of all the files by officers of the Lands and Survey Department. All this took several months, and it was not until May, 1948, that counsel were ready. Accordingly, the Commission sat in Auckland on the 11th, 12th, 13th, and 14th May, when the final addresses were made.

10. We have made this somewhat lengthy exordium for two reasons. First, we think that we should explain why the inquiry and the preparation of our reports have taken so long a time, and point out that the delay has not been due to the fault of either the Commission or counsel. Secondly, we desire to emphasize that every latitude has been given to the Maoris and their counsel, and that there can be no justification for any protests or complaints hereafter that the very fullest opportunity was not given to the Maoris of being represented and heard. It should be added that, as well as being represented by counsel provided by the Government at the expense of the Crown, the Maoris were notified by public advertisement in the press and by information circulated through the various Maori Land Court offices of the setting-up of the Commission and that any of them who so desired were entitled to appear and be heard.

11. The lengthy investigation that has had to be made by both Counsel and the Commission can be understood only if the complexity of the subject-matter be appreciated. The transactions to be investigated are for the most part more than a century old; they are several hundreds in number; each of them has been the subject of a separate file; and, in addition several voluminous general files have called for careful examination and consideration. The officers of the Lands and Survey Department have done their best to simplify our work by making a typewritten précis of each file so as to avoid the necessity of our having to read all the old files, which were, of course, in manuscript, some of it being badly faded.

12. We have considered the précis of each file carefully, and, in addition, we have wherever necessary examined the original file. The volume of our own work may be gauged from the fact that, in the estimation of the Chairman, it has involved the equivalent of the hearing and determination of over three hundred actions in the Supreme Court. Quite apart from the sittings of the Commission, we were necessarily engaged in independent individual research for many months, including, of course, the perusal of