cation, business capacity, and intelligence. His successors, on the other hand, may be half a dozen Natives hardly any of whom can speak English well, or one may be better educated than the others, but unreliable. To make a selection amongst these would arouse endless jealousy and discontent. What the petitioner asks is impossible to concede without reducing the whole system to chaos. Only very few of the West Coast Natives are at present educated, and to give them any large powers of control would be to expose them to be cruelly preyed upon by harpies of both races.

The petitioner says if the Natives were allowed to manage their own affairs they would get better rents than can be got by the Public Trustee. In some of these grants two or three hundred Natives are interested. The trouble of getting their signatures to a lease, the refusal of some to sign without a *douceur*, the necessity of getting the trustees to sign for the numerous infants, and the expense of employing licensed interpreters are some of the difficulties to be faced in getting leases from Natives. On the other hand, a lease is obtained from the Public Trust Office without any trouble. Even the preparation of the necessary documents is done at the office. A tenant having obtained a lease from Natives would have great difficulty in paying the rents. By the time his lease was completed and rents distributable, in all probability some of the Natives who signed it would be dead. He would then have to seek the successors. All these obstacles, delays, disbursements, and risks of error would have to be taken into consideration by him when calculating the profit of his undertaking, and the rent offered would be less accordingly. A man who would give more rent to Natives than to a Government officer who prepares all necessary documents and gives a tenure guaranteed by statute, at the same time relieving him of all responsibility as to distribution of rentals, would be bereft of his senses.

Regarding the petitioner's complaint that accounts are not furnished: An account is given to the chief owner in the grant at each distribution. This is explained to the others by the person who receives it. Accounts, as a rule, are not understood by Natives; but if any explanation is asked for it is given either by the Reserves Agent or from the office. No account is ever refused to any Native, no matter how small or in how many grants his interests may be. The petitioner would not get separate accounts for the other grants she is interested in, her shares in them being so very small. The accounts for these grants would be sent to the chief beneficiary. The petitioner, although an intelligent and educated Native, is unfamiliar with accounts, as shown by her statements about double commission, and her extraordinary belief that she was compelled to pay interest on the lessee's mortgage.

The office charge of 7½ per cent. commission is not too high. The usual charge by commission agents is 5 per cent. for simply collecting rents on accounts, and paying them to his principal or into his bank account. The office has to see to all leasing, get surveys made, roads laid off, ascertain who are the Natives interested, collect rents, distribute them twice a year to the numerous beneficiaries, keep accurate accounts, attend to Native Land Court matters, and take the risks incurred in paying to the wrong persons or being involved in expensive litigation arising out of the relationship of the office to these reserves. Looking at the responsible and varied duties undertaken in connection with these lands, I feel no hesitation in stating that no estate of equal magnitude requiring similar duties in supervision is anywhere administered with greater economy. Formerly the commission was 10 per cent. It was reduced to 7½ per cent. and the commission on rents from occupation licenses from 7½ to 3¾ per cent.; and these charges cannot be at present further reduced. I wish the Committee to specially note that the rates 7½ per cent. and 3¾ per cent. are not cumulative. They make the average rate of commission charged on all rents collected from lessees and licensees 6⅘ per cent. When the leases first granted under the 1892 Act are renewed in about ten or twelve years' time, it will be at a largely increased rental owing to the rise in land-values, and these greater rentals not involving extra work the commission can be then further reduced.

In order to show that the office is not making money out of the Natives, as suggested by one of the Committee, I offer these figures for consideration:—

STATEMENT of RECEIPTS and EXPENDITURE in connection with Native Branch for Year ended 31st March, 1904.

Receipts.

	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Commission on West Coast Settlement Reserves at 7½ per cent., £1,586 18s. 3d.; at 3¾ per cent., £179 10s. 6d.	1,766 8 9	
Commission on Native reserve rents at 7½ per cent. ..	669 12 8	
		2,436 1 5
Lease and consent fees		197 15 0
		£2,633 16 5

Expenditure.

	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Salaries—		
One-fifth proportion of Public Trustee and other officers not directly on the branch, but whose time is more or less occupied therewith ..	621 0 0	
Native Branch, Head Office	461 0 0	
New Plymouth, proportion salaries	371 0 0	
Nelson, half Agent's salary	87 10 0	
Greymouth, three-fourths Agent's salary ..	146 5 0	
		1,686 15 0
Carried forward		1,686 15 0