

disputed political question, and we do not therefore desire to deal with the question of leasehold or freehold. It is necessary, however, to state the position the Natives take up. The Natives are freeholders when they obtain their Crown grants or Land Transfer certificates of title, and the Natives have, according to "The Native Rights Act, 1865," the same political rights and rights of property as other subjects of the Crown. As has been well said, any State that fails to give equal rights to all its citizens, whatever their race or colour, fails in its duty, and condemns its Government as incompetent. If, therefore, the Maoris as freeholders are not to be permitted to lease their lands when they desire to do so, but are to be forced to sell half of the land they desire to lease, the same law must be applied to Europeans. We need not point out what the effect of this would be. If no European could lease any land unless he sold half of the land he intended to lease either in town or country, the present system of landholding would be entirely changed. That would be a blow struck at the right of holding freehold heavier, so far as we know, than any that has been struck at it in any part of the world, and would properly be deemed to be a great infringement of the rights of property. Those who contend that all farmers ought to be freeholders cannot limit that position to those who are leaseholders of Maoris or of the Crown—the principle must be extended to those who are leaseholders of Europeans. Is New Zealand prepared to say that no European freeholder can lease his land unless he gives his tenant a right to purchase the land leased? Or are the people of New Zealand prepared to say that no European freeholder can lease his land unless he is prepared to sell the half of it? Those who would advocate such principles are the opponents of freehold tenure. The attack, therefore, made on Maori landlordism is an attack made on European landlordism, for in a free State with a just Government the Maori freeholder cannot be placed in a position inferior to the European landowner. The Maoris resent, and, we think, rightfully resent, this attempt to place them in a servile position compared with European landowners. That the State has a right to prevent them disposing of their lands must be admitted, because the Maori lands are communal lands and the Maori owner has a duty to successors different from that of an ordinary European landowner towards his family. The State has a right to see that the Maori, unused to our civilisation and unused to our individual system, shall not deprive himself of the land that belongs to him and his tribe. The right of the State to act in such a direction has been acknowledged by all the Parliaments of New Zealand. To go further, and to say that the Maori is not to have the other rights of a landowner, would, as we have said, be striking a blow at the security of landed property in this Dominion. No doubt Maori landlords, like European landlords, have to admit the "eminent domain" of the State, and Parliament has affirmed that when land is necessary for closer settlement the State can on paying the proprietor compensation, take land for that purpose, giving, however, the owner of the land the right to select a considerable area for his own use. What we have said does not touch the principle laid down in the Land for Settlements Act. Unfortunately in the past the Maori has been too ready to sell his land and to waste the proceeds of the sales. There has been no necessity to apply the provisions of the Land for Settlements Act to Maori land. The Crown could and can always obtain land from the Maoris for close settlement. The danger has been, and is, that the Crown makes purchases without in many instances sufficiently realising that the people of the Maori race must remain mainly farmers and have sufficient land not only for their present needs but for their future development.

If, however, the Parliament of the Dominion were to enact that no freeholder, European or Maori, could lease his land unless he at the same time sold half of the land he intended to lease, or gave his tenants a right of purchase at the true value, there are strong reasons why the Maori should not be subject to such a law:—

- (1.) The Maoris have sold large areas to the Crown at, in many instances, inadequate prices, and when they could sell only to the Crown:
- (2.) In numerous instances the lands left to them are small in area considering the number of owners; and to compel them to sell half the area they desire to lease would leave their successors inadequately provided for:
- (3.) The use of land must be for a long period the Maoris' only avocation.