

' Mr Symes, I will leave it with you to fight your own battles with Mr Warburton.' I do not know how many nights—but I know it was a great number of nights—I spent with Mr Warburton in his own private house over the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act. We fought it out, he and I, word by word, and almost letter by letter. The result of my interview and fighting with him was the West Coast Settlements Act of 1892. That gave the leases that the lessees now have. And I might say that every penny of the costs in connection with my visit to Wellington I paid out of my own pocket.

20. At the period you have just been speaking of, were you a member of Parliament?—No, sir. Some time after the awards were made, I think I may say in every instance, the arbitrators reduced the rents. I believe I can safely say, in every instance the rents were reduced—that is, from the amounts the lessees originally paid. We applied to the Public Trustee after the awards were made to know what rent we had to pay for the future, and to whom to pay it, and, speaking for myself, he wrote to me and said that the rents for the future would be paid in accordance with the award.

21. *Mr Fraser* ] What year was that?—That was in 1889. After the whole matter was declared to be *ultra vires* notice was sent, I think—at any rate it was never sent to me—but I heard that notice had been sent to others to pay their rent under the original lease, and I continued to pay my rent for I should think, two or three years under the instructions that I had received from the Public Trustee—that is, the lesser amount in accordance with the award. Before the leases were granted the Public Trustee demanded from me the back rent.

22. *Mr Skerrett* ] At the higher rate of rental?—Yes, at the higher rate. I declined to pay it, and said I had paid in accordance with the letter or telegram—I forget which it was now—and Mr Barton, solicitor, Hawera, wrote me on behalf of the Public Trustee, demanding the back rent. I declined to pay it. They issued writs against me then for the payment, and I fought the matter in the Supreme Court not only in my own interests, but in the interests of the other lessees, and I won both cases. Mr George Hutchison, who was then a member of Parliament, appeared for me in the Supreme Court.

23. The cases to which you refer were really test cases?—Yes.

24. And the costs of those two cases were borne entirely by yourself?—Yes, by myself.

25. Costs were awarded, no doubt, against the Public Trustee?—Yes.

26. But you paid what was required above that?—Yes, and they were pretty heavy too.

27. You have thus investigated closely and carefully the conditions of all the west coast leases?—Yes.

28. And the transactions relating thereto were long before you were a member of Parliament?—Yes, years before.

29. Will you now come to the period when you became a member of Parliament. That, you told us, was in 1896?—Yes.

30. Will you take up the story from then?—Well, the first six years I was member of Parliament I was member for Egmont. The last six years I represented Patea. I think it was the time of the first address I gave at Waverley, in the Patea Electorate, after being elected—it was during the recess, I think—one of the lessees, who had been dining well that night, asked me a question in connection with a petition, and I thought he was referring to some petitions that had been presented by members asking that the west coast lessees should have the right to purchase their holdings. Some of the lessees asked me if I would present petitions for them in that direction. I said "No. Of course, if you ask me as your representative I will present them, but I am against the petition."

31. That is, the petition to purchase their holdings?—Yes. I said, 'I do not consider you are entitled to it, and I shall not help you in any way, and if you can get any other member of the House who is in favour of your getting the holdings, I should advise you to take your petitions to him if you want any assistance. The result was that they never presented any of their petitions asking for the right to purchase their holdings through me, and I thought this lessee was referring to those petitions. I said, "No, I do not know anything about them. I never presented them, and I have not even seen them." Another lessee thought I had been rather curt with this man, and said so when we came outside. I said I did not understand him, and he said, "He did not mean that. Don't you remember the petitions that we presented in connection with trying to get a refund of our arbitration costs." I said, "Oh! was that what he referred to?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I am very sorry. I will apologize to him. I did not understand him." I met the man, and said, "I did not understand; you did not make it clear." He said, "Surely you must have seen the petition, because Mr Hutchison has assured us that he presented one every year." I said, "Have you signed one every year?"

32. *The Chairman*.] Who was the principal petitioner?—Mr Newland. He said, "Mr Hutchison assures us that he has presented a petition every year in connection with this matter." I said, 'I have never seen a petition presented by Mr Hutchison, to my knowledge. Have you?' And he said, "No." I said, "Then the petition could not have been presented." He said, "Do you know anything about it? He must have misled us. If he had not assured us we would have gone about the matter and seen that the petitions were presented." I said I would go and try and find out something about it when I came down to Wellington. This was during the recess; and I came down and tried to find out something about it, and I found it very difficult indeed. I found that no petition had been presented for a great number of years in connection with the matter, and no one could help me to find anything or tell me about anything until I got the Clerk of the Native Affairs Committee. I asked him if he could remember anything about it, and he said, "Yes, I can remember something about it, and if I can help you I will." He said the petitions would be down in the dungeon-keep—that is, down in the old building. We made a search for two or three mornings, I think, before we could find anything in connection