

115. You give it as your opinion that the Natives have no claim on the Assurance Fund whatever?—Yes. I have never heard of such a claim—a claim by a person who, by his own act, has lost his land. No such claim against the Assurance Fund has ever succeeded yet, at all events.

116. *Mr. Dive.*] I understood you to say that if there was any claim against the fund it had to be made within six years of the lease?—That is my opinion.

117. And I understood you to say further that you are satisfied the Crown Advisers could not have advised the Government that there was any claim against it?—Yes, I do not believe the Crown Advisers ever have done so.

118. Then the reply made by the Native Minister to Mr. Massey, that that was one of the reasons why the Government could not purchase, falls to the ground?—I was not trying to reply to the statement, but that would follow from what I said.

119. I understood you also to say that the Maori Land Board could not make any stipulations or terms as to the sale of that land, in respect of how it should be cut up and settled within a certain time?—I should think it was perfectly clear. I do not suppose anybody contends that they could. Mr. Skerrett says that Mr. Herrman Lewis will enter into a covenant to that effect. The Maori Land Board has no power to make such conditions. You do not suggest it, do you, Mr. Ngata.

*Hon. Mr. Ngata:* The facts are not as stated, you see.

120. *Mr. Herries.*] When did these Natives first come to you, Mr. Bell? Have you got the date?—I have the date of the first meeting.

121. You said it was before the first meeting of assembled owners: that was on the 6th January. Did they become your clients before the first meeting?—Oh, yes. I gave an opinion—a long opinion—on the 23rd December, 1910.

122. To whom?—It was sent to Tuiti Macdonald, but there had been several Natives asking for it.

123. Is that the first opinion that you gave?—It was the first written opinion. I had expressed my view as to the report of the Commission before that.

124. When did they come to you the second time?—They were there on the 11th and 12th January. I have minutes of meetings on those dates.

125. That was after the first meeting?—Yes.

126. That was after the first meeting of assembled owners?—Yes.

127. Was that the time the committee was set up?—The committee was set up on the 11th.

128. Did you at any time suggest any price that they should accept?—Oh, no.

129. Did they ever consult you with regard to the price that they should accept?—No. They told me that the £25,000 was a "Government price," and that the land was worth a great deal more. They were quite determined not to sell at all.

130. It was not a question of price?—There were both questions; but they were not bargaining about the thing at all.

131. Did they consult you with regard to attacking the leases?—Yes, at the meeting on the 11th January. My opinion was given on the two points in December.

132. Did you advise them that they had a good case?—With regard to 1F, a perfectly clear case; with regard to the other leases, no. 1F was the important lease.

133. What was the date of the third meeting of assembled owners?—That I do not know.

134. Was it some time after the second one?—I think it was some little time after. I never knew anything at all about it. I remember seeing in the newspaper that the sale had been agreed to, and was very much astonished.

135. *Mr. Massey.*] Did the agents of the Natives—Mr. Hardy or any of the others—inform you of the change of attitude on the part of the Natives?—No, they carefully abstained from doing it. Mr. Hardy explains why he did not: somebody came to him and offered him some shares or something.

136. *Hon. Mr. Ngata.*] Was your position known to the Board at all in this matter—was it known that you were advising the Natives?—Yes.

137. By communication direct with the Board?—Direct letter. Several telegrams passed between Mr. Bowler and myself as to the date. Both Mr. Dalziel and Mr. Bowler were evidently desirous that I should be there. Neither Mr. Dalziel nor Mr. Bowler did anything to keep me away.

138. I do not mean to suggest that at all. I just wondered whether the Board knew you were representing the Natives?—I can give you a duplicate of the first formal letter [put in].

*Mr. Massey:* I can answer that question of Mr. Herries's about the date of the last meeting. I have a copy of a letter from Mr. Bowler on the subject, and he says this: "Yesterday an application was made to the Board then sitting"—this is dated the 25th March—"for confirmation of resolutions passed by a meeting of assembled owners held at Te Kuiti on the 22nd instant." The third meeting, therefore, was held on the 22nd, and the sale was confirmed by the Board, apparently, on the 24th.

139. *Mr. Dalziel.*] With regard to Mr. Skerrett, Sir James Carroll told you that Mr. Skerrett was not employed by the Government. You suggest that Mr. Skerrett told you after the first meeting that you were to take charge on behalf of all the Natives?—No, he did not say that. He said, "I shall not interfere any more; you represent the majority." And he told his office so. That I verified by asking Mr. Blair.

140. I have no doubt that is so, but do you not know that when arrangements were made at the second meeting they were made to suit the convenience of you and Mr. Blair and myself?—That is so.

141. So that even at that date—late in February—Mr. Blair was representing a section of the Natives?—Yes. Well, Mr. Blair told me what I have told you. I did not remember, but I