

interests and the individual fitness." Now I pass on. My friend confuses the claim of the Native and says the trustee—the nation—has been guilty of a breach of trust. Upon this head I only propose to submit my points in bare form without any argument or comment. First of all, I desire to accept and indorse the remarks of the Public Trustee upon this aspect of the question, and I desire to say that in the settlement of the Native difficulties on this coast the Native has been generously treated by the people, and that the legislation has been in his interests. Secondly, I desire to say that if my friend's contentions are correct, which I deny, they are irrelevant and outside the scope of your inquiry. You are not called upon to inquire or to express any opinion as to the manner in which the Native or Natives have been treated in the past by the nation, by the legislation, by Parliament, or by the Public Trustee; and the introduction of matters which I think my friend said were more political than legal will not assist this Commission in its inquiry, and should not assist the Commission, because the Commission is bound by the scope of its reference. The introduction now of these philanthropic movements will not assist us in the inquiry before us, and will only tend to mislead the Natives. It is well we should keep closely within the scope; and, lastly, on that head I would say this: that my clients have a right to have their case considered apart from any political rights or any other rights the Natives may have as against the nation, or against the Public Trustee, for any alleged malfeasance or misfeasance done to them in the past, because they were not parties to it. We have come here to inquire into the matters referred to this inquiry. Neither myself nor my clients have come here either prepared or desirous of doing anything else; and if I thought that any other factor was to be made a branch of this inquiry my efforts should at once cease, because I do say that there is the scope of our inquiry, there are our powers, and that is what we are dealing with. Lastly, sirs, it is not my province and no part of my work to make any suggestions to the Commission as to how they propose to deal with the rightful ambitions and longings of these Natives. I give place to no man in my admiration of the Native, but it is for the Commission to say how he should be assisted in the hope of devising some lawful and right scheme whereby he may be elevated and placed in a better position than he is to-day. I would invite the Commission to consider the large territory of land there is still left in the hands of the Public Trustee, and partly in the hands of the Natives themselves, for closer settlement. I do not think for a moment that the words of the president of the union appeal to the Commission. His words were, first of all, that they wanted to deal with the 18,000 acres, and if that was not sufficient they would come back for more. Now, I suggest in all humbleness that we ought to start helping him in regard to the lands that are indubitably his, and there I am at one with Dr. Pomare when he says the occupation-license system is a vicious system, and no good to the Natives. I understood Mr. Zachariah to say there are 45,000 or 50,000 acres either held under these licenses or just about to be open to the Native to occupy under these licenses. I do submit there is ample room there for the finest exercise of any beneficent legislation that can assist the Native to acquire and hold his own if he is fit for it. There is no reason why he should begin with the lands that, after all, we have made, because, put it how you will, call it what you choose, call it a bargain or misleading the Native, these 18,000 acres have been made by my clients. They have been put into the state of cultivation in which they are now by my clients, and for the Native now to ask to show his capacity as a farmer at the expense of the lessees—because I will show in a moment that it is at their expense—is no answer to the conundrum before us. What does he ask? He asks that he should be allowed to come in and to be assisted by the State to bid against the lessee. Does it occur to any one that that means ruin and confusion to the whole system and our whole social state? because if the Native thinks that the first step for him to acquire these freeholds is to become the owner of the leasehold estate, do we not know him well enough to know that he will go to that auction and bid, bid, bid no matter what it costs him? All he has got to find is £5 for his improvements, and after that he cares nothing for his improvements. Why should he, so long as he outbids the European and gets his land? Why? Because that is the first step to acquiring the freehold. When he has got the land he will meet his fellow Crown grantees and surrender the lease, and the Public Trustee is a mere intermediary.

*Mr. Bell:* By legislation.

*Mr. Welsh:* Quite so, by legislation. It is seriously suggested to us as a proper means of settlement—and this I am fain to admit is a great problem and a great difficulty, and has troubled the minds of many people on the west coast for a very long day—that the Native should be encouraged to go to the auction. I do not say that my friend's assistants are doing it with their eyes open—urging the Natives to go to auction and acquire the lands at whatever price they think. If, on the other hand, it is to be said, "No, we do not want that, but we want the Maori not to be defrauded—we want him to be permitted to go to auction and bid legitimately for what after all he has just as much right to bid for as you and I or any one else"—what rent has he to pay? First of all, he has to find £5 an acre to pay for the improvements, and then he has to pay a rent on the whole of the capital value less the £5 he has paid. Well, it is a pretty big hurdle.

*Mr. Kerr:* And the purchase of stock.

*Mr. Welsh:* That comes afterwards.

*Mr. Kerr:* It means more capital on to the £5 an acre and the payment of rent.

*Mr. Welsh:* The pakeha has got it there on the land—he is there with his stock and implements, and he is there with his £5. He is there knowing exactly what the land can do to the utmost farthing: he is living there all these years, he knows what treatment it requires and the special culture. But, apart from that, you heard what Dr. Fitchett, the Public Trustee, said, and I put it, can that be controverted? Are these leases in the interests of the community? Is it in the interests of the State or the people that we should permit lands to be longer held under a tenure which is detrimental to the lessee, detrimental to the Native owner, and detrimental