

Mr. SIEVWRIGHT to the UNDER SECRETARY, Native Department.

SIR,—

Wellington, 18th October, 1879.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 17th instant, received to-day, and in reply I can only repeat that I refer the Hon. the Native Minister to my employer, who I do not believe has misinformed or misled me in the matter. The money was voted to Hoani Nahe on his application. Certain it is that I never, either directly or indirectly, applied to the Government for money in connection with the West Coast Native business—never, in fact, knew of an application having been made until I was asked to draw the money; and it is equally certain I never was asked or employed by the Government to advise these Natives, or to obtain advice and legal assistance for them. I must therefore decline to supply any information in my possession unless instructed by Hoani Nahe to furnish it.

I have, &c.,

The Under Secretary, Native Department.

W. SIEVWRIGHT.

HON. NATIVE MINISTER.—For your information and instructions. The Audit Department has full power under the Public Revenues Act to procure whatever information is required to elucidate any public account, and it might be advisable to leave the matter to be dealt with by the Controller and Auditor so far as that part is concerned. Should not the amount be placed on the estimates and a special vote be taken for it.—T. W. LEWIS.—20/10/79.

For Cabinet.—JOHN BRYCE.

REFER to Controller. If he will be so good as to procure from Mr. Sievwright the particulars of the service rendered, I shall feel obliged. It will be seen from the attached papers that I have not succeeded in obtaining particulars myself.—JOHN BRYCE.—2/11/79.

Urgent.—For Controller-General accordingly.—T. W. LEWIS.—3/11/79.

DEAR MR. BRYCE,—

Hunter Street, Wellington, 8th November, 1879.

A matter came to my knowledge to-day which I feel bound to mention, both in justice to myself and the Natives for whom I am acting.

You are probably aware that I have been for some time past acting as counsel for the Maori prisoners now confined in Mount Cook Barracks.

In that capacity I had frequent interviews with the late Native Minister, Mr. Wi Parata being generally present. Whilst remembering that my duty to my clients was the paramount consideration, I always assured him that so far as possible I would avoid embarrassing the Government; that, as I believed the real question at issue to be that of confiscation, I would assist my clients by commencing proceedings in the Supreme Court, for the purpose of testing the validity of the Acts under which the lands had been taken; and that, considering time an important factor in the matter, I would get the consent of my clients to a postponement of their trial.

At one of these interviews, Wi Parata being present, Mr. Sheehan said that Sir George Grey was willing to assist the disaffected Natives with funds for the above purpose.

I told him at once that all such help must be declined, and that the Natives would have no confidence whatever in the proceedings to be taken unless the whole expense was borne by themselves, and the conduct thereof intrusted to lawyers entirely independent of the Government.

Acting under the instructions of a self-constituted Committee of ten chiefs, I prepared and submitted for approval a manifesto in English and Maori [Copy herewith], setting forth to the Maori tribes generally the nature of the proceedings proposed to be taken.

That manifesto was adopted by the Committee, and two thousand copies were printed and distributed throughout New Zealand; subscription lists were circulated in various parts of the colony; and a trust account opened at the Bank of New Zealand here.

From the first, the Committee resolved to decline all assistance from the Government; and when a rumour became current that the Government had supplied funds, the President and Secretary (Taiaoroa and Wi Parata) came to me in great consternation, to know if it was true.

At the request of the Committee, conveyed in a formal resolution on the motion of Wi Parata, I retained Mr. Travers, of this city, to act with me in the contemplated proceedings.

To my astonishment, I learnt to-day from Mr. Rees that, through Hoani Nahe, a member of the then Cabinet, who professed to represent the Committee, Mr. Sievwright, of this city, had been employed as solicitor, and Mr. Rees himself as counsel; that, at the instance of Sir George Grey, £300 of the public money was paid over to Mr. Sievwright, and shared with Mr. Rees (nominally as a retainer), and that this payment is treated as a grant in aid of legal expenses to the West Coast Natives.

It is not for me to express any opinion on the propriety or otherwise of these dealings; but on behalf of the Committee of Chiefs for whom I am acting, I wish at once to state that Hoani Nahe's action in the matter was absolutely and wholly unauthorized; that the members of the Committee knew nothing of Mr. Sievwright in the matter, and decline to be connected in any way with the payment of Government money, about which they were not consulted.

It will be my duty to advise them to publish this repudiation in the widest possible manner; but I have thought it right to communicate the facts to you in the first place.

At one time Hoani Nahe proposed to become a member of the Committee, but, having regard to his official position, he afterwards withdrew his name, and declined to take any part in the movements.

I have, &c.,

Hon. John Bryce, Minister for Native Affairs.

W. L. BULLER.

MR. LEWIS.—Please forward for the information of the Controller *re* a payment of £300 made to Mr. Sievwright.—JOHN BRYCE.—11/11/79.

For the information of the Controller.—T. W. LEWIS.—11/11/79.