

congruous legislation has been evoked piecemeal, out of which it is impossible to produce a certain law.

Testimony, gathered from all quarters and from both races, shows that from the commencement of the surveys, when a Native applies to have land brought under the operation of the Native Land Act and the Native Land Court, down to the period when the European purchaser registers his title under the Land Transfer Act, every step is burdened with unnecessary cost, and offered inducements to many species of fraud; while the whole proceeding tends to demoralise both Natives and Europeans, to frighten away capital, to paralyse industry, to turn the Courts of justice into theatres of oppression, and to hinder the settlement and prosperity of the country.

The statement given by Mr. Ernest Bell of the different steps by which an ordinary investor in Maori lands has possibly to proceed before he procures a title to the property is at once ludicrous and pathetic. The serious impediments, burdens, expenses, and perils which beset the direct individual dealing between Europeans and Natives in regard to lands not held in severalty, and the imperious necessity for an absolute change, both in the method of ascertaining title and in the ultimate alienation for utilisation of the common lands of the tribe or hapu, stand out distinct and clear in the whole mass of evidence given by both races. It began with the statements of Mr. E. F. Harris, Raniera Turoa, and Wi Pere, at Gisborne, and it ended with the striking words used by Mr. Ernest Bell and Sir Robert Stout, at Wellington.

The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal are frequently occupied with Native-land cases. In the history of Native-land legislation and administration since 1873 there is no redeeming feature save the inoperative Native Land Administration Act of 1886. It is a long period of unsatisfactory legislation.

The evidence is startling. Every question, by its answer, disclosed fresh abuses; every subject of discussion revealed some skeleton hitherto concealed. The actions of Judges, lawyers, and conductors; the adjournments, fees, and rehearings of the Courts; the demoralisation and ruin of the Maoris while attending distant Courts, were all commented upon. Every district also, beside its contribution to the general complaint, had its own particular grievance.

#### COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

We were told at nearly every meeting of the Natives that the Maoris had from time to time suffered serious injuries at the hands of the Government. They alleged that the Native Department and its officers, especially of late, had interfered in many ways with the surveys of land, the actions and decisions of the Judges in the determination of titles, and the sittings of the Court. So far had this feeling been engendered in the minds of the Natives as to cause large numbers of them to distrust the Court.

Besides the complaint of undue interference, it was stated by many influential chiefs that the Government had in the North—especially in the Ngapuhi country, and both on the East and West Coasts—taken land to which it had no right by purchase, cession, or conquest, and dealt with it as Crown lands. The evidence shows that this accusation was made not generally, but with the utmost particularity. Names of blocks are given in every district, and, so far from these exhausting the number, the chiefs offered to name very many other cases if the Commissioners desired it. And, further, it was made a subject of grave complaint in the Wairarapa that the contracts of the Government with the Natives, by which large blocks were ceded to the Crown, had been broken in many ways—reserves not made, money not paid, and other breaches of faith which call for reparation. The Native Land Titles Court hereafter mentioned should have jurisdiction to inquire into all such complaints, and report to Parliament, which alone can do justice, as in many of such cases it would be impossible, or, at least, inconvenient, to give back the land, which has been Crown-granted to Europeans during past years.

In some cases the Government has omitted names of owners from grants made to those who ceded land under an agreement for reconveyance of part. This was the case with the Mohaka-Waikari Blocks. A number of Natives are thereby injured. Lists of owners and boundaries were prepared by the agent of the Government, without reference to the residential owners. As a natural consequence, grave errors were made. Lands belonging to one hapu were awarded to another; names which should have been inserted were omitted. In one block of 31,000 acres only one name was inserted, and large numbers of owners excluded. These facts were brought before Parliament some years since.