

Land is locked up in that way by one or two parties—conservative individuals who wish to deal with the land in their own way.

218. In some cases the restrictions are against leasing?—Yes.

219. Lands are restricted from sale and lease, and not used by the Natives?—Yes.

220. And they are in a no better condition than before?—No. Then, in regard to removing restrictions, the majority, or a stated number, should apply to have the restrictions removed. On such application being made, the Court should inquire and ascertain what was the portion belonging to the persons who wished the restriction removed from their particular portion. That is, where the majority should apply for the restriction to be removed, their portion should be excluded from restriction. It is not right to make restrictions with only a partial inquiry.

221. Would you say, then, closing these two matters, that they afford an example of the unsatisfactory nature of the powers of the Court exercised in this direction?—Yes. The power of putting restrictions on land has been improperly used, and the Government have improperly used the power of taking off restrictions. Might I make a suggestion with reference to the Commission of which Mr. Carroll spoke? I am in the position of having certain claims of my own to be brought before it. At the present time they are at a standstill, owing to the stringency of the fees and expenses. I believe this matter is under consideration. I believe that if the Commission saw its way to make a recommendation to Mr. Commissioner Edwards himself and to the Government something could be arrived at in the way of protecting claims by the 20th March without any unnecessary expense to the applicants. The Commissioners are aware that it is necessary to make applications before the 20th in order to protect the claims.

Mr. Rees : Mr. De Lautour brought that matter up before the Commissioners yesterday.

Witness : I merely wished to give my view of the matter.

RANIERA TUROA sworn and examined.

223. *Mr. Rees*.] What are you?—I am Chairman of the Native District Committee. I wish to speak in regard to the inquiry now being carried on by the Commissioners. There is a particular block of 30,000 acres in extent. It is unutilised; there is nothing being done with it. I wish to lease it. My idea is that the people chosen by the tribe should have the power to lease, sell, or get money from the Government to improve that land. One objection that I see arises from the great cost of having subdivisions of such land as the 30,000 acres made—that is, the subdivision of individual shares. If that were to be done a great deal of expense would be occasioned by surveyors having to go on to the ground. I have seen the evil results of such work, where the burden placed on the land has been very heavy. I think the system I suggest—viz., of persons chosen by the people to act for the latter in relation to dealings for land—should apply to large blocks of waste Maori land in which there are a large number of owners—say one or two hundred people. Any transactions would be difficult to carry out where there are a large number of owners; hence it is that I think it should be done as I suggest. I think it is only by those means large blocks of land such as I have described can be properly utilised. Now, with regard to the land in the vicinity of European settlements and with few owners, each person should act for himself.

224. Do you think the Native Committee could conduct the Native Land Court work?—Yes, I think they could.

225. They would not show favouritism?—I think the Committees would not show favouritism.

226. How long have you been Chairman of the District Committee?—About five years.

227. Has that Committee investigated the title to lands?—Yes.

228. How many cases?—They investigated the title to four blocks, and settled the title to them.

229. Was there any trouble?—There was only one case in which the decision of the Committee was objected to, and that was in a case at Waiapu. Mohi Turei was the only person who objected to the decision. The other cases are not finally closed. Then, after that, the powers of the Committee were done away with.

230. What is your opinion with regard to the Native Land Court? Should it be done away with, or stand to confirm the work of the Committees?—The Chief Judge and some of the Judges should act in concert with the Committees. I have seen the hardship inflicted by the Native Land Court upon the Natives. There is great lamentation amongst them.

231. Can you give an instance?—I can give an instance of my own. Judge Barton called me to attend at the Wairoa. I was at Gisborne at the time. I left Gisborne about 6 o'clock in the morning, to go to Wairoa and attend that Court. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon I arrived, at the opening of the Court. I was extremely fatigued in consequence of my long ride. I was asked by the Court to give evidence in the case then being heard. I addressed the Court, and asked that the case be put off until next day, in order that I might get cool, and have time to get over the fatigue of my journey. The distance travelled was seventy miles. I was nine hours in performing the journey. The Court would not give consideration to my application, and it had no regard to the fact that I was tired by my long journey. I was requested to give evidence. A demand was made on me to pay £1. I was required to give evidence in relation to a claim over the survey of the Mangapoke Block. I said to the Court, "I have no money at present. Will you defer the demand—will the Court wait until I would go outside and get the money?" The Court said that if I did not pay the money at that particular time judgment would be given in favour of the European. Well, a stranger, the Rev. Tamihana Huata, had consideration for the position in which I was placed, and he gave me £1, and I handed it to the Court; but, notwithstanding, the judgment was given in favour of the European. There are many instances in which I have suffered through the operation of the Native Land Court. If this matter I have just referred to had taken place before the Native Committee, the proceedings would have been conducted differently. The behaviour