

something very much based upon the system that was adopted by the old Land Purchase Commissioners will have to be adopted—that is to say, that those who are intrusted with the negotiations should go out into the country and call meetings of the Natives—of course, after the title has been ascertained, and by some responsible persons. It is a most important question, and there is a very great responsibility attached to any one who is sent into the country to hold meetings with the Natives for these purposes, whether it be for a private individual or whether it be for the Government. He has to be trusted by the Government, and must therefore be a man of great integrity, and possessed of a great knowledge of the country and of the Natives themselves, if he is to carry out with any degree of success the business placed in his hands. Of course he ought to be a Government officer.

803. Do you consider it would be possible, when the Native owners are ascertained in a block, for them to appoint a Committee which would choose their reserves for them, and then for the remainder of the land to be leased on their behalf by the Committee and a Government officer?—I should think so. I do not see any difficulty in that at all.

804. That would simplify the matter?—That would simplify the matter. You would have to associate some of the Native chiefs with it. If you have a block of 8,000 or 10,000 acres to deal with, you should get ten or fifteen chiefs to act, and the officer who is selected for the work must be one who understands the business he is about. In such a case he will very soon find out those of the people who have power amongst the Natives, and if he selects these people to assist him his task will be greatly facilitated, for it is the chiefs who have the real power with the ordinary Natives, and they will take much greater interest in the transaction if the chiefs conduct their business for them.

805. *Mr. Mackay.*] Should not the people, however, express their opinion, and be represented upon all these Committees?—I should say it would be most advisable to have a discussion amongst the people. They would settle that themselves outside the Court. My view when a difficulty like that arose was, as is well known, merely to say, “It does not appear to me that I can settle this matter. I will therefore adjourn the Court for a short time, and if you will discuss the matter outside you will do much better.” In nine cases out of ten they would discuss the matter outside; and, having come to an agreement, I would accept the agreement as the basis of settlement. Other Judges disapproved of that practice of mine.

806. Because they seemed to think they could do everything themselves?—I may say that I was the only Judge who did that; and very few of the Judges ever went out on the ground. They perhaps settled a case more scientifically than I did, but I settled it practically and satisfactorily. Up to the present day there has not been an acre of land in the Kaipara disputed.

807. Do you think it advisable, supposing the Legislature saw fit to do it, to establish a Native Land Board, consisting of certain members appointed by Parliament and certain members appointed by the Maoris, which Board should give titles, like the Land Board gives, when the Native owners of the blocks have chosen their reserves and said what should be done with the rest of the land, such Board to be responsible for the proper distribution of moneys derived from the leases or sales of these blocks? Do you think that would be likely to work?—I think it would. There would be great power with the Board to see that everything was carried on in a business-like fashion. Of course I have no practical experience of the manner in which Native purchases are conducted at present, when a person goes all over the country taking the signatures of persons interested in the block under negotiation. I suppose it is the only system they can adopt under the present laws. In my manner of treating with the Natives for the purchase of land I never did that; it was always public.

808. So far as you are aware, the present system leads to absolute confusion and litigation?—Yes. I think I may say that I know of such cases arising in consequence. You are aware I have not had much practical experience lately.

809. Judging from what you have heard, do you think things are getting better or worse?—They are getting worse. Of course, in that respect you will recollect that, as I said before, I am not concerned in these Native-land transactions. I have not been brought into contact with dealings lately. I have not been purchasing land from the Natives. But gentlemen from Australia—men of capital—have come and asked me what they should do, as they were wanting 30,000 or 40,000 acres of land, and perhaps did not want to do much with it for the next twenty or thirty years—men who merely wished to put their sons on the land, and who wanted some secure title—some security for putting their money down for these lands. I may have said on such occasions that I did not think it safe to do so, on account of the nature of the titles and the state of the Native-land law.

810. *Mr. Rees.*] In one case there were three titles to the one piece of land?—That is a very unsatisfactory state of things.

811. Do you think it would be possible in cases of large areas of land, where there are hundreds of owners, and where we leave the land to the process of going through the Native Land Court, that, after subdividing this land amongst the Natives, and when the surveys have been accomplished and paid for, there could be anything left of the money-value given for the land?—I do not think in many cases that the worth of an acre would be left. It would cost the country really a great deal more than the land was worth to award each individual portion to each owner.

812. Whereas if that land—say, a block of 100,000 acres—were cut up for the purposes of settlement, and not for the purpose of subdivision amongst the Natives, and the usual title were given, there would be some practical and beneficial result?—The land would be occupied, instead of lying waste.

813. *Mr. Mackay.*] What is your idea of the policy of the Crown resuming the pre-emptive right of purchasing or leasing Native lands?—The Government had that right of purchase under the Treaty of Waitangi, and they waived their pre-emptive rights twenty years ago.

814. *Mr. Rees.*] More than that; it was in 1862?—Yes; twenty-nine years ago. I was a Land Purchase Commissioner at the time, and I was told by the then Native Minister that the