

it was a matter of policy. As to what Mr. Rennell said about Hone Pihama, and the land referred to in my letter, I may mention that Hone Pihama admitted to me that the Te Ngaere land was not his to sell, and that was one of the reasons why he declined to sell when he was asked.

TE KAHUI examined.

1413. *Mr. Rees.*] You are an Assessor, are you not?—Yes.

1414. Have you for any length of time been engaged in connection with the Native Land Court and in the administration of land in this Court?—Yes.

1415. For how long?—Since 1881.

1415A. Have you had any experience of the Native Land Court outside this district?—My district extends from Waitotara to Mokau, and on two occasions I have been outside those limits. That was when I went to Wanganui and Palmerston.

1416. Then within this district are you fully aware of the wishes and feelings of the Maori people in regard to the management of their lands? Can you speak confidently as to their feelings and wishes in that respect?—Yes.

1417. Now, in regard to those lands which are administered by the Public Trustee and the Reserves Trustee—that is to say, by Mr. Rennell and Mr. Mackay—are the Natives satisfied with the present method of administration?—Mr. Mackay was the first Commissioner. No, the Natives are not satisfied.

1418. Why are they not satisfied?—Owing to the doubt in the law. The dissatisfaction arises from the fact that the Public Trustee leases the land and obtains the money, and the Natives do not know upon what terms the leases are made. There is constant dissatisfaction from this cause, and the Natives express it to Mr. Rennell continuously, whenever he is going round with the rents to them. The reason of their dissatisfaction is that they do not know what rent is being paid for the land. But in the case of leases between Natives and Europeans directly there is no dissatisfaction, because it is clearly known what is being done. That is all I have to say about that. The Commissioners engaged in this inquiry, however, understand the matter themselves. What I have to say with regard to those lands that are leased by the Public Trustee will not take very long. I wish to explain to the Commissioners that we are not satisfied with the Public Trustee having the controlling power in regard to the leasing of our lands. Nor would the Natives, including myself, be in favour of the Land Board, nor in favour of the Land Court. The Land Court has oppressed us very much. What my desire is, is that a new law should be made for this district by the Parliament that will shortly assemble. That is what I wish to say to the Commissioners. The Europeans of this district have a great deal indeed to say to the Commissioners, but I do not know what they may have said. Mr. Rennell has appeared before you, but he appears under orders. All the restrictions on the lands in this district should be removed. The Natives should have the control of their own lands, and if one individual desired to lease he should be allowed to do so; or if he desired to sell, he should be permitted to do that also, if he requires money, so that each person could clearly deal with his own particular portion. If a Native wishes to lease a portion of his land let him do so, or if he wishes to sell a portion and retain a portion for himself, give him freedom to do so. That is the plan that we on this Coast desire. There has been a great deal said to the Commissioners to-day by those persons who have been before them, but that is all I have to say.

1419. *Mr. Carroll.*] The purport, then, of your remarks is that you do not desire the Public Trustee to have the control of your lands?—Yes, that is it.

1420. Secondly, that you are not in favour of the Land Board?—Yes.

1421. Thirdly, that you should have the control and management of your own lands?—Yes.

1422. Now, supposing that in the case of a block of land, where there were a hundred owners, and they wished to lease that land, what procedure would you suggest for the purpose of leasing?—If the hundred owners—supposing that were the number—wished to lease the land and they agreed to it, well and good; let them lease it. If they wished to divide the land into convenient portions and lease them, or if they wished to retain possession of the land, let all that rest with themselves to determine.

1423. If the hundred owners wished to lease the land, and they select from among themselves some of their number to give effect to the lease, would not that do?—Yes.

1424. That would be preferable to the laborious method of getting each owner to sign his name to the lease?—That is very clear.

1425. Then, when the lease would be decided upon, how about paying the rent?—The lessee would pay the rent to each individual owner; so that whatever befel, right or wrong, the lessee would be responsible. It would not do for me to take the rent of another person.

1426. Would it not be well for a Committee chosen by the hundred owners to go along with the Government officer to receive the rent and distribute it to the owners? Would such a system as that be acceptable to you?—Do you mean a Native Committee, formed of those owning the land?

1427. Yes?—And that there would be an officer of the Government to act in concert with the Committee?

1428. Yes, and to be responsible for the proper distribution of the money?—Would such an officer be in the same position as Mr. Rennell?

1429. At the present time Mr. Rennell is acting under the Public Trustee. It is not as if he were working with the Natives who are the owners of the land?—Yes; that is so.

1430. The position, therefore, of the Government officer appointed to act in conjunction with the Native Committee would be different from that of Mr. Rennell, because he would have to attend to the distribution of the money belonging to the people who owned the land?—That would be at the time the rent was paid?