

54. As Chairman of the Clifton County Council, can you speak as to the Native lands in your county that are held by the Natives under occupation licenses, and which have been let by them to Europeans?

*The Chairman:* I understand that we are to be supplied with a list of those licenses that have been issued to Natives and which lands are held and occupied by Europeans.

*Mr. Welsh:* I will be satisfied with that.

*Mr. Zachariah:* There is no such list as that to be had. The list I will hand in is a list of the occupation licenses to the Natives, and they are supposed to be held by the Natives.

*Mr. Bell:* I will admit this: that there is in Taranaki an area—I do not know whether large or small—of land held by Natives under occupation licenses, and let to Europeans.

55. *Mr. Welsh.*] You have heard the statement of my friend, Mr. Bell. He has admitted that there is an area of land in Taranaki which the Natives have the right to occupy under licenses, but which they have let to Europeans, who occupy those lands and pay the Natives the rent: can you carry it any further than that?—Only to the extent of the Clifton County Council. With the Commissioners' consent, I should like to say a few words on this subject. First of all, it was, I understand, suggested that the Public Trust Office should furnish the Commission with a return giving the information, but I am quite satisfied the Public Trust Office could not do it effectually except they sent out a man to inquire into every special case. With regard to the Valuer-General, he made a revision of the Clifton County Council valuations fifteen months ago—after the passing of the Rating Amendment Act, 1910, the Act which enables a local body to collect rates from those Europeans who are occupying Native land without any legal qualifications.

56. *The Chairman.*] That is not a local Act?—No, it is a general Act, passed by Parliament. At that time I was Chairman of the Clifton County Council, and we were desirous of obtaining power to rate the whole of the Native land. We took immediate steps to get these European occupiers of Native land placed upon the roll. First I had an interview with Mr. Flanagan, the Valuer-General, and I pointed out to him that, in the opinion of our Council, it was the duty of his valuers to put them on the roll—in other words, that his Department should do that work. Mr. Flanagan said No, it was a rating matter; but if the local bodies would send down a list of the names he would place them on the roll for rating purposes, but he would not do the work otherwise. Now, of the counties that are affected by lands under the West Coast Settlement Act—namely, Clifton, Taranaki, Eltham, Egmont, and Hawera—I believe I am correct in saying that only two counties have taken any steps to put these people on the roll—namely, Clifton and Egmont. The other counties have taken no steps whatever, and consequently it will be impossible for the Valuer-General to afford you very much information in that respect.

57. That only bears out what has been said already. You can only go the length of two of these counties against five or more. Is it not sufficient that there is an area of land that is occupied in this way?—Yes, perhaps so.

58. *Mr. Kerr.*] There is no doubt the return we receive from the Public Trustee will show the area of land occupied by Natives under occupation licenses?—Fifty per cent. of the open land in the Clifton County Council—

59. *Mr. Welsh.*] Will you produce the return?—I could not give the whole of the land held by Natives under occupation licenses, but I can give the area of land that is placed upon the valuation roll as being held by Natives in the particular ridings I have gone into.

60. What have you got within your own knowledge?—One of these returns is compiled by the Clerk to the Clifton County Council, and the other is compiled by myself from knowledge that has been imparted to me by others.

*The Chairman:* I do not think we can take this matter any further—it would be a dangerous step. We have it that there is an area of land which the Natives have under occupation licenses, but which they let to Europeans.

*Mr. Bell:* Perhaps it will also help my friend if I say that I am using that fact as an argument in my favour.

61. *Cross-examined by Mr. Bell.*] Now, Mr. Foreman, you tell us that for some years you paid no rent under your lease at all. You got that consideration from the Public Trustee because you were in straitened circumstances?—Yes.

62. I think you were the principal agitator in the Clifton County Council to enforce the payment of rates by Natives on all occasions: am I correct?—That is so; I have tried to obtain that.

63. What they legally owe you say they have no excuse for not paying?—Well, I would not put it exactly that way. I have always regarded it in this light: that where lands were held they should contribute towards the upkeep of roads and bridges equally, according to valuation.

64. And if they do not pay, sue them, I suppose?—Well, yes, I would do that readily enough if the law gave us any redress.

65. You are not as soft-hearted as the Public Trustee was apparently?—Well, I should like to say in that connection that the Public Trustee has, I believe, right through the administration of the West Coast Settlement Act been a fair and lenient landlord.

66. He let you off paying your rents?—Well, at that time I was not particular; I would just as soon have chucked up the land.

67. At the same time his letting you off paying meant that he let the Natives off receiving their rents?—Quite so.

68. In connection with the first lease dealt with, you told us you had two objects in converting; you put it that the first object was the reduction in rent?—Yes.

69. And the second, not so important, that you would get full compensation for improvements?—That is so.

70. Now, with regard to the second lease, what would have been your object in converting? You say you would have converted if you had known of the power?—To obtain full compensation for any improvements in excess of £5 an acre.