

Superintendent's Office,  
Wellington, 24th November, 1856.

SIR,—

I have the honor to call your attention to a subject which appears to me to require the immediate notice of the General Government, I allude to the Registration of Natives, claiming votes, on the Electoral Roll of this Province.

During the year 1854-5, a few Natives were registered as voters, but of these no notice was taken, as their number was wholly insignificant.

During the present year, however, several other claims have been preferred, and there are now on the Roll thirty-five Native voters.

In April last, a list (a copy of which I enclose) of 49 Native claimants was sent in from Otaki; and it was solely owing to the prudence of the bearer, Mr. Eagan, that all these were not registered. The list was given him by Mr. Ashton St. Hill, and as I am informed, in his handwriting. Mr. Ashton St. Hill, who has been appointed Vote Clerk for the Otaki District, intimated to Mr. Eagan that next year he intended to place some hundred Natives on the Electoral Rolls and I have now the authority of Archdeacon Hadfield for stating that a very large number of claims will be made on behalf of Aborigines residing in Otaki and the adjacent Native District. Similar attempts will, I am told, be made in other parts of the Province.

These facts seem to indicate the existence of a scheme to swamp the Europeans at the next elections, and to place the whole representation of this Province in the hands of the Natives, or rather of certain Missionaries. They have already given rise to a feeling of considerable indignation throughout the Province, and they will probably occasion serious disturbances, if this plot be not at once crushed by the Government. Of course two parties could play at this game. It would be quite as easy for the Settlers as for the Missionaries to place any number of Natives on the Roll, and to bring them up to the poll like a flock of sheep. And as the Settlers would not hesitate in order to defeat this Missionary move, to spend considerable sums of money, the Missionaries would inevitably be defeated, but the consequences would be equally disastrous.

It is to prevent the settlers having recourse in self defence, to the dangerous weapon thus proposed to be employed against them, that I have deemed it my duty to bring the subject under your notice, in the hope that the Government will not hesitate to take such steps as shall render all such attempts abortive.

I apprehend that the powers of altering and framing the Electoral Regulations given by the Constitution Act afford ample means of defeating a scheme which if attempted to be carried out, must seriously endanger the peaceful relations which at present subsist between the two Races.

I have, &c.,  
(Signed) I. E. FEATHERSTON,  
Superintendent.

(List enclosed, containing the names of fifty Native Claimants for Registration.)

The Honourable the Colonial Secretary,  
Auckland.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Auckland,  
30th December, 1856.

SIR,—

The subject of your despatch of the 24th of November last, relative to the Registration of Natives, claiming votes on the Electoral Roll of the Province of Wellington, has received the careful consideration which it deserves, and I have now the honor to state the views of the Government of New Zealand with respect to it.

It does not appear from your communication whether the claims on behalf of Natives sent from Otaki in April last, were those of persons who may fairly have been presumed to possess a *bonâ fide* qualification under the Constitution Act, or whether they were preferred without any apparently reasonable grounds to justify their being made. The broad distinction between the two cases is, of course, obvious.

In reference to the first, I have to observe that while any attempt for mere party purposes to make use of even those Natives who possess the requisite qualifications of Electors could not be too strongly condemned and discouraged, the Government could not disapprove of any such Natives being assisted, either at the Registration or otherwise, with a view to an intelligent exercise of their privilege.

The Constitution Act confers the franchise, without distinction of race, on all who possess any of the qualifications enumerated in section 7, and not disqualified under the following section, and the Government has not the power, even if it had the will, to deprive any person of the rights conferred by that Act; nor does it consider that it would be proper that any power which it may possess in this respect should be used for the purpose of throwing difficulties in the way of those, whether Natives or