

that it would be a dangerous thing to allow the majority to rule how the moneys belonging to the owners of a block of land should be disposed of. It is only fair to each person having an interest in a block of land, and entitled to receive money, that he should have a voice in saying how that money should be placed or used. In fact, right through the alterations are in this direction—namely, that the principle of the Bill that the majority in all cases shall rule, should not be; but that the whole of the owners should have the power of objecting to anything that is done in connection with their land. For instance, if the whole of the owners like to elect the Committee of seven, then they would give full power to the seven to deal with the whole block; but the majority alone should not have that power. Then we come to Part VII. It is proposed to strike out the whole of Part VII., because the Bill should deal only with matter suggested by its title. The “validating” or “legalizing” the quality of the title to the land forms a separate measure altogether. If it is necessary that the quality of the title should be inquired into and validated, they are of opinion that there should be a special Commission to inquire into the fairness of all these transactions, and settle them, apart from this Bill altogether. Then, in Part VIII.—that is, in reference to the removal of restrictions—the addition made to clause 60 is “that no such inquiry shall take place unless all the owners are present or represented.” Then, in Part IX., clause 62, we propose to strike out the words “Governor in Council,” and substitute for them the word “Board,” and the same substitution in clause 63. I may state the reason of this: After going through the Bill more than once we thought we saw that the aim of the Bill was to focus everything in the hands of the Government. First of all we will say that there are a hundred owners in a block of land. They would be reduced to seven; then that seven would transfer to a more limited body, say, the “Board;” then clauses 62 and 63 give power to the Governor in Council to make any alterations, regulations, or other rules as he may think fit for the better enabling of this Act to be given effect to, and so on. It is quite possible that the Governor in Council might take over all the powers supposed to be vested in the Board, and alter the whole complexion of the Bill. The Natives think it would be safer for their interest if the words “Governor in Council” were struck out and the word “Board” put in their place; because on the Board they would be represented. They further say that, if desired, the Board should represent two owners of the block and one Commissioner. The balance of power would then be in the hands of the owners. I do not think I have much more to say.

5. Is that all you have to say?—I might say that the Hon. the Native Minister explained this clause in moving the second reading of the Bill, and we understood from him that it meant this: that these lands would be administered under the waste-land laws.

6. *Mr. Locke.*] Have you received any letters from any other parties in the Island in reference to this?—No. I might say that the meeting at Napier represented the Wairoa District.

7. At the meeting at Omahu?—The meeting was held at Hastings, and Natives attended from the Forty-Mile Bush and all round about. I should say that only representative men were invited to those meetings.

The Hon. Mr. BALLANCE, Native Minister, examined.

*The Chairman:* I understand that Sir George Grey would like to hear what the Hon. the Native Minister has to say about the Bill.

*Hon. Mr. Ballance:* I have said all that I have to say about the Bill in the House.

8. *Sir G. Grey.*] There are one or two points that I am not clear upon in respect of Part VIII., and I would like to put some questions to the Native Minister upon that. The first question I would put is, how it was that no legal sanction to the title of such occupation as is alluded to in this section had been obtainable under Part VII.?—Because the land had not passed through the Court.

9. Then, I ask whether, according to law, all agreements, titles, or instruments relating to such occupations, whether in writing or otherwise, were not absolutely null and void?—Yes: by the existing law there could be no titles unless the land had passed through the Court.

10. You have said that such occupations benefited the Natives and the colony at large. How could it be a benefit to the Natives and the colony at large that such occupation, unauthorized by law, should have been taken?—This Part is intended to give to the occupiers—who are assumed to have gone on the land with the consent of the Natives, and who are paying rents—a title for fourteen years. So far that is an amendment of the existing law.

11. But that is not an answer to my question. What we want to know is, does the Government state in this Act that it was a benefit to the Natives and to the colony at large that such unlawful occupation should have been entered upon? How can it be affirmed that it was so?—It seems to me to be a matter of opinion. The assumption is, that where the land has been occupied—in many cases, perhaps, not in all—with the consent of the owners, and *bonâ fide* occupation has taken place, it may be for the benefit of the Natives and the colony.

12. But does not such occupation prevent the free competition in land, inasmuch as many people would not occupy against the law?—There may have been cases where it would have prevented competition; but, on the other hand, there may be cases where no competition would have taken place.

13. Then, in those cases where it prevented competition, it was not to the advantage of the Natives?—Yes; it might follow. It is a matter of opinion. I do not know.

14. Then, I would ask, how could it be an advantage to Europeans if such occupation of these lands should have rendered the Natives undesirous of parting with their land in other ways?—I cannot follow the question. It appears to me that it does not prevent a title being obtained to the land, and the land being dealt with in the usual way according to law.

15. Does it not withdraw Native lands from occupation under free competition?—I have already said that in some cases it might have done so, but in other cases it might not.