

all improvements were to be theirs—for the first five years at a low rent, and so increase as they went on. The sum and substance of what I have to say is, I do not wish the Public Trustee to manage our affairs.

Kauika: I have a question to put to you. What about the Crown grants that were given to us by a former Government? We have Crown grants that entitle us to these lands—that is, the people. I want to know if these Crown grants were wrongly issued to us in the first instance. Are they worthless? Shall we burn them in the fire? This is my question to you.

Hon. the Premier: I will answer the last question first. The Crown grant gives to them the land. We shall not go behind the Crown grant; that is conclusive. The land is theirs; we do not dispute that; the laws uphold it, and the Government will administer the laws. Well, now, with regard to the question of the Public Trustee, my words are on record. I have said that so long as the lessees have rights the Public Trustee must remain. As to the payment of the money, whatever may have taken place in the past, there will be no delay in the future. The Public Trustee will pay the money over as soon as he gets it. But we have found in the past one or two chiefs have taken the money and the others have gone without their shares. That has been unfair to the bulk of the Natives. The Public Trustee will now see that the money which he has collected shall be paid to the Natives—that is, to those to whom it belongs. As far as the Public Trustee is concerned, I do not think you will have any cause to complain in regard to the prompt payment of your moneys in future. If you have, I will be the first to interpose and see that any grievance of the kind is at once redressed. With respect to the lease handed to me by Mr. Broughton, I am advised by my colleague the Attorney-General that this lease does give the Natives the whole of the improvements, and therefore I am bound to say, in fairness, that any rent should be upon the value of the land as it stands. We do not wish to destroy any legal rights that exist, whether those rights are in the possession of the Natives or the Europeans. I now think I have answered all your questions. I ask you to fairly consider my words, and if you should send a deputation to Wellington before the session I shall be glad to see it, and talk matters over. And now I wish you a very good day. I am pleased to have met you all here.

Kereopa: I have been listening to all that you have said. I am one of the speakers, but I am behind those speakers. You have said a great deal, and I have taken possession of all that you have said.

Hon. the Premier: I may say, Mr. Williams, although I have come here at a considerable amount of inconvenience, and have a great deal of work to do, if the Natives think of any fresh proposition to make and they would like to see me again, I shall try and make time to see them again before the session.

Rongo: What I wish to speak about is my lease, which has already expired, but the late lessees are still sitting upon the land, and the Natives want possession of it.

Hon. the Premier: I would refer you to the Public Trustee.

The meeting terminated at 1.10 p.m.

No. 4.

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE HON. THE PREMIER WITH THE LESSEES.—WEDNESDAY, 20TH JANUARY, 1892.

The Hon. the Premier, accompanied by the Hon. the Attorney-General, the Public Trustee, and Mr. Stafford (solicitor advising the Public Trustee), attended at the Harmonic Hall, Patea, at 3 p.m., where he was met by a number of the lessees, including the following: Messrs. W. Symes, H. T. Turner, J. R. Lysaght, F. Lysaght, F. Riddiford, P. Wilson, G. Bayly, A. Law, J. McGregor, J. Davidson, W. Wilson, G. and W. Newland, J. H. Siggs, E. Gallagher, T. Nicholson, D. Buchanan, J. Verry, W. B. Balmforth, G. V. Pearce, A. Symes; J. Ross, W. Gower, and G. Gower.

Hon. the Premier addressed the lessees as follows: Gentlemen, I have called this meeting for the purpose of obtaining your views in regard to the difficulty concerning the new leases. Before I explain any further I would suggest to this meeting that it might possibly be desirable to have a Chairman formally constituted. If so, you will elect a Chairman among yourselves, and have the meeting constituted in the usual way. If you desire to have it less formal, I will proceed to put the matter before you in the light it presents itself to my mind. In either case I shall, of course, state the circumstances. If you think, yourselves, you would like to have a Chairman I would ask you to nominate one.

Mr. J. B. Lysaght, sen.: Speaking for the body of leaseholders, I gather their view is that there is no necessity for appointing a Chairman. We are come here, Mr. Ballance, to hear what the Government propose in our case to meet our interests. Mr. Walter Symes was appointed by us as a representative, and I merely rise to say that as far as I am aware there is no necessity for appointing a Chairman. Mr. Walter Symes will speak on our behalf.

Mr. Walter Symes: Gentlemen, this is a matter that has been agitating the country, or this particular district, for a number of years now, and it will require going over for some considerable time back—as far back as the year 1879. I may say, prior to the Act of 1879 these lands had been leased by the present lessees—in most cases, at any rate—and it was a thorough understanding between the Natives and the lessees. But perhaps I am rather premature. It has been just suggested to me—I was not here at the start—that it would be very much better if we heard the views of the Hon. the Premier on the matter.

Hon. the Premier: I may say, gentlemen, that I called this meeting without any definite proposition to put before you, but rather with a view of eliciting from yourselves your views and opinions upon the question, and to receive from you any suggestions you desire to make in view of the possibility of legislation next session. I think it is quite possible that there may be legislation proposed by the Government, and I thought it desirable to obtain on the one hand the opinions of the