

colony Better never to have had land at all. It was the intention of the Government to introduce important Native legislation next session, and in preparing that legislation he wanted to be fortified with an expression of opinion direct from the Natives themselves, so that he could assure the country what the Native mind was. The time had come when this question must be dealt with fairly and, at the same time, firmly. The Government could no longer allow millions of acres of land to remain in a state of nature while thousands of people were wanting land to settle upon and cultivate. These unutilised lands the Government were prepared to deal fairly for. A law had already been passed to empower the Government to purchase lands from the Europeans for the purposes of settlement. They were going to propose next session, as they did last session, that they should have power given them to take land from the Europeans for settlement purposes. That was where land was being held in large areas and kept in a state of nature, with only a few sheep running upon it. This was the class of land they required for settlement, and they would take it whether or not the owners liked. If Parliament passed such a law applying to European land, they were not likely to allow the Natives to keep millions of acres locked up and unused. There must be equality in their legislation. In the case of European land, its value was fairly assessed, and the price thus ascertained was paid by the Government. The same treatment would be meted out to the Natives. The Natives had now a Government in power who were friendly-disposed towards them, and who desired to be just with them. At the same time he wished to assure them there was no going back—that once having put their hands to the plough the Government were going through with this question. The Premier concluded by urging the Natives to speak their minds freely and frankly.

*“The Natives’ Reply.”*

“Ihakara te Rango, an old and influential chief, over seventy years of age, was the first to speak. He welcomed the Premier, briefly referred to the matters that had been brought forward, and expressed the hope that Europeans and Maoris would be one in all things.

“Hiraka te Rango (son of Ihakara, and leader of the progressive party among these Natives) asked specially for an administrative committee to deal with the lands, and negotiate with the Government on the tribe’s behalf. Between now and next session they would meet and consider whether there was a necessity for bringing any other matters under the notice of the Government. Hiraka then referred to the Motukawa subdivision, the position of which he said was peculiar, as a portion of it had been included in Rangipo-Waiu, a block purchased by the Government. This overlap delayed further partition. He therefore asked that the Government should legislate, if necessary, to rectify this trouble. He also asked if the portion of the Awarua Block acquired by the Government could not be partitioned off.

“Mr Seddon This has been arranged for, and we wish to know where it would be most convenient for the Court to sit.

“Hiraka Utiku and I have agreed that here will be the most convenient place.

“Mr. Seddon The Judge now sitting here could not act, as he had purchased the shares claimed by the Government, but the case will be taken immediately

“Hiraka No. 2, No. 3, No. 3A, No. 3B, No. 4, and No. 4A might be heard at the same time. We want this Court to take up the work of that partition as soon as Oruamatua is concluded. He then proceeded to say that, with regard to the school, a census of the children had been taken, and three acres had been selected for school-buildings. As to the necessity for a policeman, they lived in an isolated part of the country, which was frequently visited by the scum of European society. They had agreed to give a portion of land for the station.

“Mr Seddon: Put that in writing, and a surveyor will be sent to lay off the site.

“Mr. Carroll It has pleased me that the Premier has come personally to see you. It was my wish he should meet you face to face, and not hear your grievances second-hand. We have heard them, and they will receive our attention. If there are other matters you wish attended to, send your word to us. Do not delay, or be frightened to come forward.

*“Sly-grog Selling”*

“Hiraka said he did not wish the Premier to depart with the idea that they wanted a hotel established in the district in order that they might get drink. It was for quite a different reason. They could not shut their eyes to the fact that grog was imported clandestinely into the district, and they wished to impress the Government with the fact. It was not desirable that evil should exist in any district, but perhaps the lesser evil in this particular case was that it should be under control.

“The Premier said he was very glad to hear this expression of opinion. Probably if the policeman were sent up he might be able to stop these evil doings. At any rate, one of these sly-grog sellers was now in gaol, where he could neither sell nor drink grog. (Laughter.) His ears were open, and he had heard that the Natives themselves were worse than the Europeans in this evil practice. He hoped that was untrue. He was a good judge of character, and from the levity displayed when he referred to the liquor question he came to the conclusion that there were some of these practisers of evil deeds present. (More laughter.) As the Natives wanted a policeman, it would be rather peculiar if his first duty were to lock some of them up. He hoped they would cast their bottles and cases of whiskey into the river.

“The meeting then closed.

“We met at Moawhango the Judge of the Native Land Court sitting there (Mr. Butler), and Mr A. L. D. Fraser, Native Agent. The Court has been sitting there since the middle of January, and has still some six weeks’ work ahead of it. The Natives of the district appear to be well off in live-stock, and to be amply dowered with land. They own about a hundred thousand sheep and some four thousand horses. In fact, horses are so plentiful throughout this part that large numbers of them are running quite wild, and last year drafts