

41. Have the Maoris anything to complain of in regard to the general laws of the country other than those referring to the land?—No, we have no complaint against European law other than those which affect and apply to Native lands, but with regard to laws affecting Native lands I most distinctly and strenuously do object to them, and the member who is asking me this question himself knows perfectly well that what I say is true—that the Maoris do suffer very great injustice under the land-laws as now constituted.

42. *The Chairman.*] If this Maori Council was constituted, would the Council have the power in themselves to administer the law with regard to the administration of justice, or would they appoint sub-committees with regard to the administration of law in certain districts?—What I say is this: Say, for example, the business arising in Mr. Heke's district, that would be left to his District Committee to deal with. That is apart from the Maori Council, which is to be set up wherever we decide shall be the central place—whichever place may be decided upon by the members who shall be elected by the various sections of the Maori people to represent them on that Maori Council. Then, that Maori Council will give power to the sub-councils to administrate the law which may be given to them by the Parliament. I think that would lighten the difficulty in all the districts all over the North Island.

43. That would be to appoint a special Committee for the administration of justice apart from land questions?—Supposing the Runanga Council sub-committees were set up and appointed by the Maori Council within a place where some of their people live. Now, supposing any Maori trouble arose amongst them, then this Committee which has been appointed by the Maori Council for that purpose would deal with the question of that trouble there, and would come to a final decision. They would then report to the head Council, telling the head Maori Council what decision they had come to, and the head Council would decide whether they were right or wrong in their decision.

44. What I mean is this: If we appointed in the different districts a Committee whose duty alone would be to administer justice, apart altogether from the question of lands?—Only to deal with questions between Maori and Maori. I would not ask the power to be given to deal with a question between a Maori and a European. I think that should be done, because Maoris know all the ins and outs with respect to their customs and practices, and their lands, and so forth.

45. *Mr. Stevens.*] You remember the Act of 1882, or 1884, passed by Mr. Bryce's Government?—I have heard of it; I do not know it.

46. Do you not know that the effect of that Act was to give the Maoris power to manage their own affairs in a somewhat similar manner, such as is stated in this instance. Something similar to the law which Tamahau Mahupuku and his party asked to be passed by this present Parliament?—Yes, I have heard of the Act of 1882, but it was not the Act of 1884.

47. And did that act to the benefit of the Maori people?—No; it was of no effect. There was no distinct mana and authority given under that Act. They were unable to do anything with it, because it was not clear. If an Act had been clearly drawn up they would have been able to exercise it.

48. Then, is the Act asked for during this Parliament to be different from the Act that was passed in 1882?—Well, if the Act was here and I had read it through, and all its various clauses, I might be in a position to reply to the questions asked me. It may be so; on the other hand, it may not be so.

49. Of course, I am equally desirous, with other people, that some such law should be passed as will be for the benefit and will insure the prosperity of the Maori people, but I think that no definite proposal has yet been laid before the Committee to suggest the direction in which such a law should go. Up to the present I do not think that there is any proposal of any definite character that has been made. This petition to which I am now speaking is a request to the Government to bring down a Bill to meet the wishes of the people who have sent in this petition.

50. But this petition that I have got in my hand—Tamahau Mahupuku's and others—does not make any definite proposal as to what they suggest should be done?—I would ask Mr. Stevens not to ask me any questions about that petition until it comes before the Committee. The petition I am speaking about now is the petition of the Maoris in the West Coast district.

*Mr. Stevens:* Well, this is merely a petition expressing a chord of dissatisfaction with which I sympathize myself; but it does not, after all, make any definite proposal. I would suggest that it is not a proposal, nor is it a suggestion. I would suggest that it would be better, instead of sending in an indefinite request such as that, some definite proposal should be drawn up and submitted to the Committee for consideration. Something that we could say we could agree to or not, and then perhaps we might do something this year instead of there being, as last year, nothing done.

51. *The Chairman.*] I understand the petitioners have come before the Committee so as to lay before it their views upon a form of legislation they wish the Government to bring in?—And I have done so.

*Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon:* I may say that Mr. Kaihau has put the position very plainly, and it is this: that the time has arrived, in my opinion, as Native Minister, that unless we lay down some well-defined policy in respect to dealing with the remnant of the Native lands—if we go on as we are now—they are being frittered away—the ultimate result will be a lot of landless Natives, regret and an ill-feeling engendered in the Native race; that will be the ultimate result. It is, then, a question upon which the Committee could advise after having read the evidence of last year, and whilst that evidence was given under a misapprehension, because since the evidence was taken there has been a change of feeling on the part of the Natives that we ought to give in so far as was proposed in the Legislature last session, but that we ought to give optional legislation—to