

### *Waiariki District.*

*Native Land Court.*—Sittings of the Court held in different centres in the district numbered twenty-four. A large number of various applications disposed of, the business of the Court was kept well in hand. The Maori people evince keen interest in the proceedings of the Court and display a high degree of confidence in its decisions.

Particular attention has been given to applications for rate-charging orders and the general problem of rating on Native lands. During the past year it is felt that a useful advance has been made towards a solution of this vexed problem in at least one county, but it is considered that there is no reason why the same result cannot be attained in other local counties. In actual fact a neighbouring County Council is anxious to apply similar methods, but has been asked to allow the Court to give its undivided attention to the successful launching of the initial effort.

The problem which faced both the Court and the rating authorities was one of a large accumulation of arrears secured by charging orders over the Native lands of the district, and a large annual recurring rate, of necessity made larger by the fact that the Natives were not paying their share towards the hospital, road, and drainage requirements of the district. Matters had been further complicated by an attempt to enforce rate-charging orders in a wholesale manner by the appointment of a Receiver. This attempt was rendered more or less abortive through the representations of the Natives that they were being harshly treated.

It appeared to the Court, after going into the position of many individual assessments, that there were many Natives who could well pay their rates, but that they were sheltering under the general amnesty obtained by the mass protest. It appeared also that there was much land upon which rates could and should be paid if only the rightful persons were made liable. Again it was quite plain that there were some cases where the rates should be remitted, on the ground that their enforcement would be a definite hardship to the owner or owners.

The Court thereupon met the local authorities and a representative meeting of Natives with a view to finding some basis of operation that would be readily understandable by the Natives and within the scope of their financial ability. As a preliminary, the Court explained to a meeting of Natives concerned what it conceived to be its duty under the Rating Act.

The next step was the disposal of applications by an outside Receiver previously appointed for leave to lease in some nineteen selected cases. In each of these cases the Natives received proper notice of the hearing, and in most cases the Receiver was able to inform the Court that satisfactory arrangements had been made by the occupier to liquidate the rates owing. In the remaining cases leave was given to the Receiver to lease the land for a term sufficient to remove the encumbrance.

Following these formalities, the County Council announced that it was prepared to remit 50 per cent. of rates (current at the time or in arrears) wherever occupiers were able to make satisfactory arrangements for payment of the reduced amount. A considerable number of Natives were agreeable to this arrangement, and quite a substantial amount in cash was received by the local authorities as well as orders on dairy companies and firms against produce and growing crops.

At this time there were some fourteen hundred rate applications set down for hearing, and the Court ruled that each case should receive individual consideration. The Court suggested, also, that some consideration should be allowed to ratepayers who had given orders for their arrears of rates, and that the future current rates of these people might be reduced while they were meeting payment of their arrears. Otherwise current rates would be falling into arrear and the general position would not improve.

As a result of conferences the County Council agreed that, as the real aim of all parties was to inculcate the habit of paying current rates when due, it would write off one year's arrears for each one year's current rates paid, would accept as a year's current rates whatever sum a land development settler was deemed by the Court able to pay, and, furthermore, that a year's rates paid by a lessee under a lease from a Receiver would be treated as having been paid by the Native owners. The Council's offer was explained to the Maori people by the Court and accepted by them as a very generous gesture.

The remaining step was the appointment of a person acceptable to all parties to tour the district for the purpose of checking each assessment and making the best arrangement for payment of current and future rates.

During the past year officers of the Native and Lands Departments have collaborated in explaining these proposals to the Maori people and enlisting their co-operation in the scheme, and it is noteworthy that the amount of Native rates collected by this County Council last year had the effect of allowing a reduction in this year's county rate of  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the pound. This plan is in the nature of an experiment, and the success already attained augurs favourably for an extension of the scheme to other counties in this district.

Due mainly to shortage of trained staff, it has not been possible to make any marked progress with consolidation of titles during the year. As opportunity permits, those schemes which are sufficiently advanced are being pushed on to completion.

The number of alienations of Native land confirmed shows a slight increase over the previous year, but the majority of leases confirmed affect land that has previously been subject to tenure. A careful investigation is made in these cases to ensure that it is in the interests of the owners to re-lease the lands rather than to assume occupation and development themselves. In some cases the large