

141. I ask very clearly, whether there was a violation of the contract, or whether you are bringing these allegations forward with a view to assist you in getting the Government to agree to the modifications?—I say this justifies me in asking for the modifications, which the Committee might not think I was justified in asking for unless I had shown some means of getting out of the difficulty. Why I bring the matter into the petition is this, that the proposed modifications may be considered by the Committee. I must give some reason for departing from the existing contract, and show some cause why the modifications should be considered. This is one of the strong reasons.

142. *Hon. Sir J. Hall.*] You want a new contract, and wish to show the grievances you suffer under the present?—That is so.

143. *Mr. Saunders.*] You want to show, in a general way, that there have been some breaches in the contract to justify you in coming to the Government for a new contract?—Yes.

*Mr. Bell:* The petition has confined itself to the question as to whether the position of the company and the Government, with regard to this contract, is such as to make it desirable that the difficulties on both sides should be put an end to. We do not ask for a new contract to continue the war, but to protect the rights of the company. It would be necessary to support by evidence the allegations we make in the petition. We do not ask the Committee to accept them on our *ipse dixit*. The Committee will be able to measure the gravity of our objections to the course taken on the part of the Crown, and will be able also to measure the Crown's objections to the company; and it will then decide as to whether the question is worthy of settlement. I do not think it is possible for us to fix a quantum of damage. I did not intend to indicate that the company was not going to support the allegations by evidence: that is what we have come here for.

*Witness:* It is a question as to how deeply they require me to go into the evidence. The Minister intends to go into these reserves up to the total, 750,000 acres; and, on the face of it, as the mining population is only two or three thousand, they can only exhaust, say, 20,000 acres. Is it necessary or fair to take 750,000 acres to meet the requirements of a population which is not increasing but decreasing? Is it necessary, I say, to make these reserves, except one here and there? They cannot be wanted to-day, although they might be required at a distant date. These reserves injure the company by being made to so great an extent.

144. *Mr. Seddon.*] Am I to understand, Mr. Wilson, that you contend that, under the terms of the contract, the Governor or the Government of the day must go and test that ground?—I say he must see the necessity for such reserve being made, either on the ground that it is payably gold-bearing, or that there is an increased population, or that the miners wish to have the land for their purposes.

145. You told the Committee that in the vicinity of gold-workings you had given instructions that no objections were to be lodged by the company? Will you say Yes or No to that?—I cannot say whether that has been done, Yes or No. I have written to you to the effect that we do not object to reserves being made round known gold-mining centres. [Map referred to.]

146. Can you point out any blocks where reserves have been made that did not come within your instructions?—You may have a few people working at certain points, and I am quite willing that a reserve should be made to meet their requirements. We should be the last people in the world to object to the gold-miners developing the country. But I do argue that it would be better for the colony and the company to have all the land advertised when applied for, and that an expert with the Warden should come forward and reserve what is necessary and leave out the other part of the country on which it is impossible to say that gold-working is payable. Of course we will all admit that you can get gold anywhere you test on the West Coast, but the question is whether it is payable. You have many people on small claims who will admit that they are barely earning food. With such a stretch of country as you reserve, you would have 150,000 miners if the reserves were valuable. I say that by making these reserves you are only providing for a large population which may require them at a very distant time. I also say that these reserves have not been proved, and may not be found to be payable.

147. Do you consider the Mining Inspector, the Warden, the Commissioner of Lands, the Inspector of Mines, and the Mining Association such good judges as to be able to express an opinion whether the land is wanted for mining purposes "and the several purposes connected therewith or incidental or conducive thereto"? Would you consider that they could form a better opinion than yourself?—I may question you there. It is a matter of opinion—purely a matter of opinion. Look how many experts you have who have spent the whole of their lives gold-mining on the West Coast, who will go on to a piece of country which they will tell you has millions in it, who will spend large sums of money in bringing in water, &c., and then it turns out a duffer. How can you expect any man to state definitely whether a block of land is payable or not? The more you know about gold-mining the less you know where payable gold is likely to be found. Then, again, the lead may pinch out at any point, and you have no conception where it can be recovered. The more you know about gold-mining the more uncertain you are as to where the gold is in payable quantities.

148. Most of the ground there is sluicing?—Certainly, there is considerable amount of sluicing-ground.

149. The colony has spent over half a million in the district on races, &c.?—I am not contending that the company wish to prevent mining. I rather contend that the company is prepared to encourage all gold-mining; but, at the same time, I contend that we must encourage settlement; and I maintain that these mining reserves are preventing settlement.

150. With two exceptions they have all been agreed to by the company?—I did not say so.

151. Does not the contract say we have an absolute right to 750,000 acres?—When required. You have only the right if the land is required for *bonâ fide* mining purposes, and the reserves are to be made from time to time in blocks not exceeding 10,000 acres. I want to draw attention to this: that, before the present contract, a late Minister of Mines proposed to select the whole 750,000