

view of the inquiry now going on with regard to the Chief Reporter not taking his turns in the gallery. Referring now to what Mr. Leslie says about the representations from members of the staff to the Chief Reporter, this witness again states what is untrue, and I will relate the circumstances connected with the letter of the 1st August to the Chief Reporter. They are these: There had been several discussions on various occasions amongst members of the staff as to what form these representations should take. After a certain form had been agreed to, on a certain Friday night, when the Chief Reporter was at home, it was decided that these representations should be typewritten for signature. On the following afternoon (Saturday) I came to the *Hansard* room and found Mr. Leslie engaged in writing a report of the Art Exhibition for the *New Zealand Times*. I at once proceeded to draft a memorandum, in accordance with the decision arrived at by members of the staff on the previous night. This draft was read over to Mr. Leslie, and approved of by him. Mr. Geddis having arrived in the meantime, that gentleman, at my request, proceeded to print it off on the typewriter for signature. Before it was finished Mr. Leslie left the room, and did not return. Mr. Spragg, however, arrived, and, having read over the memorandum, expressed his concurrence with it, and both Mr. Spragg and myself signed it. It was considered desirable that the members of the staff should sign in the order of seniority. Mr. Berry was out of town, and his signature was not therefore attached; but the other signatures were duly appended. On the following Tuesday Mr. Leslie, much to our surprise, declined to sign, after considering the matter, and said he would sign absolutely nothing. This document I now enclose, and it will be seen that it is signed by Messrs. Grey, Spragg, Geddis, Russell, and Gore. Mr. Berry's signature was not, as I have said above, attached, for the reason that he was then at Plimmerton; and Mr. Leslie's signature is not there either, for the reasons already stated. Several other discussions followed, and it was ultimately resolved to send in the document of August 1st in substitution of the first one. The latter was signed by all the members of the staff except Mr. Leslie. The reply of the Chief Reporter was considered most unsatisfactory. He attempted to "ride the high horse," and evidently thought that by assuming a bold front he would nip any further action in the bud. But the members of the staff considered that they had been "sweated" long enough, and hence the inquiry that is now going on. Up to the day that Mr. Barron handed me his very curt reply to the memorandum from the staff there had been perfect unanimity of feeling. On that day the Chief Reporter manifested towards all the other reporters a demeanour so distinctly cold that we could all see that he was sulking, and that he was determined to show us that we had incurred his severest displeasure. Mr. Leslie made an attempt to engage him in conversation, and, receiving a very snappish reply, he at once indited the note which has been sent to the Committee drawing Mr. Barron's attention to the fact that he had not signed the memorandum. Thereupon Mr. Barron's reserve was dissipated so far as Mr. Leslie was concerned, and ever since then they have daily taken counsel together, and made common cause. I deny altogether that Mr. Leslie heard first of the letter of the 1st August from myself. He had taken part in almost the whole of the discussions that had occurred concerning it. As a matter of fact, the letter of the 1st of August sent to Mr. Barron was not drafted by me at all. A draft was shown to me, and I refused to sign it. Then it was modified to some extent, typewritten, and handed to me again. I approved of this modified draft, and the signatures of the members of the staff were appended to it in their order of seniority. I was requested to forward this to Mr. Barron, with the covering note, which I read over to the members of the staff. Mr. Leslie says what is again absolutely untrue when he states that I had not been acting in harmony with my colleagues. After his treachery I ignored him altogether; and of course I did not consult Mr. Spragg, after his letter. But all along I have been acting in the most perfect harmony with my colleagues—Messrs. Berry, Geddis, Russell, and Gore. In other words, five members of the staff have had the courage of their opinions against two, and have therefore sought for a redress of their grievances. "Cabal," in Mr. Leslie's letter, is the precise term which very appropriately designates the attempt that is made by himself and Mr. Barron to persuade members of the House that the Chief Reporter's action in establishing a sinecure for himself by the "sweating" of his staff proceeds from anything but selfish motives. Throughout my long parliamentary and journalistic career I can confidently say that my veracity has never been called in question, and I maintain that every statement made in my evidence is strictly in accordance with fact. Coming now to Mr. Spragg's letter, I deny absolutely that Mr. Spragg was "trapped" into signing either of the two letters to the Chief Reporter. He took part in the discussions that were held concerning the representations that should be made, and recognised that an additional note-taker was necessary. Mr. Spragg signed both documents; and how he can reconcile this with his subsequent action it is impossible to understand. The only explanation that suggests itself is that on seeing the Chief Reporter's hostile attitude he "funked," went back on his former opinion, and left the other five members of the staff to maintain the position they had taken up.

In conclusion, I have only to say that Mr. Barron, Mr. Leslie, and Mr. Spragg, in the further action they have taken since the report of the Committee was presented to the House, have made a most sedulous attempt to obscure the real issue involved by raising a number of side-issues, and by a laboured attempt to justify the Chief Reporter's abstention from his primary duty. The real issue is, whether the staff is to be "sweated" in order that the Chief Reporter may continue in the enjoyment of a comfortable sinecure of £600 a year, which he was hoping would escape the notice of those in authority, never contemplating that the staff would dare to incur his displeasure by making any remonstrance.

The Chairman and members, Reporting Debates Committee.

I have, &c.,

J. GRATTAN GREY.

I ENCLOSE herewith for the inspection of the Committee the first document signed by Mr. Spragg. The second document (which was adopted in lieu of the first, and forwarded to Mr. Barron) was signed by Mr. Spragg after an interval of several days from the time of signing the first one.