

*Mr. Phillips:* Yes. I may state that Mr. Seddon has since expressed his regret to me. It is only fair that I should say that Mr. Seddon did not know Mr. Armstrong. In further reference to the precedent I quote I may state that, notwithstanding King James got four hundred members "suited to his mind," still his interference in the elections lost him his throne. Before that Parliament was half over he had to leave the kingdom. On the 24th December last a telegram was received in this colony from Canada that twenty-seven Returning Officers had been arrested on a charge of conspiring to defeat the popular will at the last June elections there. If we are to have a number of Returning Officers appointed to act as Armstrong has done here there is no hope of a free Parliament. If we have Returning Officers they should be fairly impartial men, who should be appointed for their integrity, to conduct our elections in future. They should be fairly independent men of some means and position. The polling-places should be lessened in number, so that the Deputy Returning Officers should also be impartial. I ask the Committee that my expenses incurred in the contest for the Wairarapa seat, which I might have won, and in presenting this petition, be paid out of consolidated revenue, and an amount for damages exactly equal to those I could have recovered in the Supreme Court. Of such great importance do I consider this matter that I ask that this petition may be printed and made one of precedent; that legislation of some sort should be passed to check the practices of which this man Armstrong has been guilty; and more particularly that Ministers of the Crown refrain in future from interfering in elections outside the places they personally represent.

THURSDAY, 2ND DECEMBER, 1897.

Mr. N. GRACE examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] I believe your name is Mr. N. Grace, sheep-farmer, at Carterton?—Yes.
2. You are summoned to give evidence on behalf of Mr. Coleman Phillips on the petition before the Committee respecting matters in connection with the last general election for the Wairarapa District?—I do not know that I can give evidence. I was a candidate for the Licensing Committee. My nomination was refused and returned. I do not know that I can say anything further. Mr. Armstrong took upon himself to say that I was disqualified and could not act on account of holding two shares in this co-operative association. As to whether it was his duty to do that or not I cannot say.
3. *Mr. Phillips.*] Do you think it was right of Mr. Armstrong to have refused either your nomination or mine?—It is hard for me to say.
4. Do you know what is the general feeling in the district in regard to Mr. Armstrong?—I do not know.
5. Do you think Mr. Armstrong is a fit and proper person to be a Returning Officer?—I think his political bias is too great to be a Returning Officer.
6. Do you think in the matter of my petition considerable partisanship was shown by Mr. Armstrong as a Returning Officer?—I am not prepared to say that.
7. Was any partisanship shown in your own case?—No. I think that Mr. Deller, being a shareholder of the farmers' co-operative association, and my name being on the list, knew that he could not be disqualified without disqualifying me.
8. Mr. Armstrong did not go out of his way to disqualify Mr. Deller or yourself?—Not to my knowledge.
9. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Armstrong, do you desire to ask the witness any questions?—Yes.
10. *Mr. Armstrong.*] You were not standing on the same side of the Licensing Committee as Mr. Deller, were you?—I do not know that there were sides. I was an independent member.
11. Was not there what they call a publicans' party and a prohibition party?—I do not think that was the case at the last election.
12. Do not you know that the publicans met and selected five candidates?—Yes.
13. Was your name amongst those five?—No.
14. Were you not nominated at all by the other side?—No.
15. Was not the other side prepared to support you?—Not to my knowledge. I am generally supported throughout the district.
16. You were rejected by the publican party?—Not to my knowledge.
17. You were rejected?—I do not know whether it was a case of rejection.
18. Were there not eight or, say, seven candidates nominated? You were nominated on the other side?—I refused to be nominated by either party.
19. *Mr. Field.*] How many shares in the co-operative association have you?—Two. I had only just become a shareholder.
20. You say Mr. Deller was also a shareholder?—I believe so. His name was also on the list of shareholders.
21. You said you were not nominated in the interest of either party?—I was nominated independently.
22. You are not a Prohibitionist?—No.
23. *Mr. Monk.*] Is the holding of shares in a company a disqualification to a candidate?—I do not think so. I have had lawyers' advice, and they say it is not. I hold shares in a farmers' co-operative association.
24. *Mr. Phillips.*] You say the refusal of the licensing nominations was not carried out on political grounds?—Not to my knowledge.
25. Supposing I call your attention to Mr. Armstrong's own evidence in the Resident Magistrate's Court, in which he states that this matter was carried out on political grounds—this from a report of one of the Wairarapa papers of Mr. Armstrong's own evidence?—It might have been.
26. Was it carried out on political grounds or not?—Not to my knowledge.
27. Were you not interested in the case when it came before the Court?—Not particularly.