

220. It is not a question of what I think. You were the active agent in bringing this pressure to bear. I want to know which officer or Minister you have been "squeezing"?—I have told you that I have not squeezed or spoken to any Minister about the matter.

221. How did you press the Government?—Through the correspondence. Your ideas of carrying things out are, perhaps, different from the company's.

222. How did you "squeeze" somebody connected with the Government?—We did not "squeeze" any one.

223. But bringing pressure to bear means "squeezing"?—You wish to imply that something was done that was not creditable?

224. I am simply using your own words. You say, "After much pressure the Government granted 250 acres"?—Is it not much pressure, after making an application for a coal lease on the 22nd August, 1902, to have to carry on this correspondence, and only receive intimation on the 6th August, 1904, that the lease has been granted to you—when you were the prior applicant?—Your idea of pressure evidently is to use undue influence on Ministers. I do not resort to "squeezing."

225. You say, "After much pressure"?—Yes. It was after much pressure.

226. I understand what political pressure means all right?—It does not say "political pressure" there.

227. It says "much pressure"?—You are hard up for something to say. You are quoting from a report of a meeting at which I used the term "after much pressure." There was much pressure.

228. Were you aware, when you made the application, that the men had spent a considerable amount of time and money in prospecting the ground?—I know nothing about their business. I know nothing about what it cost them, and their developments, except what Mr. Leather told me one day in a semi-confidential manner. This was shortly prior to the meeting held this year.

229. Do you mean to tell the Committee that you were not aware that the syndicate had prospected the ground at this time?—We had no knowledge with regard to it at all. There was talk about the syndicate, but—

230. Did you use this pressure to try to "squeeze" those men out of it after they had spent their money on prospecting the ground?—Certainly not. The company made application for this area because it was essential to the working of the company's business that they should have it.

231. Why was it essential?—Because they wanted an extended area.

232. That did not make it essential?—Not in your opinion, but in their opinion it was. They are not guided by your judgment in the matter.

233. Did you offer those men any terms to buy them out?—No.

234. Did any one on behalf of your company?—Not that I know of. There has been no authority whatever given to any one to in any way negotiate with the syndicate.

235. You did not try to get them to surrender their application, did you?—We made no application further than that we wanted the area we applied for.

236. This gentleman (Mr. Leather) says that the syndicate were asked the terms on which they would surrender their claim. Was that by your company?—No.

237. Did any one on behalf of the company interview them?—Mr. Ralph interviewed Mr. Leather on behalf of the Taupiri Coal Company as suggested by the Commissioner of Crown Lands, who asked that there should be an endeavour made on the part of both sides to come to an amicable arrangement; and that failed.

238. Who is Mr. Ralph?—One of the directors of the Taupiri Company, and the owner of a considerable area of land on which the company works.

239. Does he occupy any Government position?—No.

240. You bought a property from him, did you?—Yes. From Mrs. Harris, from Mr. Ralph, and from Miss Ralph.

241. He is a large shareholder in your company?—Yes.

242. Have you got a lease for this land—this piece in dispute?—You would imagine so by the receipt, would you not?

243. Not altogether. A receipt does not constitute a lease?—If you have not got the lease after that correspondence and delay, I say we should have.

244. Have you got a lease from the Crown of any part of this ground that is in dispute, or that the other people have applied for?—You will see that the letter sent by the Commissioner is dated the 11th July. You know that I have been in Parliament since about the 26th June, but the company's business is going on during my absence. I sent to the secretary, asking him to forward to me all correspondence in connection with the company's applications. This is the correspondence which I have before me and which I have read. This is the receipt for the fee paid for the lease [Produced]. As the business has been dealt with since I came to Parliament I am not aware whether the company has obtained the lease or not.

245. That is outside of my question. I ask, have you or your company got a lease for any part of the ground that the syndicate applied for?—I can give you no information further than that which is submitted to you. As I say, when I found this petition was coming forward I sent a wire asking for all the correspondence, and that correspondence has been placed before you.

246. When did you send the wire?—After the petition was presented. I could not say the date.

*The Chairman:* The petition was presented on the 21st July.

247. *Mr. R. McKenzie:* Over three weeks ago. If you had obtained a lease would it not be part of the correspondence?—There is the receipt. The secretary would not send the lease here. Why should he?

248. I tell you, as a matter of fact, that there is no lease?—Then you know more about it than I do.