

The matter was submitted to me after I was informed that all the others had agreed to make certain suggestions to the Chief. I stated plainly that if the suggestion was intended as in any sense a complaint I would have none of it. I did not think the suggestion could be carried out, and said so plainly; but, as the majority desired to submit it for Mr. Barron's consideration, I then saw no harm in it. I asked if this meant a request that Mr. Barron should go into the gallery, and the answer was distinctly "No." First of all, a long series of recommendations had been drafted, by whom I do not know, but the members of the staff would not agree to this. Then Mr. Berry drafted a suggestion that, in view of the pending heavy financial debate, Mr. Barron should consider whether it would not be advisable to appoint one man to go into the gallery (temporary appointment) in lieu of transcribers. This I did not consider practicable; but I saw no objection to submitting it to Mr. Barron. Mr. Grey rejected this, and subsequently drew up his "respectful suggestion." Seeing no harm in it, and being assured that it was merely a matter for Mr. Barron's consideration, I signed it, although my opinion as to the relative value of one note-taker, or two shorthand writers to assist in transcription, differed materially from that of other members of the staff.

I distinctly remember saying, "This is not a complaint, and if Mr. Barron does not approve of the suggestion that ends it"; and I was answered quite as clearly, "Yes." I now recollect that Mr. Grey said nothing in answer to that remark, and it appears that his silence was not acquiescence. No sooner, however, did I learn that this document had been made the foundation of an attack on the Chief, than I considered myself "trapped" into signing it, and said so unmistakably, if not politely, in the presence of the other members of the staff, and I there and then wrote asking that my signature should be withdrawn.

Yours, &c.,

S. SPRAGG.

Hon. Major Steward, Chairman of the Reporting Debates Committee.

*The Chairman:* Mr. Grattan Grey has submitted a statement which I will call upon the clerk to read to the Committee.

GENTLEMEN,—

*Hansard Office, Friday morning, 18th October, 1895.*

I have the honour to acknowledge, from the clerk of your Committee, the receipt of certain documents sent in by Messrs. Spragg and Leslie, with a request that I should reply thereto before half-past ten o'clock this morning. These documents reached me only a minute or two before going into the gallery yesterday afternoon, and I think it most unfair that in the midst of reporting work I should be allowed so little time to reply to these communications. However, as I have been given to understand that it is necessary this reply should be in the hands of the Committee this morning, I have no alternative but to do the best I can with the scraps of time at my disposal between "turns" to answer with haste the sweeping assertions contained in these documents. If a little more time had been allowed me, I could have fortified myself with further evidence to completely disprove these unfounded statements. Mr. Leslie's evidence is so wildly reckless and extraordinary, and so utterly at variance with facts, that one is simply amazed at its outrageous audacity. From beginning to end it is a barefaced attempt to bolster up a bad case by unscrupulous and groundless assertion. The sycophancy that has been manifested throughout his action in this affair, and which characterizes the whole of his testimony, is not a matter of surprise to myself. One who knows nothing to the contrary would imagine that the Chief Reporter was a paragon of every virtue and accomplishment under the sun, and that, in fact, the publication of *Hansard* could not possibly go on unless Mr. Barron is continued in his present fat and comfortable sinecure—a sinecure, in fact, to which no parallel can be found in the whole range of the public service of New Zealand. If inquiry were pushed to the root of the matter, substantial reasons would be found to account for Mr. Leslie's excess of zeal on Mr. Barron's behalf, apart altogether from the *Hansard* question. His exertions in that direction in canvassing members have been most indecent and improper, and what underlies his whole action accounts for his desertion of his colleagues, towards whom he has acted the part of a traitor. I repeat again, as strongly as language can emphasize the fact, that Mr. Leslie's evidence is a tissue of the grossest misrepresentations. It is the coolest effrontery for a man of his limited professional experience to talk of "crass ignorance" on my part, and of a deliberate intention to mislead. Every statement I have made about the duties of the Chief Reporter is founded upon indisputable facts. What the Chief Reporter does in connection with the indexing of *Hansard* is the merest child's play compared with the work which the other members of the staff have individually to perform in its compilation. Then, as to Mr. Leslie's statement that there is not a day on which members of the staff do not put questions of detail: All the older members of the staff know as well as Mr. Barron what should be done under given circumstances; they merely refer to him as a matter of form, in order that there may be uniformity of action on particular points; and if he were not there—as very frequently he has not been—the senior reporter has done, and can do, all his work at least quite as well. Then, again, as to Mr. Leslie's assertion that "there are and always have been frequent exceptions" to the transcribed "copy" passing directly from the hands of the reporters to the messengers from the Government Printing Office, Mr. Leslie says "there have been occasions when Bills have been in Committee, and have undergone many or important amendments, the whole of the 'copy' is revised by Mr. Barron before going to the Printer. The whole of the recent tariff copy was, *inter alia*, revised in this way." With regard to the foregoing statement, the occasion pointed out by Mr. Leslie was the solitary instance in which "turns" have gone through the hands of the Chief Reporter. This new-born zeal on the part of the Chief Reporter was a source of considerable merriment to members of the staff, as they could see it was adopted in order to give colour to the plea of "editorial supervision"—which I again most emphatically declare is the shallowest pretence—in