

were somewhat unnecessarily frightened. The fearful financial debate was coming on, and without extra assistance we knew it would be very hard. The resolution which was drafted by Mr. Berry was simply submitting to Mr. Barron's judgment whether it would be better to appoint one man to go into the gallery, or to obtain assistance in transcription during the heavy pressure of the work. I was not of opinion that the appointment of one man to go into the gallery would be practicable, but I was quite willing that it should be submitted to Mr. Barron. What I mean by being "trapped" is this. Having signed an apparently innocent document, a mere suggestion for the consideration of the Chief, on the distinct understanding that it was in no degree a complaint or a request that Mr. Barron should go into the gallery, I found that a copy of that document was retained, and subsequently used as a means of attack: the very thing to which I would on no account have consented. If that is not being "trapped," whatever the intention may have been, the result seems to me to have been fairly successful. I distinctly deny that I ever signed anything, or consented to anything, that could be taken by any member of the staff to mean that I considered the Chief should be requested to go into the gallery. Having said that, I would merely add that I do not think I am usually regarded as being either cowardly or untruthful.

Mr. GEDDIS'S evidence.

The Chairman: Mr. Geddis, have you any further statement to make in addition to the replies given by you to the questions forwarded to you by the Committee?—I think the written answers which I have sent in to the questions of the Committee express all that I have to say. I have seen no reason since to amend or vary those answers in any way. As reference, however, has been made to what took place in the *Hansard* room when the draft memorandum for submission to Mr. Barron was shown to Mr. Leslie, I may just as well give my account of the circumstance. The matter was talked over by the members of the staff on the previous evening (Friday), and an understanding was come to that the various reporters should meet at the *Hansard* room on the following afternoon (Saturday), and then draw up and sign a memorandum. When I arrived at the *Hansard* room on the Saturday afternoon I found Mr. Grey and Mr. Leslie already there. Mr. Grey had drafted the memorandum, and in my presence he read it over to Mr. Leslie and myself. Mr. Leslie expressed his acquiescence with it, and intimated that he would sign it. It was thought desirable, however, that the members of the staff should sign it in the order of their seniority. At Mr. Grey's request I took the draft memorandum and proceeded to write it out on the typewriter. Before I had finished Mr. Leslie went away. Mr. Spragg arrived immediately afterwards, and the memorandum was read over to him, and signed by Mr. Grey and himself. As Mr. Berry was out of Wellington at the time a space was left for his name. Several other members of the staff signed, then the completion of the document was held over till the Monday. With regard to the personal matter which has been introduced, I have nothing whatever to say, except to express regret that it has been introduced. It seems to me that the paramount question involved in this inquiry is as to whether the staff is of sufficient strength to cope with the work. The Chief Reporter represented to the Government in 1892 that it was quite insufficient to cope with the work, and that it was likely sooner or later to break down unless strengthened by the addition of another reporter. Another reporter was appointed by the Government at the beginning of the session of 1893, but as towards the end of that session the Chief Reporter ceased to share in the work of the reporting the strength of the staff was brought down to its former position, so far as note-takers were concerned. During the two years that have elapsed since then the work of reporting has increased both in volume and severity, and if there was need for an extra reporter in 1893 there is far more need for one now. With regard to the drafting of the second memorandum, which was the one that was sent to Mr. Barron, I may say that several members of the staff were engaged in its composition, the object being to procure such a form of words that would accommodate Mr. Leslie's susceptibilities, and enable him to sign. I have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Spragg's statement as to his position with regard to that memorandum is quite correct. He made it perfectly clear, to my mind, that he was willing to sign so long as the representation which the staff made was only to the Chief Reporter, and that he was not going to be a party to carrying any representations beyond the Chief Reporter.

Mr. Spragg: That is so.

QUESTIONS PUT TO MEMBERS OF THE HANSARD STAFF, AND REPLIES THERETO.

The Chairman: Has the Committee any questions to ask the members of the *Hansard* staff?

Mr. Pirani.] Mr. Barron, ever since your snappish reply to Mr. Leslie, when you supposed he had signed those documents, but subsequent understanding to the contrary, you have daily taken counsel together?—We have talked over the matter, but I think every member of this Committee will bear me out when I say I have not once addressed any of them on the subject now before them.

Mr. GREY examined.

The Chairman: Has the Committee any questions to ask Mr. Grey?

Mr. Pirani.] I think Mr. Grey has had some experience in being in charge of the staff?—I have. In the latter part of the session of 1893, and on several occasions since then. Mr. Barron was taken ill in 1893, and I was then in charge.

Can you tell me how long?—Several weeks.

Mr. Hogg.] In this reply of yours, have you imputed any conspiracy?—I have imputed no conspiracy to any one, but, ever since Mr. Leslie's treachery, that witness and Mr. Barron have been in consultation with each other, and I believe the latter was fully cognisant of Mr. Leslie's active canvassing of members on his behalf.