

Their examination on the position will be found in the evidence. These gentlemen are of opinion that Schedule C in the report of the special auditors is valueless, since they hold that the vouchers must have been duplicates.

Various payments being shown of approximately equal amounts at later dates both by bank pass-book, cash-book, and ledger, a difference of opinion arose as to their identity with those under the Schedule. Your Committee therefore caused sixteen cheques for corresponding amounts to be obtained from the bank; of these, only five bear the indorsement of Nathan Seddon, while the others appear to be paid to Mr. Wylde either by cash or through his private account.

At this interval it seems to be impossible in the absence of reliable evidence to arrive at any certainty, but your Committee is agreed that there is no evidence of overpayment to Mr. Nathan Seddon.

CHARGES AGAINST MR. R. J. SEDDON.

Of the passages complained of in reference to Mr. R. J. Seddon, the principal statement by Mr. Hutchison is on page 63 of *Hansard*, where, referring to Mr. Seddon's examination in Court as a witness for Mr. Wylde, he says, "In the course of his examination, however, a document was put into his hands; it was an authority in his own favour from his uncle, Nathan Seddon, under which the right honourable gentleman had to admit that he himself had been the person who had drawn the moneys so paid and overpaid." Your Committee is, of course, ignorant as to the evidence by which Mr. Hutchison would seek to establish this, but the authority referred to, bearing date the 7th March, has been produced. Mr. Barnett in his evidence stated that he thought two payments were made under it when Mr. R. J. Seddon was Mayor of Kumara. If such payments were made, they were quite in order. There is no evidence that any payment was made under it in the years under review—namely, 1880–81. The special auditors make no allusion to Mr. R. J. Seddon in this connection, and your Committee is of opinion that on the evidence before them Mr. Hutchison is in error on this point.

The part taken by Mr. R. J. Seddon in opposing a special audit at the prolonged meetings of the Council when deciding as to a course of action, and generally in championing Mr. Wylde, laid him open to adverse criticism, but, after a very full investigation, your Committee is of opinion that this is explainable by party zeal.

Re MR. SEDDON'S REPUTATION.

That the allegation that Mr. R. J. Seddon was held in indifferent repute on the West Coast is disproved.

Re MR. R. J. SEDDON'S ASSOCIATION WITH CHINESE.

In reference to the further charge of Mr. Seddon's connection with the Chinese: Briefly, Mr. Hutchison's charges were that Mr. Seddon was once connected with them in business on the West Coast, and that he was there a partner with certain Chinamen, and known amongst them as Bun Tuck.

It was elicited that Mr. Seddon practised for years as a mining advocate, and was in that capacity employed by the Chinese.

The Committee finds that at one time Mr. R. J. Seddon was the registered owner of a share in a mining claim along with a party of Chinamen; but the explanation of Mr. Seddon in his sworn statement is that he took a transfer of this share in trust from a Chinaman who was going home on a visit, and that he held it only on this client's account. This is corroborated by other witnesses.

Evidence was given that this Chinaman (Tum Shum) left a man to work his share, and that the proceeds were not paid to Mr. R. J. Seddon.

In regard to Mr. Hutchison's charge that Mr. Seddon was known as Bun Tuck, your Committee has had no evidence placed before it in support of it. There is evidence of the existence of a Chinaman of the name of Bung Tuck, who was one of the shareholders in the mining claim referred to, which mining party was variously known as the Tum Shum and Bung Tuck party, and your Committee has little doubt that Mr. Hutchison in his statement concerning this is in error.

In reference to a document read to the House by the member for Patea, the evidence leads to the conclusion that the original was written in English, and that the member for Patea procured the translation of the document into Chinese, a clerk having taken the original in English to a Chinese place of business in Wellington, and had it translated into Chinese there.

The names in the document are not, so far as could be ascertained, the names of individuals connected with the party of Chinese alluded to, with this exception: that one of the Chinese was named Bung Tuck (not Bun Tuck). It is right to state that Mr. Seddon admits the fact of his name appearing as it does in the transfer was not unlikely to lead to a misapprehension.

Of course, in an investigation where there is no prosecutor, and the defendant has first to state the case against himself, and then to disprove it, the result must always be inconclusive and unsatisfactory; but in the present case, since the questions raised are in the main so dependent upon documentary evidence, your Committee advances the opinions expressed in this report with a good deal of confidence that the case is fairly put before the House.

Wellington, 4th November, 1898.

ALEX. SLIGO, Chairman.