

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

TUESDAY, 1ST NOVEMBER, 1910.

The Chairman: Are you ready to go on, Mr Myers?

Mr Myers: Yes.

The Chairman: Before proceeding I wish to intimate that the Committee has decided that it is not necessary to have an opening statement by counsel.

Mr Myers: I am obliged for that. Might I suggest, sir, that it would be desirable that witnesses should be ordered to leave the room till they are required to give their evidence.

The Chairman: Have you any objection to that, Mr Skerrett?

Mr Skerrett: No, I have no objection.

The Chairman: The first charge you will proceed with, Mr Myers, is No. 3, That the said Walter Symes, in or about the year 1906, and again in 1908, while a member of Parliament, charged and received from a number of west coast lessees of Native lands commissions or sums of money for preparing and conducting petitions in Parliament on their behalf

Mr Myers: Yes. I will call Mr Otterson.

HENRY OTTERSON SWORN and examined. (No. 1

1 *Mr Myers:*] You are Clerk of Parliaments, Mr. Otterson?—No, Clerk of the House of Representatives.

2. And you have charge, have you not, of the records, including any petitions which are from time to time presented to the House?—Yes, I have.

3. Have you in your custody certain petitions which were presented by Mr Symes in 1905 and 1906 on behalf of a number of west coast lessees?—Yes, I have.

4. Will you produce them?—Yes. [Petitions handed in] I produce a petition signed by George Johnston and sixteen others, and the date it was presented was 15th August, 1905.

5. That was presented by Mr Symes, who was then a member of the House?—It was.

6. Do you know whether Mr Symes at that time occupied the position of Government Whip?—I could not say for certain. There have been so many changes in the Government Whips.

7. Have you any record of the report made by the Committee upon this petition?—Yes, I have the report in the Appendices to the Journals.

8. Would you mind indicating what the report was. The petition is a petition for a refund to those seventeen petitioners of sums of money paid by them as lessees of west coast lands in connection with certain awards which were abortive?—That is so.

9. What was the report?—The Committee reported twice. The first report was, “The petitioners pray for a refund of expenses in connection with the west coast land awards. I am directed to report that the Committee has no recommendation to make”: 14th September, 1905

10. Now, do you remember what was done then—do your records show?—The Journals of the House show that the petition was referred back to the Committee.

11. Do you know on whose motion that was done?—I have not looked that up. *Hansard* shows that Mr Symes, member for Patea, moved as an amendment that the report be referred back to the Committee for further consideration.

12. And does *Hansard* show that he delivered a speech in support of his motion?—Yes, he delivered a speech of over four columns.

13. Would you give the reference to the volume and page of *Hansard*?—Volume 134, page 654.

14. What next happened in regard to the petition?—That amendment was carried, and the petition was referred back to the Committee for further consideration

15. With what result?—The second report was as follows: ‘The petitioners pray for a refund of expenses in connection with the west coast land awards. I am directed to report that this petition should be referred to the Government for favourable consideration’ (dated 12th October, 1905); and the House referred it for favourable consideration.

16. Can you say whether Mr Symes addressed the House on that occasion?—Yes, he spoke a few words.

17. Would you mind reading what he said?—“Mr Symes (Patea) desired to say that this petition was upon an old-standing grievance, and he expressed the hope that the Government would take it into their favourable consideration. It was a thoroughly deserving case, and of very long standing. He therefore hoped that the Government would act upon the recommendation of the Committee.”

18. What is the volume of *Hansard*, and the page?—Volume 135, page 661

19. Now, were there any other petitions on the same subject?—There were two petitions on the same subject presented next year, 1906.

20. Were they also presented by Mr Symes?—Yes, both by Mr Symes.

21. And they were presented on behalf of whom?—The first one on behalf of Mr George Hutchison, on the 3rd October, 1906.

22. And have you the report on that?—Yes: “The petitioner prays for a refund of money paid to uplift award under the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act, 1881. I am directed to report