

THURSDAY, 7TH OCTOBER, 1875.

Mr. BRIDGES, Director and Acting General Manager of the National Bank of New Zealand, examination on oath continued.

Mr. Bridges,
7th Oct., 1875.

642. *The Chairman.*] When you left yesterday, you objected, I think, to give some specific information, because your answer "would extend beyond the Bank," and you wanted to be quite clear as to the course the Committee would adopt with reference to your evidence in that respect. The Committee have deliberated, and their opinion is that all the protection they have the power to give you will be given.—I understand. I do not think that is sufficient to protect me, and, therefore, I have no further evidence to offer. Perhaps you will allow me to withdraw the last answer I gave yesterday.

643. *Sir F. D. Bell.*] I cannot consent to that.

644. *Witness.*] In answer to the question put to me yesterday, I meant that pressure was used on the part of the Bank, but not political pressure. Pressure was used to obtain a higher price than the property was worth, the Bank being interested.

645. *Sir F. D. Bell.*] Are we to understand that upon taking away the expression "political pressure," you are willing to give any further explanation of what you mean by the word "pressure" without the addition "political;" or are we to understand that you have no further evidence to offer?—I have no further evidence to offer.

646. Do you not see that your evidence, so far, would lead to the inference that very improper transactions had taken place?—Yes; I regret making that answer; but, in justice to myself, I say clearly that the statements I may make here may subject me to an action for libel on the part of the Bank. In a Court of justice, where the production of papers and books could be insisted on, it would be different; but as it is, I should put myself in a false position by making any such statement before this Committee. I had no intention of making that answer, and I ask permission to withdraw it.

647. Do you not think that you should either be prepared to say there is no foundation for your statements, or to carry those statements to their conclusion?—All I can do is to ask you to let me withdraw that answer. If that question were put to me now it would be answered differently.

FRIDAY, 8TH OCTOBER, 1875.

Mr. BRIDGES, Director and Acting General Manager of the National Bank of New Zealand, examined.

Mr. Bridges,
8th Oct., 1875.

648. *The Chairman.*] The Committee desire me to tell you that they consider your answers to the questions that have been put to you of a very important nature, as they involve practically the character of some of our public men. The Committee do not think the answers ought to rest where they are, and they consider it their duty to press the matter further, and to endeavour to obtain from you more precise answers than you have yet given to those questions. Whilst the Committee are desirous of giving you every protection that lies in their power, they must leave it to you to determine as to what the nature and the character of that protection is, that is to say, whether it is sufficient to cover you as completely as you wish to be covered under the circumstances of the case?—As far as I am aware, no. I have looked at the Act, and it appears to me quite unreasonable to expect that I should make any statement that would render me liable to a lawsuit.

649. At the same time the Committee are of opinion that these answers cannot remain where they are, and that you must be more explicit. Would you state to the Committee, under the circumstances, what the nature of the pressure is to which you alluded with regard to the purchase of the Port Chalmers Railway?—With all respect to the Committee, I must decline to answer any questions that I think would render me liable to a lawsuit.

650. Then the Committee are to understand that you decline to answer that question?—Yes.

651. Or any other question in connection with it?—Any other question that I consider would render me liable to a lawsuit.

652. That is to say, any other question that would elucidate more clearly the answers you have given?—I asked yesterday that I might be allowed to modify my last answer of the previous day. It did not clearly express my meaning.

653. After reading the answer referred to: In what way would your answer extend beyond the Bank?—I can only say I should like either to withdraw that answer or modify it.

654. Do you mean by saying that, that you did not intend to say that your answer would extend beyond the Bank?—I did not intend to say that. If the question were put to me now I should answer it differently.

655. Are the Committee to understand, then, that the answer is a hasty one, and does not contain that which is in itself correct?—The construction of the sentence is such that I cannot say it is not correct, but I can say it is a hasty answer, which would be different if the question were put to me now.

656. *Hon. E. W. Stafford.*] Is it substantially correct?—That is a question which I must decline to answer. It was a hasty answer, and an answer that I regret having made.

657. *Hon. W. Fitzherbert.*] Is it a hasty answer in regard to your own position, or is it hasty in regard to the truth?—That depends upon what construction is put upon the answer.

658. Do you ask to withdraw the answer upon the plea that upon reflection you find that you stated beyond what are facts, or upon the plea that you were hasty in your answer?—It is altogether hasty.

659. *Sir F. D. Bell.*] Do you mean to say that your answer is untrue, or that you have made a mistake, and withdraw it?—I am quite prepared to admit that, as a matter of opinion, it is incorrect as to extending beyond the Bank.

660. But, as matter of fact, was there a transaction of any corrupt kind between the Bank and the members of the Government of the day?—Not within my positive knowledge.