

FRIDAY, 19TH JULY, 1889.

GEORGE SMITH examined.

969. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—George Smith.

970. Where are you from?—From Denniston.

971. You represent the Denniston Miners' Association?—Yes; in the Westport District.

972. How long have you been in the district?—I have been eight years in the employ of the Westport Coal Company, but not continuously.

973. Following what occupation?—Coal-miner.

974. Has the output of coal since you went there been much increased?—Oh, yes; very greatly increased. When I went first to work there 20 trucks a day—20 trucks, of 6 tons each—lowered down the incline would be called big running; now they lower 120 trucks for a day's work.

975. Has there been much improvement made in the opening-up of mines?—Yes. When I went to Denniston they were making a road through the small to the head seam, varying from 14ft. to 16ft. It was the intention to cut through to get to the Coalbrookdale lease. They had to drive through. They were only working the small seam. Since I left they have had a lot of difficulties to get through.

976. Have improvements been made in the haulage?—Yes. At that time they used to draw the coal out of the mines by means of horses. A few years afterwards they put on an endless chain: that was an improvement on the horses. Two or three years ago they dispensed with that; and now they have an endless rope: that is a very great improvement. Now they have a very good haulage system.

977. Have the improvements made lessened the cost of coal?—Yes; it must have done so.

978. What number of miners were at work when you went there first?—Between forty and fifty men engaged in the mine hewing coal alone.

979. What number of men are engaged now in hewing coal?—I should say there are 250; from that to 280.

980. What men are engaged as artisans in connection with the mines?—About 360 men, all told, at Denniston Hill alone.

981. Have they any engaged at the port of shipment?—I could not say. That is on the present works of the Denniston coal-mines.

982. Are they pretty regularly engaged?—No; this last nine or ten months they have been working only from seven to eight days a fortnight.

983. When the Newcastle strike took place, the number of men was increased?—Yes, by about 100 or 150 men. They put on two shifts when the strike took place. They expected an increase in the demand for Westport coal.

984. Did that increase occur?—It did not occur to the extent they expected. They expected to keep the mine fully employed, whereas the men have only been employed from seven to eight days in the fortnight.

985. Supposing there was sufficient demand for coal to require the men to work six days in the week, would they do it?—Decidedly; but at the present time they could not work six days a week. They could, at most, only work eleven days in the fortnight; they could not work twelve days in the fortnight. You will understand there are two shifts. The back shift does not work on Saturday. The front and back shift change time and time about; so that, even suppose the men are working full time, they could only make, at most, eleven days in the fortnight.

986. We have been told that the men prefer to have two days to themselves.—I have been a miner since I was fourteen years old, and my experience is that most men would be willing to work full time if they could get it to do. There is only one place that I know of where there is a day taken. In Newcastle every second Saturday is an idle day. We have not entered upon that system here.

987. But you say they would be willing to work the full time if the work were offered to them?—The work in the mine is very hard work. A man up in years may get rather tired, or tire himself, and he might take a Saturday to himself; but that would happen only now and then; that would not happen every week, and would only happen with men well up in years. I know that in the Denniston district there is no wish to be idle.

988. Is that the general feeling up there?—It has been. The place has become more settled; men are beginning to build homes. Until recently they did not care about building homes, for they did not care about settling in the place.

989. Is it a cause of discontent that they cannot get land to build on?—No; the place itself had as much to do with it as anything else; but bad work, or, rather, want of employment, would make the feeling more intense.

990. But there is no difficulty about getting facilities in the shape of land to build houses on?—There is some discontent just now about the price of leases of building sections in Denniston.

991. What, as regards price: are there any sections to be sold?—Yes; there are some sections to be sold.

992. Government sections?—Yes; it is being surveyed for the Denniston Township.

993. *Mr. Guinness.*] Leasehold or freehold?—Freehold.

994. *The Chairman.*] What is the upset price of these sections?—I could not exactly tell; I have not built myself; but men who have built on the sections are discontented. The survey has been made since they bought and went down and settled there.

995. Has the work of the mines been much retarded by insufficiency of trucks?—Yes; at first—that is, years ago, but not latterly. Then there used to be a demand for coal, and they had not a sufficient number of trucks to supply the boats visiting the harbour.

996. Let me explain to you the object of this Committee. It is to learn from evidence the present state of the coal industry on the West Coast, or anything bearing upon its progress, or