

WEDNESDAY, 19TH MAY, 1897.

ALEXANDER BRACEGIRDLE was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a seaman on the “Te Anau.”
2. You are a member of the Union Company’s benefit society?—Yes.
3. Will you tell us what reason there was for allowing you to stay ashore?—I had been given to understand this Commission was appointed to see whether it was advisable that the society should be registered or not, and in the interests of the society and in my own I think it would be inadvisable that it should be registered.
4. I was not asking that. I was asking why you stayed ashore—was it at your own wish or at the wish of the Union Company?—I left at my own wish. I was asked if I wished to give evidence, and I said I did.
5. *Mr. Fisher.*] Who asked you if you wished to give evidence?—One of the committee. I take it he was representing the whole of the committee.
6. *The Chairman.*] Then, am I to understand you have to sacrifice your pay while ashore?—No, sir.
7. Are we to understand, Mr. Bracegirdle, that it is really with the wish of your superiors that you stay ashore?—No, I do not think so.
8. Do your superiors allow you to stay ashore whenever you like?—Oh, no.
9. Well, then, it is with the consent or desire of your superiors that you stayed ashore?—With their consent.
10. *Hon. Major Steward.*] On the usual pay?—On my usual pay.
11. Is there no additional allowance in consequence of your having to remain ashore?—Yes; I get my board.
12. They pay you also board money?—Yes, just the same as if I was at sea.
13. *Mr. Fisher.*] But, in addition to their request, do you appear also by your own wish or desire?—I do not appear by the wish of the company; it is my own wish.
14. Who pays for your detention while you are away from the ship—who pays your wages?—I take it the company will pay my wages, and the society my board.
15. *Hon. Major Steward.*] What is the amount of board allowance?—£1 or £1 5s. a week, but I am not sure which.
16. *The Chairman.*] Will you tell us what particular position you hold with the society that both the company in paying your wages and the society in paying your board wish you particularly to give evidence that might be supplied by the ordinary committee?—I hold no position in the society, except that I am a full paying member, but I take an active interest in the working of the society.
17. Is the “Te Anau” now in port?—No; I think she is in Lyttelton.
18. She has not returned since you have been ashore?—Yes; the “Te Anau” has been here once. She is here every week.
19. *Hon. Major Steward.*] When did you leave her for this purpose?—I left her on Friday week.
20. *Mr. Fisher.*] The point, I take it, is this: Are you in a position to give evidence that could not have been given on the one side by the seamen themselves and on the other by the committee or the officers of the society?—Well, I could not answer that question very well. I have only come here to speak of my own experience of the society, and what I think of it. I do not come here to favour the society or the company one way or the other.
21. *The Chairman.*] Will you inform the Commission what reason there is for your not having left the vessel the last time she was here, as you knew the date the Commission was to sit?—We did not know the date the Commission was to sit; that was the reason I left her.
22. How long have you been in the company’s service?—I think three or four years—about four years.
23. Have you been all that time a member of the society?—I have been a member of the society about three years and a half.
24. Who asked you to join the society?—Mr. Kirby, the shipping agent.
25. Did he hold out any inducements to you to join the society?—No.
26. Did he tell you it was compulsory?—He said if I did not belong to any other society I would have to join this one.
27. That is to say, unless you joined the Union Company’s society you could not join the Union Company’s service?—I did not take it as that. He asked me if I was a member of any other society, and I said No, I had never been a member of any benefit society in my life; and he said I must join this society.
28. Well, unless you joined the Union Company’s society you could not join the Union Company’s service?—I would not say that.
29. What do you understand would have been the result if you had said you could not join the society?—I refused to join at that time. I told Mr. Kirby I did not belong to any society, and did not wish to belong to any.
30. Then, on not joining the society did you receive any work from the Union Company?—Yes; constant work. I joined the society about six months afterwards.
31. What had occurred in the meantime to alter your opinion?—I inquired into the workings of the society, and what its objects were.
32. Are you a married man?—Yes.
33. Were you married at that time?—No; I was single then.
34. You positively affirm there was no pressure put on you to make you join the society?—Yes; there was no pressure whatever.