

158. *Mr. Fisher.*] You have already answered that in the event of any large question arising the committee are virtually powerless?—The representatives of the men are virtually powerless now.

159. *The Chairman.*] Supposing the majority of that committee pass a resolution that the funds should not be distributed amongst the holders or members of the society, but should pass to some one else, what would be the position of members of the society then?—I think they could claim an equal share.

160. How can they? They are not known to the law; they are not registered?—You have the receipts in your book to show that this money has been paid in. That would answer in law.

161. That is why I marvelled at your answer to the question that you prefer an unregistered to a registered society?—I think the receipt is sufficient evidence that the money has been paid.

162. You will find that in law it is not worth the paper it is written on. Are you aware of any other private benefit society in New Zealand except the Union Company's society?—Yes.

163. Well, suppose the case of an employer who wishes to form a private benefit society of his own. A carpenter goes to him and wishes to work for him at 10s. a day. He says he cannot work for less than 10s. a day, because that is the union price for a carpenter. The employer then says, "I will pay you 10s. a day, since that is the union price, but I have a little private benefit society of my own for which I shall take 5s. a day. I shall keep the fund myself. You are to have no control of it." You would not consider that that society was acting on the principle of the larger benefit society?—I think the death of such a society would be very acceptable.

164. Can you tell me where the line should be drawn between the two cases, because the principle is the same?—I cannot say where it should be taken.

165. You can see how it is possible for an employer to do such a thing?—Yes; but I do not think any employer would be so mad as to do that.

166. Of course, in the case I quoted I was exaggerating; but he might take 5d. or 6d. off the wages. The principle is the same?—I think the employer is quite within his rights in doing so, in order to make provision in case of accident and sickness, and provided the fund is properly invested.

167. It actually rests with the caprice of an employer whether a company or a private individual is preferable to a benefit society properly registered?—Yes.

JAMES WILSON was examined on oath.

168. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a fireman on the s.s. "Te Anau."

169. Are you a member of the committee of the Union Company's society?—Yes.

170. You were withdrawn from the ship to give evidence before this Commission?—Yes.

171. Do you get your shore-allowance as well as your pay?—I could not say.

172. Who gave you an order to come ashore?—Well, I could not say who it was. The engineer told me, but I cannot say by whose authority it was.

173. That was last Friday week, the 7th instant?—Yes.

174. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—Since 1883.

175. How long have you been a member of the benefit society?—Since its formation.

176. Did you join voluntarily?—Yes.

177. What were your reasons for joining? Were you a married man?—Yes.

178. And thought it a good thing—better than any other friendly society?—Well, I was not in any other friendly society.

179. I suppose you all joined in a batch, or did you join one by one?—I joined by myself.

180. Were you persuaded to join by any officer or agent of the Union Company?—No.

181. It was a matter of pure free-will?—Yes.

182. Can you tell us what the idea was as to the formation of that society: was it just owing to the kind feeling of the company towards its men?—Well, I thought so at the time.

183. Since you have been ashore, have you had any instructions from or communications with the officers of the company?—No instructions whatever as to the evidence I should give. It was left to my own free-will.

184. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Are you one of the members of the committee elected by the men?—Yes.

185. You are not appointed by the company?—No.

186. *The Chairman.*] Do you think that, under the constitution of the committee to which you refer, the opinions of the men have a fair chance of being represented in the event of any dispute with the company?—Yes. Of course, the books show that the men's representatives on the committee do the most of the work; in fact, at some of the meetings none of the company's men are present at all, except the treasurer and the secretary.

187. *Hon. Major Steward.*] What is the quorum?—Five.

188. *The Chairman.*] They are mostly the employes' representatives?—Yes.

189. Have you ever heard that formerly coercion was used to make the men join the society?—I have heard of it at different times, but, when you came to inquire into it, the individuals never gave any idea of what the compulsion was.

190. We have it in evidence that there was grumbling amongst the single men. Why should they grumble or be dissatisfied if there is no coercion? Would you join anything concerning which you were dissatisfied?—No; I cannot tell their minds on that point.

191. Is it just pure contrariness on their parts?—There is something in that. I have inquired into different cases when there was compulsion, but when you came to inquire of the individuals themselves you found there was no compulsion used.

192. You do not think there is any coercion now?—Not that I am aware of.