

246. Supposing you have to pay 4s. 6d. per month, and that there are three hundred men paying at the same rate, and the society keeps paying out the sick- and death-allowances, and so on; and suppose at the end of five or ten years, after meeting all engagements, there is a balance accumulated which is not wanted: have you any provision whereby the account shall be audited so as to enable you to see if there is any such balance? Do you not think it would be wise to have such an audit?—Yes.

247. Because, does it not occur to you, if such a surplus did exist, that it would be possible to reduce the monthly payments, and that there would be a balance to divide amongst the contributors?—Yes.

248. You are not aware of any such provision being made?—No.

249. *The Chairman.*] Who is the auditor of the balance-sheet?—I do not know.

250. Was it ever audited by a proper accountant?—Yes; it always is.

251. Not connected with the company?—No.

WILLIAM RANDLE made an affirmation, and was examined.

252. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a fireman in the Union Company's service, on the "Te Anau."

253. How long have you been in the company's service?—Upwards of fifteen years.

254. You are one of the committee of the benefit society?—Yes.

255. How long have you been on the committee?—About two years.

256. When did you join the benefit society?—When it was first started, in 1891.

257. What made you join?—I was asked to join.

258. Were you married then?—Yes.

259. Did you belong to any other society?—No.

260. Did you join because you thought it would be a good thing for a married man to belong to some benefit society?—As a matter of fact, I thought it would be better for me to join.

261. By which you mean that you would have a better chance of permanent employment?—Yes.

262. I notice in the rules printed in 1891 it is stated: "All present employés of the company, as defined in the rules, may within three months become members of the society without payment of an entrance-fee on passing the necessary medical examination. It shall, however, not be compulsory for them to join the society, though all who join the company's service in future will be required to do so and pay an entrance-fee." It was not compulsory, apparently, in words for you to join the society because you were in the company's service; but do you know of any others who were compelled to join?—I would not like to say for a fact that I do. I cannot bring forward facts to prove that such was ever the case, and unless one can do that it is not worth while saying anything.

263. Well, your impression was that some of the men who joined were not doing so voluntarily?—Yes; I have always been of that impression.

264. Do you think that that feeling has altogether subsided now?—To a great extent it has; but still it remains there, and it will remain there so long as any society of the kind is run with the employers having a large say in the working of it.

265. Now, do you think, in the constitution of the committee as at present composed, the employers have too large a say in comparison with their contribution? They contribute about one-fifth of the sum and the men contribute about four-fifths. Do you think, then, that the employers have too large a say in the working of the committee?—Well, according to the way they have been working lately that is not the case. Practically speaking, within the last eight or twelve months we have had almost the sole working of the thing ourselves, so far as money matters, &c., are concerned.

266. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Do you mean the men's representatives on the committee?—Yes.

267. Are you one of the men's representatives?—Yes.

268. *The Chairman.*] Do you consider that if the society was registered as an ordinary friendly society the company would cease to pay their contribution?—I fancy it would; but if it was registered it would give far more satisfaction to the members.

269. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Can it do that without an alteration in the rules?—I dare say the whole thing would have to be reorganized.

270. Can the company cease payment without altering the rules? I see Rule 47 reads, "The company shall give to the society at its commencement a donation of £500, and thereafter contribute for the first five years 20 per cent. per annum (not to exceed £500 per annum) on the subscriptions of ordinary members." That five years has expired?—Yes. If the company ceases to contribute towards the society the rules will have to be altered.

271. *The Chairman.*] Just so. What was your conception of the reason the society was organized? Was it because it was a humanitarian or philanthropic sort of idea on the part of the company towards their men?—It may be partly so, but, still, there were other large reasons, apart from that.

272. Would you have any objection to state those reasons?—Well, I can give my opinion, but I do not wish it to be put into print. My private opinion is that it gave the company a very large amount of power over the men. It would prevent them from organizing or getting up any body similar to the Seamen's Union, as it was before the strike.

273. How do you think that would be carried out by the society? In what way would it work?—Fear of getting out of employment. When the society was first formed, if the men would not join it they were not discharged just at that time; but from time to time, as their articles were up, the company would dispense with their services altogether. That is my firm belief, and it is the same with plenty of other men on the boats, if they would only say so. In a thing of this kind