

we have not a thoroughly free hand to speak. If I had a free hand I would speak differently, but, apart from that, if it was not that the employers have a large say in the management it would be really a first-class thing, on account of the large benefits we derive from it.

274. You are aware that if this was made a registered friendly society there would be security to the members over the funds they are paying in, and the rules would be registered?—Just so.

275. Are you aware that so long as you are paying into a private benefit society the rules of which are not legalised any rules you may pass about the division of funds is little better than waste breath?—Yes, I am fully aware of that.

276. And that is one strong reason in your mind why you would like to see the society registered?—That is so.

277. *Hon. Major Steward.*] I suppose you are pretty familiar with the rules?—Fairly so, under the circumstances; but not being heart and soul in the thing I have not followed it up.

278. Have you ever directed your attention to the possibility of the funds accumulating and your having more funds at the end of a given period than are required to meet payments? Is there any provision for the distribution of such a surplus, or for a reduction in the scale of payments from time to time?—None, to my knowledge.

279. In default of that, what would become of the money?—The only way I can see, supposing that at any time the society was wound up, is that the money would be equally divided amongst the men at that time in the society.

280. But, if the society was going on, the scale of contributions would be obviously too high: could the scale be reduced?—The only remedy for that would be to alter the rules.

281. My idea was that, if it was registered and brought under special legislation, you could deal with that point?—The only way I can see out of the difficulty, if the society is going on as at present, is that the rules will have to be altered with the view of meeting the difficulty.

282. One other point: Being a member of the committee, you know, as stated by the Chairman, that the company contribute one-fifth of the funds, and the men four-fifths: do you not think that the representation should be adjusted on the same basis?—I do, certainly.

283. *The Chairman.*] Perhaps you perceive that so long as a majority may consist of members of the Union Company—I mean their seven representatives—you really have no control over the affairs of the society?—They have the lion's share of the voting-power, and can vote as they please.

284. They could alter any of your rules?—Yes; if they brought up anything we did not like we could vote against it, but what use would it be?

285. In the event of the company taking it into their heads to discharge the men elected to represent the men on the committee, what redress would there be?—No redress whatever.

*Mr. Fisher:* I have been driving at this question for two days, and I am bound to say that with the other witnesses it was impossible to get satisfactory answers. But we have a plain and satisfactory answer from Mr. Randle, and I do not think it necessary to ask him any questions at all. I would only like to say this: that the assumption in the minds of the men and the committee that these rules have some force is a mistake, and I think it advisable that the members of this benefit society and this committee should be informed that these rules and regulations have no force in law whatever—that they are so much waste-paper, and that it would be a benefit if this society was registered, so that the men would have some real control over the funds. At present they have no control whatever. The dominating power on the Board is the Union Company and its representatives, and the men have no power whatever. Mr. Randle, apart from my brother-Commissioners, has made that position perfectly clear. I think it would be of advantage to all the members of this benefit society if they understood their position as Mr. Randle understands it.

DAVID ADDERLY REID McEWAN made an affirmation, and was examined.

286. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—Chief cook on the “Te Anau.”

287. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—About fifteen or sixteen years.

288. How long have you been in the benefit society?—Since its formation.

289. How long have you been a committee-man?—Since its formation.

290. What induced you to join the society?—Nothing induced me specially; in fact, I was one of the originators of it.

291. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Then, it had its origin with the men?—Yes. The men themselves, or several of them—one or two in the “Manapouri” and myself—originated it.

292. *The Chairman.*] You were thinking the matter out without suggestion?—Without any suggestion at all.

293. If you thought it out without suggestion, perhaps the suggestion was not yours to ask any person who joined to sign a declaration that they belonged to no union that might be detrimental to the Union Company: we have that statement given in evidence?—I know nothing about that. There was absolutely no suggestion or condition of the sort. We did not take into consideration the point as to any one being bound to make a declaration that they belonged to any society, or two societies. It was a desire amongst ourselves to inaugurate a better scheme for the one we had just lost. That was the union at the time. I do not mean the Seamen's Union. I mean the Cooks' and Stewards' Union. Mr. Fitzpatrick and myself talked the matter over, and instead of reorganizing the union we thought a benefit fund should be started whereby members would receive sick-allowance when ill and off duty. The signing of the agreement you refer to was amongst the firemen and the sailors: it was away from the society altogether; in fact, the society was not in vogue when the agreement was signed. The agreement was signed by the men returning to their work after the strike.

294. It was the Union Company's affair?—Yes.