

295. The men were not allowed to join unless they signed the agreement?—That is so.

296. *Mr. Fisher.*] What do you say now in regard to that?—From my personal knowledge at the time, I believe the men were required to sign a document to the effect I have stated, but it had nothing to do with this society, for this society was not in existence then.

297. *The Chairman.*] It was a matter between the Union Company and its employes?—Yes.

298. Then, it was you and others who got the society up?—That is so.

299. The company promised to subsidise it to the extent of one-fifth?—No, no. The company was approached on the subject—I believe it was Mr. Kirby who broached the subject first—to see if it was a good thing, instead of having funds, to have a society from which we could draw some benefit, seeing that the greater part of the funds had been dwindled away in absolutely nothing. The funds went to no good purpose, and I do say it was a good thing to have a fund amongst the men that they could apply to for provident purposes.

300. Was the suggestion not made that such a society was not necessary when there were societies such as the Druids, the Oddfellows, and the Foresters?—I never heard of it. There was absolutely nothing known on the ships of the Druids and the Foresters.

301. In 1891?—Yes, in 1891. I had belonged to one before that.

302. Did you throw it up?—I did not. I kept them both going, because I considered one as good as the other.

303. Before this you had been a member of a friendly society, and, in forming this benefit society, you arranged that it should be governed by a committee, seven of whom are the Union Company's officers and six the representatives of the employes: is that so?—No.

304. What is the position of the society according to the rules? There are six representing the society and seven representing the company?—Only six from the company have a controlling power. The manager only presides at the annual general meeting.

305. *Hon. Major Steward.*] What about Rule 24, which provides that the manager shall be a member *ex officio* of the committee?—That is so. It is there right enough, but it has never been taken advantage of. Mr. Mills has never been present at one meeting of the committee.

306. If he has not exercised his power he still has it?—Yes.

307. The previous rule (No. 23) gives six on each side?—Yes.

308. *The Chairman.*] That is what I was asking you—whether in forming this society you, with your previous experience of friendly societies and their management, thought it a fair thing that the Union Company should have a majority of the representation on the committee?—No.

309. Then, that was done without your wish?—Oh, no. When we inaugurated the society we did not think that all the employes of the company would be eligible for membership, but there was an amalgamation afterwards, and when the company was approached to see if they would give us a sum to form a fund, or the nucleus of a fund, the company helped us out of the difficulty, and gave us £500 for that purpose. It was then proposed that the company should have these six nominees on the board of management, and the men six representatives.

310. And the manager?—Yes, they appointed him, but I put no stress upon it. He has never been at the committee meetings, and, besides, there are actually four nominees of the company who are working on the wharf, and who we consider are equally as good as any members of the society. These nominees of the company are paying members of the society, and from the term you use it might be inferred that they are not members of the society, but officials of the company.

311. You think I am laying undue stress upon this?—I do.

312. But surely you have been at elections where the opinions have been equally divided, making the casting-vote of importance?—Yes. The public are very often led away with the idea that, owing to the names of these people appearing so prominently in connection with this society, we have absolutely no say in the matter at all. But such is not the case. It is my duty, as a member of the society, and from my experience during the years I have had to do with the society and its dealings with the officials of the Union Company, to say that they have been most fair in their dealings with us. From the outset of the society they have had only one desire, and that was that the men should have the working of its affairs, and it is our fault, and not the fault of the company, if we have not done so. I drew up all the amended rules, and they were approved and confirmed by the general meeting without the company's consent.

313. You must not think that the Commissioners have the slightest wish to impute either wrongdoing or wrong intention to the company. We wish to understand the position as it is. We take the book of rules, and we have to take things as we find them. The fact remains that power is in the hands of the company which we consider dangerous. Let me follow that up by another question. You know that if the society was registered the rules would have to be fixed and gazetted, and so on, in the books of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, and they would then become legal documents. Do you not think it would be a far more valuable thing to have those rules absolutely binding on the men rather than that they should be at the mercy of the committee, because now, so far as we have been able to understand by the evidence, this being an unregistered society, the rules, which have never been recognised by law, are absolutely waste-paper?—I do not know that our rules would be any more liberal if our society was registered, and, for myself, I should not belong to the society if it was registered.

314. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Not with the same rules?—Of course, with the same rules; but I would not belong to it, because you cannot register a society with the code of rules this has. You cannot name one society where a member paying for ten years can withdraw and get his surrender value, and get the same privileges.

315. *The Chairman.*] Perhaps it is on a false actuarial basis?—It is not. I do not think it is unsound.

316. But would not your answer to me, that you consider this society could not become a registered society because such rules as these would never be accepted by the Registrar, augur that