

466. Other witnesses representing the miners' union have given as their reason for not wishing to place the matter under the control of the Arbitration Court that Arbitration Court proceedings created turmoil, trouble, and bitter feeling: is that your experience or opinion?—The Arbitration Court has never dealt with the hours of labour with us. We have asked the Court to do so, but it has refused, and we have signed our agreements under the conditions of the Act of last session as regards the hours and overtime.

467. But does the sitting of the Court create a feeling such as the witnesses mentioned—*i.e.*, a feeling of bitterness?—No, not in my experience.

468. Would it not be better to work for, we will say, eight hours in some mines where the conditions are healthy than six hours in an unhealthy one?—I do not know that there is that much difference.

469. But there would be a difference?—Yes, certainly; but I think that eight hours from bank to bank is a fair thing for a miner, no matter where he is.

470. I take it that you would regulate the hours of work by the hours in the most unhealthy mine?—It is very hard for me, or any one else, to define what is a healthy mine. I think that all mines would come under the same category, provided they were properly ventilated, as they should be according to the Mining Act, though some mines are more damp than others. I do not think you can classify the mines in that way. I think they should all stand on the same level.

471. How long do you think a man should work in a healthy mine?—I think seven hours a day is enough in any mine.

472. If seven hours is enough in a healthy mine, surely it is too much in an unhealthy one?—That is so. There are plenty of places that men go to work at, and have to go home again.

473. This Bill would not meet those cases, would it?—No, certainly not.

474. That was my reason for asking whether the matter would not be more satisfactorily dealt with by the Arbitration Court, if they would undertake it?—In the district I belong to often five or six men go home in a day, probably through no fault of the management. They find the air impure, and have to go away home.

475. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] Do you think there is such a thing as a healthy mine?—No; I do not think there is such a thing. I think all mines are unhealthy.

476. Some may be a little better than others?—Certainly.

477. Is it a fact that the air may be what you would call pure in a mine in the morning or up to 2 or 3 o'clock, and then become foul, changing within an hour or half an hour?—Certainly.

478. Is it also a fact that it is invariably worse in the afternoon than in the forenoon, on account of shots being fired, and the men breathing the air, and so on?—Certainly. A man fires a shot, and the air is polluted all round immediately.

479. With reference to this tired feeling that has been referred to, it has been stated by yourself and others that a miner gets exhausted after seven hours or so. Is that feeling the result of bad air?—Yes. My experience of this tired feeling is that it comes from the damp. A man is lying down holing, and there is a fireclay underneath. It is throwing off the damp all the time, and he is inhaling this. It makes his limbs ache, and he feels out of sorts altogether.

480. Is it not a fact that if the air becomes sufficiently bad you can work away until you ultimately become unconscious?—Yes.

481. Have you known cases of that kind?—I have.

482. Have you known of a man being carried out of the face through being overpowered with bad air?—I have.

483. Would that be in mines that were considered to be well ventilated?—Yes, supposed to be.

484. Mines that the Inspector passes?—Yes; but I would not say they were well ventilated.

485. But as well as it is possible to get them?—No; because, in my opinion, the mines in New Zealand are not well ventilated, and the Act is not carried out.

486. At all events, your experience has been that bad air has a bad effect on a man's health?—Certainly.

487. How many men are there altogether working in the coal-mines in the Buller district—say at Denniston, Buller, and Mokihinui?—About one thousand.

488. How many are there working in the Grey coal-mines?—That I could hardly tell you—about one hundred.

489. And at Reefton?—About one hundred.

490. There are nearly two hundred at Blackball?—I think that there are barely one hundred in the Brunner Mine now.

491. I mean all the men employed in the Blackball Mine?—There would be over one hundred.

492. How many do you reckon there would be between the Grey Valley and Reefton?—I think, about six hundred coal-miners.

493. Then, there would be about sixteen hundred in the two districts?—Yes, all that.

494. Do you know of any reason why the truckers should not be employed on piecework, the same as the hewers?—Most of our truckers have always been employed on piecework.

495. So that if a witness came before this Committee and said that if the Bill were passed he would lose so much by his truckers and horse-drivers, that would not apply to your district?—No, certainly not.

496. It might apply to the horse-drivers, but it would not apply to the truckers in your district?—No.

497. What about the tippers at the bins?—Theirs is contract work with us. The boys are on day-wages.

498. Do you know anything about the rates for hewing coal in New South Wales?—No.

499. You have no idea how they compare with the rates paid on the West Coast?—They are higher than here. Of course, at the New South Wales collieries they use the riddle.