

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

MONDAY, 6TH DECEMBER, 1909.

WILLIAM PRYOR, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Secretary of the New Zealand Employers' Federation.
2. Have you been deputed to come before the Committee and give evidence?—Yes.
3. In reference to several clauses?—Several particular clauses. I might say that at meetings of the mine-owners in Auckland, Reefton, and Dunedin they decided to ask me to take steps to place their representations from their different points of view before the Committee.
4. What is the first point to which you desire to refer?—With regard to the Coal-mines Bill there is not much, I am pleased to say, Mr. Chairman, I have to speak on. There is, of course, the great objection mine-owners have to clause 3 and similar clauses in the Mining Bill. I have several telegrams here asking me to strongly oppose section 3. The employers are of the opinion that they should still have the right to require medical examination if they deem it necessary, and it is pointed out to me in one of the letters I have received that, while there is only one coal-mining company that makes a continual practice of requiring its workers to submit to a medical examination, still others occasionally do so. For instance, if they have a man applying to them for work who does not look over-strong physically, they might say to him, "We should like to have a medical certificate showing that you are strong and healthy and not suffering from any lung-complaint or anything of that description," pointing out at the same time that it would be dangerous to other workers employed, as they are, in confined places. It is necessary to others that no one suffering from contagious diseases should be employed in the mines. Further than that, if a man suffered from some physical disability it might at a critical period cause him to fail to do some particular sort of work. Supposing a man had a weakness in his legs, or something of that description, and a tub in a jig were getting away, prompt energetic action might save an accident, whereas his weakness might display itself at the moment, and he might not be able to stop it. Then, take a man who had suffered at some time from rupture—perhaps only a slight one—medical examination would discover it; but if there were no medical examination a small strain sustained in the mine might cause a serious rupture, and the employer would be landed in compensation for it, whereas, as a matter of fact, it would be due to something else altogether. That is one objection to the Bill. I will only deal with those provisions objected to.
5. Yes, we do not want to be bothered with what you approve of?—The Auckland mine-owners were somewhat concerned about clause 6: "On and after the 1st day of July, 1910, no person shall be employed in the position of underviewer or fireman and deputy in a mine unless he has had at least five years' experience in underground workings in a coal-mine." I think they omitted to notice that the same wording was used in the principal Act. They said "fireman" might mean a "shot-firer," in which case it should be strongly objected to. I spoke to the Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie about it, and he was kind enough to tell me that it did not necessarily mean that, but it would mean the man who had to examine the mine to prevent possible fire or explosion. I take it that if a man is a shot-firer and nothing else it does not apply to him. I advised Auckland about that, and they said they were quite satisfied with the definition of "fireman."
6. Clause 101 in the consolidated Act calls him the "deputy or foreman"?—Yes. There is an amendment of 1908 which, I think, contains the word "fireman." Would it not be well to have "fireman" defined? That might get over any little difficulty. I take it that in the Bill he has to be both "fireman and deputy." If there was a definition of "fireman" showing that it did not mean "shot-firer" it would meet the case.
7. According to the clause he must be fireman and deputy?—Yes. Going back to the medical examination, there is an important point I have omitted with regard to section 3. If medical examination is to be prohibited, then before that is done the reference to pneumoconiosis should be deleted from the Workers' Compensation Act. A deputation from the annual meeting of my Federation a fortnight ago waited upon the Prime Minister, and he then gave us to understand that pneumoconiosis would be deleted from the Workers' Compensation Act.
8. We cannot give you that assurance?—I want to point this out: that when we were objecting to this medical examination being taken out, the Prime Minister said, if we took pneumoconiosis out of the Act, as a necessary corollary it must prohibit medical examination—one goes with the other. If medical examination is prohibited in the Coal-mines Act before pneumoconiosis is deleted from the Workers' Compensation Act, then it is possible the employers will be landed with the prohibition of medical examination while pneumoconiosis is left in.
9. You are not affected by it in any case; the argument is far-fetched?—Supposing some one took it into his head to make a claim, then it is not far-fetched. It is a bargain with us so far as the Government is concerned.
10. It is not a bargain so far as we are concerned. You are putting before us the views of the employers?—Yes.
11. *Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie.*] Regulation 23 says, "In making the examinations provided for by the foregoing rules, the fireman shall mark with chalk the day of the month upon the face of each working-place, as 1, 5, 10, 25, or other numbers, as the case may be. He shall pay particular attention to the edges of the goaves and the gate-end lips. He shall be careful to ascertain that every part of the mine and roadways so to be examined are free from firedamp, chokedamp, or