

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

MONDAY, 6TH DECEMBER, 1909.

WILLIAM PRYOR, Secretary of the New Zealand Employers' Federation, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You have some objections to offer, on behalf of your Federation, to this Bill?—Yes. Clause 7 is the first to which I wish to refer, but I have nothing further to say than what I have already stated in my evidence on the Coal-mines Amendment Bill in connection with this clause. Objection is taken also to clause 8, which is regarded as an unwarrantable interference.

2. That is the law at present?—Evidently there is a slight alteration, and that is the trouble.

3. What is the trouble?—The Otago Association is taking the stand that the Government Inspectors are capable of doing the work of inspection. There is another objection to subsection (2) of clause 8, "The workmen's inspectors shall have full liberty to visit and inspect . . . once at least in every month." I think it is a valid objection.

4. That is the present law?—It is desired that they should be allowed to inspect the workings once every month.

5. But there might be special occasions when it would be necessary to inspect them four times a month?—Then there would have to be provision made for that. We ask that in subsection (4), instead of the words "mine-owner and mine-manager," there should be substituted "mine-owner, mine-manager, or any person deputed by the mine-manager." It seems a reasonable request, because they would not send any one but a responsible person for their own protection.

6. *Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie.*] The mine-manager and mine-owner under this law have a legal standing. You could not appoint any person without reporting to the Mines Department?—You have deputies certificated. Suppose you say "certificated person."

7. I have no objection so long as you put the responsibility upon some responsible person?—Would "any other certificated officer or person" do?

8. I do not object to mine-managers or deputies being appointed. I shall have to submit it to the Law Officers. The manager might consider that any person should be able to act as his deputy?—It might be necessary in the interests of the mine, and, as the manager has responsible duties in other places, it seems to me to be reasonable to ask for the amendment.

9. It is not mandatory. They need not go unless they like?—Naturally they desire to go. If the clause could be widened a little it would be more satisfactory. In subsection (5) we ask that provision should be made for workmen's inspectors to furnish a copy of their report to the mine-owner the day after the inspection. It should be within twenty-four hours.

10. *The Chairman.*] What is your next point?—Clause 10, "Wardens shall have power, when granting any license, either in respect of Crown or private lands, to impose such conditions, terms, or reservations as shall tend to obviate the destruction of the surface of pastoral or agricultural land the subject of the license." This is a matter of very great importance to the Otago mine-owners, and they very strenuously object to it.

11. What is their objection?—They say with regard to clause 10, "We desire to object on the grounds that granting such power to the Warden may lead to conditions being imposed which would make the working of the ground not only unpayable but possibly impracticable, and lead to loss of capital invested in dredging machinery and dredging claims. In many cases land the agricultural value of which would be £2 or £3 per acre has been purchased for dredging at up to £30 per acre, in some cases this payment being for 'right to dredge' only, and not for freehold, and carrying to the freeholder a royalty also. Large capital expenditure has been incurred also in placing up-to-date machinery on the ground, and, as stated above, conditions may be imposed which would make it impossible to work payably. Most of the ground being used for dredges is of very low agricultural value, being usually creek-beds or low-lying flats. In the alternative, we consider that if the clause is carried it should only apply to lands acquired after the passing of this Amendment Act, and not to land *bona fide* held for mining at the time of the passing of this Amendment Act." I might say that there was a representative from the Otago Union here, but he had to go home on Saturday. He had intended to be present at this meeting of the Committee, but had to return hurriedly.

12. *Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie.*] What is your objection to that?—First of all, the Warden might make conditions that would practically kill the industry. The industry is not in an enviable condition, taking it all through, and, although agricultural land has been used for dredging, they say that it is of low value, and there is no harm being done in the way that is suggested.

13. This has nothing to do with the owners of the land—it is only put in in the interests of the public. It is really done for the protection of the community?—They seem to fear the Wardens.

14. *The Chairman.*] What is your next point?—Clause 15, subclause (g), providing that forfeiture may take place in six months instead of twelve months. That is objected to. They say there should be a latitude of twelve months before forfeiture takes place.