

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 18TH AUGUST, 1910.

S. L. P. FREE examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—I am one of the attorneys of the Consolidated Goldfields of New Zealand at Reefton.

2. You desire to make a statement with regard to the Half-holiday for Miners Bill?—Yes, sir.

3. If you make a statement now we can afterwards ask you questions?—Yes. The proposal is to close the mines from 12 o'clock noon until 5 o'clock of the same day. I may say, first of all, that all our mines are working under an industrial agreement, of which I have a copy here—an agreement which was entered into on the 1st July last for a period of three years—and the arrangement as to hours is this: that the working-day shall consist of eight hours under the bank-to-bank clause—that is, taking the time off of lowering the men and lifting them out of the mine, and also the luncheon or crib time; so that on an average the men work seven hours a day: and it is also agreed that the night shift following Sunday shall go on at 1 a.m. and cease work at 8 a.m., so that they are only seven hours underground. The afternoon shift on Saturday goes on at 3 p.m., so that the day shift has seven hours underground, giving us about six hours' work. The afternoon shift goes on at 3 p.m. and ceases at 10 o'clock, and they are only seven hours underground, which gives us six hours' work. That is the arrangement which was made and entered into on the 1st July last for three years. This agreement covers not only our own mines, which are the Wealth of Nations, the Progress, and the Blackwater, but also the Keep-it-Dark and the Big River Mines—in fact, all the larger operating mines in the district. I will hand you a copy of the agreement, which can be referred to by the Committee if necessary. If this law comes into force it will probably mean that no work will be done in the mines after 8 o'clock on Saturday morning, unless it is made clear that for the half-shift work until noon only half-shift wages shall be paid. You can understand that if you are dealing with quartz which only yields 10s. a ton it will not pay you to take it out if you have to pay double wages for the half-shift, and the probability is that in most of the mines it will not pay you to take out the quartz at all. There is therefore the probability that the shift would not be worked at all. In any case it would mean that the mine would close down on Saturday at noon, and the night shift would not go on. The reasons for this must be obvious. The agreement we have with the miners is that they go on at 3 o'clock and knock off at 10, and if they cannot start until 5 o'clock and then knock off at 10 they are only working a five-hour shift; and you must remember that the winding plant must be closed down at noon, and if you had to start your mine again to work five hours that it would not pay. The result of the Act would be one of two things—either the mine would cease work at 8 o'clock on Saturday morning or would cease work at 12 o'clock and not resume again. The first alternative would mean the loss of one shift a week, and the other alternative would mean that one shift would lose a day's work a week; or, in other words, they would lose one shift in three. The measure, as far as my companies are concerned, is believed to be unworkable, and not in the interests of either the workers or employers. I think that covers all I have to say.

4. Have you anything to say with regard to its effect on the batteries?—Of course, it would reduce the output by the amount of time lost, and it would in some cases—in connection with the smelter—mean that it could not be observed. But, there, I suppose we could get a special dispensation. At our Progress Mine there is considerable smelting plant, which has to be run continuously. If the Bill were operated strictly it would stop the smelting entirely. That is to say, if we were bound to close down the smelting from noon until 5 o'clock on Saturday the smelter would freeze; and you must keep your smelter going. You cannot close down your smelter—you must keep it going.

JONATHAN DIXON examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—District manager for the Westport Coal Company.

2. Will you make a statement also with regard to this Half-holiday Bill?—Yes. I consider the half-holiday proposal for miners to be absolutely unnecessary in regard to coal-mines, owing to the fact that the principle is practically acknowledged in connection with the industry at the present time. In proof of this statement I would quote from the statistics taken in connection with minerals and mining for 1908, also several awards in operation throughout the Dominion. In these we find that the total output of coal for that year was 1,860,975 tons, and the total number of persons employed in and about the coal-mines was 3,894. Now, the total tons raised at mines where it is known that the pay Saturday (that is, every alternate Saturday) is observed as a full holiday amounted to 1,344,039 tons, or 72.25 per cent. of the Dominion's total output. The persons employed at these mines numbered 2,466, or 63.3 per cent. of the total. The tons raised at mines known to observe the Saturday half-holiday were 161,619, or 8.7 per cent. of the total. The persons employed at these mines numbered 392, or 10.2 per cent. of the total for all mines. Therefore the number of mines referred to—which is a minimum, as there are doubtless more—that are at present complying with the requirements of the proposed Bill represents 81 per cent. of the total output and 73.5 per cent. of the total employees. Out of the total of some 182 mines there are 106 which only employ about 353 men, an average of some three persons per pit. Then there are about 19 private pits, which together in 1908 only produced a total of 667 tons. These facts would suggest that no hardship exists with regard to the Saturday holiday time with rela-