

EDWIN RIDLEY GREEN sworn and examined. (No. 32.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are the Inspector of Mines for this district?—Yes.

2. We wish to ask you some questions generally in the method of working the Kaitangata Mine. You have heard what the witnesses have said in regard to the present system of pillar-working. Will you give the Commission your opinion of that system, and whether you think it safe or whether a safer system could be adopted?—Well, sir, to begin with, the evidence is practically new to me, and it would certainly require some consideration for me to be able to give you an opinion of any value. You ask me as to the safety of working in these high places, and I wish to point out that the accident list from these high places in this mine is an extremely small one. The accidents have come almost entirely from the low parts of the roof. Giving a superficial opinion, it depends to a large extent upon the nature of the coal in the roof as to whether it should be a low roof or a high roof for safety. It sometimes happens that in low seams the roof is worse than those in high ones. Generally speaking, the conglomerate is present in high roofs of from 25 ft. to 30 ft. and takes a long time to fall. The nature of the working in bringing down the coal from these high places is such that the coal is generally dropped in large quantities—sometimes hundreds of tons are brought down. The workmen are on top of this high coal and have the advantage of knowing this roof. They discuss the nature of the roof, too, with us, and when we get their opinion it is most valuable. In any case, where the roof is bad more care is taken. This mine has been working for over forty years. The same variations in the roof exist as have been present throughout all that period.

3. Is it the same system of working?—To a certain extent it is; the present system is better than the previous one.

4. As far as your experience goes, is it the best system that could be adopted?—It has stood the test of time so far, though it has been in vogue for only a few years. They had another method before. There is one factor which the management have to consider most carefully, and that is that this mine is so liable to spontaneous ignition, which is liable to produce uncomfortable conditions of working. There are so many surrounding features that I would like more time to express an opinion.

5. Do you exercise any control over the method of working, as to whether it shall be one system or another?—If I thought the system a bad one I should certainly exercise my influence to have it altered.

6. Do you think the Act gives you sufficient power, or would you suggest that you should be given any more specific powers?—I have not found any difficulty in enforcing anything so far.

7. But we are here to inquire into any possible defects. As an inspector, if you had more definite powers to interfere in the matter of systems of working would it be better?—Would you allow me to take that question down and give a written answer later?

8. Yes, it is a matter in which the Commission, I think, would be glad of your opinion?—Very well, I will endeavour to assist you by every means in my power.

9. You see we are prepared to accept any suggested amendment or improvement in the Act which would give you greater powers in carrying out your duties. For instance, with regard to summary power to prosecute for certain offences. Perhaps you may find certain conditions existing which you may have to report to Wellington, and by the time you are able to prosecute the conditions may have so changed that your charge may be difficult to prove; whereas if you had summary powers of prosecution it would be a big lever in your hands. We are quite prepared to receive any suggestion on such matters, though it does not follow that they will be adopted?—Well, a suggestion sounds very well, but we are a law-abiding community, and I find it very seldom necessary to take proceedings. It might be done in minor matters, but I would like to have the cases decided before a Magistrate as already provided.

10. You consider that if you had a summary power of prosecution given to you the proceedings should be taken before a Magistrate and not before a Justice of the Peace?—Yes, I would have the wording put that way.

11. Now, with regard to the furnace shaft and the apparatus there for raising men in the Castle Hill Mine, will you give us your opinion of that?—Yes, I never liked it, and do not like it now. The management has been aware of that, and also the union. We had an official trial some three or four years ago, when we were all present—the executive of the union, the management, and myself and Mr. McIntosh, late Inspector of Mines. The trial consisted of lowering and raising men. After working with the water for a time the president and secretary of the union, the mine-manager, and Mr. McIntosh went down and came up again.

12. You did not go?—No, though I was prepared to do so. They came up rather wet, as the rope stretched, as all new ropes will, but they came up all right, as the men are alive to tell the tale.

13. But that is only an emergency plant: as such, what have you to say about it?—I would rather have a steam winch.

14. You have heard what one witness had to say with regard to signalling?—Well, there is a telephone from the surface to underground and *vice versa*.

15. But could you not have a telephone from the bottom of the shaft?—Yes, that is a fair suggestion.

16. Supposing the way to that dip were cut off?—Yes, it would be an additional safeguard to have a telephone connected with the bottom of the shaft.

17. What have you to say with regard to the suggestion as to the furnace there in that return airway?—The fact is that this mine for a number of years has only been worked intermittently. It has only been worked in order to keep it in repair. It has been an adjunct to the main mine. It has never been taken seriously in regard to output either by the company or the union. The company has been put to a great expenditure. One does not like to overburden them with expense, but if they are going to employ thirty-four men down there, as they were doing the other day, I must consider it.