

96. *Hon. Mr. Fraser.*] Have you had any experience of co-operative work?—Yes, I have worked on the co-operative system.

97. You made a remark just now about the men having the right, under the co-operative system, to pick their mates: is that so under the co-operative system?—It is more so now than formerly. They have not that right now altogether.

98. Do you think it would be a good thing if they had that right?—Undoubtedly; you would get better results than now.

99. There is a system of working called the co-operative system which is after all not a true co-operative system, because the men are not allowed to choose their mates; their mates are chosen for them: is that not so?—Under the present co-operative system men do not always get what they earn. Too much is left to the Engineer. The Engineer frequently does not like a party, or his estimate has been made to look foolish, and he pulls back a good party to 8s. or 9s. a day when they would actually on the prices have earned 15s.

100. Is it not also a fact that in the majority of cases the gangs that are working are not such as they would be if the men had the opportunity of choosing their own mates? Are there not a considerable proportion of men in each gang who are not as efficient workers as the others?—That does not work out down our way. There is very general satisfaction given by the co-operative system down there.

101. But you admitted just now——?—I say that if I had the power to amend the co-operative system that is one of the innovations I would bring about—to allow the head of the party, or the party, to choose their own mates, or ballot a man out of the party who was not giving satisfaction.

102. *Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] Do I understand by that that if there were half a dozen comparatively weak but willing men they would be sent out and set aside by themselves, and be paid at the same rate as the strong men?—Yes, it would work out in that way.

103. Do you approve of a system that would give the comparatively weak but willing men less than a living-wage, because they would not be associated with strong men, and thus get the benefit of a living-wage?—There is not that great difference.

104. *Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie.*] You said that the men now working on the co-operative system have not got the right to select their own mates?—They have on the Inangahua line.

105. Can you tell me any other place where they have not got the right to select their mates?—On the Main Trunk line, I understand, they had to take the men the Engineer put in.

106. Can you give me anywhere in New Zealand a case where the co-operative workers have not that right?—I have not heard as many complaints latterly, but I understand that even now they had not got that right.

107. Do you of your own knowledge know that they have not the right to select their own mates?—If they have the right I am now made aware of the fact. I was under the impression they had not.

108. You do not know of any case within recent years?—On the West Coast, no. The co-operative system is giving satisfaction there.

109. Do you know that as a matter of fact they have the right to vote a man out of the party who is not giving satisfaction to that party?—I did not know that.

110. Was it not always the system that they could vote a man out if he was not giving satisfaction?—I did not know of their having that right.

111. Did you ever see any of the conditions for carrying on the co-operative system?—I have seen the specifications that exist as between the Engineer and the workers.

112. But you did not see the conditions?—No.

113. You said that the men are not paid for the quantity they put out: what do you base that statement on?—On actual experience of co-operative work.

114. Where?—On the Inangahua line.

115. When?—On two or three occasions.

116. How many years ago?—On one occasion not twelve months ago.

117. Did the men not get a plan showing the quantity of earthwork and the number of yards of cutting they have to do?—Yes, but repeatedly it happens in this way: the men, over the work they have done that month, have not actually earned more than 5s. or 6s. a day, but on pay-day they get 10s. They get into better ground the next month, and know that they are earning about 12s. or 13s., but get paid only 9s.

118. But every co-operative party when they take a certain piece of work get a plan showing the quantity of earth in the cutting before they start?—They should get the plan.

119. But is it not a fact that they do get it?—Co-operative workers know more about a shovel than a plan.

120. You are assuming that those quantities are taken out by the local engineer, are you not?—I know of cases where, I believe, the Engineer was wrong, and the men did not get what they should have got.

121. Can you tell me of any other class of work where some parties make 12s. and 14s. a day and other parties 5s.?—There have been wide discrepancies like that on the Inangahua line. I have known men to come out with 3s. 6d. a day.

122. Is it not a fact that it is their own fault, because they evidently do not want to work, and are away from the work a good deal?—Frequently it is the Engineer's fault.

123. How?—Because sometimes the estimate gives the men too little for the work.

124. If the price is too high or too low the Engineer has the right to vary it, so as to allow the men to earn the ruling rate of wages in the district?—He has that power.