

petent to supervise that work and carry it out just as cheaply and more satisfactorily than any contractor. As far as that goes, Mr. McLean had to go to the Public Works Department to get his engineer. A contractor is not going to undertake a work of that kind except for profit. If you have to engage a competent engineer to carry on the work, I fail to see why a contractor is necessary at all.

139. You have not worked on co-operative works, have you?—Yes.

140. Where?—On the West Coast, at Coal Creek, and in the North Island many years ago.

141. Do you think the co-operative system would be cheaper than the other system?—Yes, properly managed the co-operative system must be the best system under the sun. It must be cheaper, and must be better for the workers and for the Government.

142. Do you think they get more work out of the men on the co-operative system?—The man who does nothing does not get anything out of it.

143. You mean that the man who does not do his share of the work does not get paid?—No. As far as the co-operative system in this country is concerned, I believe it has been abused to a great extent. Men have in some cases lost the incentive to work hard, because they believe they are going to be paid a certain amount irrespective of whether they work hard or not. That is the idea they have in some cases. If you pay a man by results—according to what his labour produces—there are very few loafers. The coal-mines in this country are worked under this system, and there are no loafers in the coal-mines; the difficulty is to get them to knock off at the right time.

144. *Hon. Mr. Fraser.*] That is not the co-operative system?—It is the co-operative system as it should be.

145. *Mr. Seddon.*] Your reason for suggesting that this tunnel should be worked under the Mines Act is that the conditions are exactly the same as prevail in a mine?—Yes.

146. Has this request—that the tunnel should be worked under the Mining Act—been made for a long time?—Since ever it was a tunnel. I heard the complaint before I saw Otira at all.

147. Is it a fact that amongst the miners throughout the West Coast and elsewhere there is a prejudice set up against this Otira Tunnel?—Oh, no; no more than there is a prejudice against any mine that is unhealthy to work in or dangerous. A man prefers to work in a good one.

148. That prejudice is not maliciously circulated, is it?—No.

149. *The Chairman.*] Do I understand you to say that the prejudice is against the work and not against the contractors?—Yes. I have absolutely no quarrel with the contractors.

150. *Mr. Okey.*] You say that you are the general secretary of the West Coast Workers' Union: do you not know the general rate of wages that is being paid for similar work?—The minimum at Otira is 10s. a day—the same as is paid all over the Coast.

151. But what is the wage that is being paid on the Coast?—10s. a day, and it is 10s. at Otira—that is, for labourers.

152. At Otira they are paying 11s., 11s. 6d., and 12s. 6d.?—Yes, for underground workers.

153. For work that in other places is paid at the rate of 10s. a day?—Oh, no; it is paid more than that in other places—10s. 6d. and 11s.

154. The wages are really higher at Otira than the general rate?—Yes, they are higher, but not in proportion to the hours the men work.

155. With regard to the bank-to-bank clause: suppose they fired a shot at half past 4 o'clock, the men would not start working again, would they—they would come out?—Very likely.

156. That would mean they would be out by 5 o'clock?—Yes.

157. So that many times, I suppose, they would really get the benefit of the bank-to-bank clause?—In some such cases you do not come out; you simply come out of the face where you are firing, and you have to wait then for the trains.

158. But if it does happen like that the men do not do any more work that night—and, no doubt, the contractors arrange to fire shots just about knocking-off time, or half an hour before?—It is not so much the work, as far as that goes: the men want to get out of the smoke—they want to get out in the fresh air and get their wet clothes off. You can make men stop the full eight hours at the face, but it does not follow that you will get any more work out of them. A man can work himself to death in six hours. I think the contractor would get more work under the bank-to-bank clause than under the present system; he would get more work done for the money.

159. But in work like this do you not think there must be a certain amount of give-and-take between the contractor and the men?—Yes.

160. Are the men asking for this bank-to-bank clause?—Yes.

161. Is it the usual thing in work of that kind?—Yes.

162. That the men should come in and go out in the contractor's time?—Yes, it is the law under the Mining Act.

163. It is not usual with general work: the general thing is for the contractor to pay one way?—That is outside; this is underground.

164. In the country you pay from the time the man starts from his place of business—you pay one way?—The miner is worse off than that, because he does not get paid either way. It is only the time he is actually in the mine that he is paid for—not while he is walking to the mine.

165. The rate of wages cannot have anything to do with the contractors not being able to get sufficient labour there?—The wages and the conditions.

166. But you have admitted that the wages are better than are paid for similar work in other places?—No; per hour they are not.

167. You are not going to put all tunnels under the Mining Act, surely?—A tunnel of that description should be. There is just as much reason why such a tunnel should be under the Mining Act as any mine I know of. When we have interviewed Ministers about it they have all