

249. But I was speaking of the system of inspection?—The Inspector, in my opinion, has done his duty to the best of his ability. If he has been imposed upon by deceitful people I cannot help that. Fortunately, however, for us in New Zealand we have not many such people.

250. May I take it that these people—these deceitful owners of mines—have deceived the Inspecting Engineer as to the true condition of the mine?—You can deceive any man once, but not twice.

251. Then it is possible, if a sufficient amount of deceit is used, to deceive and keep in the dark the Inspecting Engineer of Mines in New Zealand?—Of course.

252. And, as a matter of fact, for seven years the Inspecting Engineer of Mines in New Zealand did not know the condition of the Taupiri mines, and was successfully deceived?—You deceived all New Zealand; you deceived the public.

253. But you were deceived?—Absolutely. I was uninformed of the state of affairs here until I found it out by accident.

254. May I put it this way: that unless you are informed of the condition of the mine by the owners, under existing circumstances you are quite unable to know what the condition of the mine is?—No, you are utterly wrong; there are two ways for me to be acquainted with the condition of the mine. First, by the Inspector of Mines: he may tell my chief the condition of the mine—he does not consult with me; he does not address me officially, but addresses my chief, who sends me the Inspector's monthly reports for my remarks.

255. I asked you if you are not informed by the mine-owners of the condition of the mine, have you any method of finding out other than those you have enumerated—that is, from the reports of the Inspector of Mines to the Under-Secretary?—Supposing I am ordered by my chief to make a special inspection of a mine, I do so and then form my own opinions. But if such conditions as explosions occur from time to time, as at Ralph's Colliery, there is not much necessity to search for further information as to the dangerous condition of the mine.

256. Then you do not inspect a mine unless specially instructed to do so by the Under-Secretary?—As far as coal-mines are concerned, that is generally so. Unless I am asked by the Inspector of Mines to accompany him, or by the Under-Secretary, I would not encroach upon the duties of my colleague the District Inspector.

257. Then, is the value of your report only that of the report of one who has heard the facts from the Inspectors or the Under-Secretary?—My annual report is a summary, touching upon the main features for the year.

258. A summary of what?—What I think the public and Parliament would like to know.

259. As to what?—As to the condition and the prosperity of the industry. My report is an editorial on the salient features for the most part contained in the reports of the Inspectors of Mines. I refer generally to the prosperity of the industry, safety precautions, &c. I do not go into minor details. The Inspector in his report deals with what he has found.

260. Then your report is not based upon personal investigation and inspection?—Not always.

261. It is never so based unless you are specially instructed to report?—Unless with regard to gold-mines.

262. We are dealing with this explosion—in regard to coal-mines, I mean?—I say, then, my report is cursory—the details are supplied by the Inspector of Mines, who is the responsible statutory officer.

263. You are not a responsible officer?—Not a responsible officer as a District Inspector.

264. Are you in any sense a responsible officer?—I am responsible for the duties which my chief asks me to carry out.

265. Only those?—I am responsible in other matters—as a member of the Board of Examiners.

266. I am referring to the inspection of coal-mines?—I am not a responsible officer in regard to the inspection of coal-mines.

267. You concur with the description given by Mr. Bennie as to your duties?—Absolutely.

268. Had you any reason to suspect Mr. Bennie of not satisfactorily performing his duties?—Well, now, I have written Mr. Bennie private letters.

269. I do not want that. Give a public answer to my public question?—In this matter of these explosions Mr. Bennie and myself looked at things from a different aspect.

270. That is quite permissible, but it is no answer?—You want me to condemn him, and I will not do so.

271. I know you cannot condemn him?—I am not going to condemn him because he disagrees with me. I cannot justly condemn him because he holds a different opinion from me.

272. You are a responsible officer appointed to travel round the mines and furnish a report, for which the Government pays you a considerable salary, and I am seeking to ascertain the value of the return they get for it?—You are confining me to the coal-mines—one portion only of my duties.

273. I did not say you were getting £600 a year for the inspection of the coal-mines alone. I say it is a ridiculously inadequate sum if the duties are performed?—They are performed.

274. Had you any reason to suspect that Mr. Bennie was not performing his duties as Inspector of Mines satisfactorily?—I cannot give you a Yes-No answer. I will tell you what happened between Mr. Bennie and myself. I will give you, perhaps, a little more than you wish. The letters are very explanatory.

275. We have Mr. Bennie's letters?—I want to refer to a point only.

276. We do not want to go over Mr. Bennie's letters again?—Will you kindly produce the letter in which Inspector Bennie does not recommend safety-lamps being used in this mine. [Letter produced, dated the 7th August, 1914.] He says: "I cannot recommend that safety-lamps only be used in these mines for two reasons—(1.) Very little gas is found in the miners' working-places; it has practically always been found in falls of the roof of the old workings, and two officials are specially appointed to examine the old workings; during the week daily inspections are made, and a full round of the work