

is made during the week. (2.) The working-places are 10 ft. to 18 ft. high. The light from a safety-lamp is very poor." That is where I do not agree with Mr. Bennie.

277. That is a difference of opinion?—Of course.

278. But that does not show incompetence?—I am not here to express my opinion of the competency of my colleague.

279. I wish to ask you, do you say you decline to state whether you formed any opinion as to the competency of the Inspector of Mines?—I formed a different opinion to his on this question of safety-lamps. I am not going to call him an incompetent man because he disagrees with me.

280. That is a difference of opinion?—You have answered the question.

281. I suggest that that is merely a difference of opinion, and is not an indication of incompetency?—I am not going to say.

282. Is it an indication?—I am not going to condemn my colleague for incompetence.

283. You have told us that one of your duties is to report as to the way in which the Inspectors of Mines are performing their duties?—I draw the Under-Secretary's attention, in the hope that he will address them and ask them to rectify defects which I may consider to exist.

284. Did you ever see prior to your visit to Huntly any defects in the administration of Mr. Bennie?—I was requested by the Minister of Mines, Mr. R. McKenzie, to inspect Ralph's Mine when Mr. Wright was manager. I then saw defects, which were rectified promptly by Mr. Wright.

285. During Mr. Bennie's tenure of office as Inspector of Mines you did discover some small matters of neglect in the mine, and these were rectified by Mr. Wright?—Yes, promptly rectified.

286. What were they?—The ladders in the shaft had no protection, and a man getting nervous might fall off. I asked for a frame to be put round them. Another defect was the absence of direction-pointers in the mine towards exits in case of accident. The lights might all have become extinguished, and I had notices put up pointing the way out to the travelling-road. Another defect was to do with the telephone. I asked the manager to have the telephone carried farther in towards Taupiri West, in case of inundation by water. I insisted that a connection should be made between the three shafts. The company wished to delay it, but I insisted upon it being done. These matters were then promptly put right.

287. *The Chairman.*] What connection has that with the Inspector?—It has nothing at all to do with the Inspector, but these are defects which I myself found out and had rectified, after being specially requested by the Minister to inspect the mine.

288. *Mr. Napier.*] These matters had nothing to do with the Inspector?—Mr. Bennie was then Inspector, but he apparently had not noticed those items. I observed these defects and had them rectified. I do not remember if I told the Inspector.

289. These things were not defects in Mr. Bennie's administration?—They were within his administration. He had not perhaps observed them, or perhaps he did not think they were as important as I did.

290. You think he had not observed them? Did you report that fact to the Under-Secretary?—Yes, naturally I would report it; but I have not a copy of my report here.

291. You believe you did report to the Under-Secretary that defect in the administration of Mr. Bennie. You are not so simple as you seem. I am not referring to defects in the mine, but to defects in the administration of the Inspector of Mines. You have now given us a detailed account of certain defects in the mine. You said you did not consider him much to blame for those?—I did not.

292. Did you report that as a black mark against him?—I think he had just overlooked those minor matters.

293. Did you report it as a circumstance against his reputation?—No.

294. Therefore, may I take it that during the whole time of his term of office you have not reported any facts against him which would indicate that he was incompetent or unreliable?—Not a word. He has different opinions from me. It is for our chief to determine which is right.

295. Prior to your visit to Huntly on this occasion when did you last inspect Ralph's Mine?—A little time ago, but I have not been down Ralph's Mine since the Royal Commission on Mines was here. I have never been asked to inspect, and I have had no occasion to.

296. Would you go at all if you were not asked?—It depends upon circumstances. If there was something I was uninformed about I would possibly go, but there are a hundred and sixty collieries in New Zealand, besides many gold-mining claims and dredges, so that it is impossible for me to attempt a regular examination of over three hundred New Zealand mines.

297. One of my objects is to endeavour to ascertain whether one Inspecting Engineer is sufficient—whether the present control is adequate to give the public the necessary assurance that everything is right?—Under the new Bill the Inspecting Engineer is to be Chief Inspector of Coal-mines.

298. Is it not a fact that you are at present an Inspector without a district?—I was gazetted for no district.

299. That means for all districts?—Not according to section 23 of the Act.

300. What were you gazetted for?—I had no authority to enter a coal-mine for any purpose. The manager could refuse me the right of entry, and my right of entry was questioned at Kaitangata. I received that appointment in consequence, at my own request.

301. But you appreciate the significance of my question. Are you not an Inspector of Mines without any special district being assigned to you?—That is so.

302. Therefore, can you not lawfully enter any mine?—Yes.

303. And for three years you left Ralph's Mine unvisited by yourself?—Yes; I only became aware of the danger nine months ago, but the evidence I obtained was tremendously strong, and there was no need for me to make an inspection to ascertain the danger. The Inspector was here eight times this year. I would not encroach upon his duties. It would have been repugnant to me.