

Steamship Company by which they acquired a share in this mine, and also the fleet of Mr. Martin Kennedy. And by the acquiring of these fleets and these mines they established a monopoly. Now, I would ask you to consider this question. No matter what the good intentions of the Union Steamship Company may have been, what has been done has been detrimental to the best interests of the Coast. There was another small man working independently, and the Grey Valley Coal Company acquired his mine, and, if rumour is to be believed, it was not on account of the mine,* but on account of the small vessel † running in opposition to the monopoly of the Union Steamship Company. This mine was acquired and allowed to fill with water. The Koranui Mine was dismantled; the Wallsend Mine is now being allowed to fill with water, and I am sorry to say that I do not believe that is to the best interests of the Coast. There is another thing in regard to this which I am afraid looks very suspicious. In the first six months, as compared with the corresponding six months of the previous year, before the company had it, there was a decrease in trade to the extent of 24,000 tons, and there was £6,600 spent less in wages. If such is the case I fail to see where any benefits accrue to the working-classes—there might have been benefit accruing to the Union Steamship Company. And I may state that, immediately this monopoly was formed, the price went up in Greymouth, close to the mines, 2s. 6d. per ton, and in other places to a considerable extent. But, coming closer to the question now at issue, Mr. McLean stated this morning that he could not see how it was they could not demand coal from their own mines. I admit they have a perfect right to do so, and we have also a perfect right to say whether we will work to supply them with coal from their own mines. I do not think we should have taken such strong steps as we have had we not been bound in honour to support the body with which we had amalgamated—the Maritime Council. Now, I ask Mr. McLean, in common fairness will he state the reason the associated employers in Australia had for refusing the Ellis Company coal? If the employers had a right to refuse the Ellis Company we have a perfect right to refuse to supply coal to any vessels which are manned by non-union labour. This was the stand we took up, and we have a perfect right to take up such a stand, because if we had supplied coal to any one who came, indiscriminately, we should be finding coal to punish the members of our associations. I am sorry it has come to the point it has; but we are bound to do the best we can as co-partners in the association in order to bring about a settlement of the dispute. We have been fighting for it a long time, and we know very well we have nothing in particular to thank the Union Steamship Company for, because I can tell you honestly that the Union Steamship Company had not been in the Grey Valley Coal Company long—I take it that, being quarter shareholders, they must have some control over the company—before there was a system of what I call starvation practised on the miners, who were reduced one or two days per week, and had a demand for 6d. a ton decrease in their wages. I believe the company were making a profit from that mine up to the time the system of weighing was changed, and then they distinctly stated they were losing so much money, £250 per week. I believe we cannot say they were losing £250 per week; their books do not show it. But I ask you in common fairness, was it the miners who were the cause of this loss, or was it the amount of capital put into the mines which should not have been put in, and which was not being used? The Grey Valley Coal Company have been compelled to have such a large number of officers to officer these mines, which they knew were not paying, that it is my firm conviction it was not because the mines would not pay, but because they were over-officered for amount of coals won. These are facts, and I am quite certain the Hon. George McLean will bear me out in what I am stating, that the miners have endeavoured on all occasions to do the best they can to maintain peace and quietness, and also to do the best they possibly can for their employers. And I say to those employers, if they embark in concerns which are not needed, or should not have been purchased, then they use a large factor in reducing the working-powers of their mines, because they must have interest on their capital; and the result is the decreasing of the wages of the working-classes. Now, we want a settlement, but, as the Hon. George McLean, as representing the Masters' Association, says they are determined to use their right if they think proper as to what employes shall be employed, so we have a right to say we will not endanger our lives with free labourers. If you put a free labourer into a gassy mine, such as there are in the Brunner district, that man comes in, knows nothing about gas, nor anything of the description, and probably by some mishap he ignites the gas, and every man in the mine is blown to "kingdom come"—or to pieces, anyway. These are facts that want looking to. And, in regard to employing free labour in a mine, if they are free labourers they must be skilled labourers. I can vouch for it that at the time of the Westport strike an unskilled man was put into the mine, and one day a safety-lamp was placed in his hand for the safety of the mine. The man knew nothing about the use of a safety-lamp, but he hung another open lamp on his head and carried the safety-lamp along going up into his place to work. The experienced men, however, saw the danger, or the possibility is neither he nor any one else would have lived to tell the tale. This would be employing free labour with a vengeance. That lamp would not have been put into his hand had there not been occasion for it. The places are examined, and if there is gas apparent the men must work with safety-lamps. It must be apparent to every one that if such men go into the mines some disaster will occur, and we have a perfect right to say, if the employers want to engage free labour in working these mines, that if they come to work with us they must be skilled. But in this respect we say we are not going to work with free labour. We have taken up this position, gentlemen, after due consideration, and we refuse to hew coal in order to cut the throats of our fellow-unionists; but should this difficulty be settled there is no one who will have greater pleasure than we shall in supplying the Union Steamship Company with coal, or any other company which they may think proper to send there to take coal from us. But I am sorry to say that before this present dispute came about we were in very little better position than we are in at the present time, because we had seventy or eighty men we were keeping before, and the rest of our men being out at the

* Tyneside Mine.

† S.s. "Oreti."