

1726. We were informed that the miners refused to agree to the price allotted by the board of arbitrators?—They did not think it a fair equivalent.

1727. They went to arbitration, then, and did not accept the decision. Do you see any end to the present trouble or dispute? Is there anything you can do to bring it to a conclusion, or anything you can suggest as regards this terrible trouble? Let us put it to you in this way: If I understand your strike aright, it is not a local strike; the question of wages is settled. But immediately there comes a distant strike by the seamen against the Union Steamship Company. Because of this you refuse to work coal intended for the company's boats. So far as I understand, the Union Company are well supplied with men for thirty-four or more boats out of forty or forty-two. Thirty-four of their boats are running as before?—I cannot see what solution there is ahead of us in the difficulty. I do not know of any. The only answer I can give is what Sandy, the Scotchman, replied the other day to a question asking what they were waiting for. Sandy said, "Well, we are waiting for the Union Company to give in."

1728. Do you think it is likely to give in?—I think so.

1729. When there are so many other collieries opening?—There is no coal that can class itself with Westport.

1730. Is not the coal being supplied from other places, and the trade is being taken away from here?—Undoubtedly; it is like a war, it means loss on both sides.

1731. Are not you the only people who are suffering any great hardships?—Unionism is fighting for a principle. There is something elevating in it that lifts us, and is calculated to lift the masses, and the masses are the working people, who are fighting for a principle.

1732. What is the principle they are fighting for? I would like to get a clear definition?—To be allowed to hold their union, and to maintain their rights, and to affiliate.

1733. Then, I suppose you would give the same right to those who do not join?—Those who do not join have exercised their right by accepting employment on the Union boats.

1734. Then you exercise your right, and say, "We will not tackle work," and so the two bodies stand apart?—I think the "blackleg" labour are in a minority at present, and they ought to join the majority.

1735. You acknowledge there has been a very great improvement in the position of the workers as compared with past years?—Yes. Step by step the position has in many ways been improved by unions. I can remember when I was a lad not seeing the light of day more than once a week.

1736. Was that not achieved by the Earl of Shaftesbury? Has there been any great demand in the past that has obtained a great deal at one time? Is not a strike like this generally allowed to be a temporary failure?—Undoubtedly there has been a lot of failure.

1737. *The Chairman.*] In your opinion, and from your experience, do you consider the unions, on this occasion, may have been too grasping to gain public sympathy?—I do not think they are trying to grasp on this present occasion of the strike. It is the right to maintain. Even if there is a temporary defeat, it can only possibly be temporary.

1738. *Mr. Brown.*] Have you any idea of the population of Brunnerton and surroundings—I mean the male adult population?—I should think there is about five or six hundred.

1739. And you say by full-time work there is employment for about two hundred?—About three hundred at the mines, but we have diggers and others resident about the place.

1740. Then there is a part of the population of Brunnerton that are otherwise employed than in the mines?—Yes; there is just what there always is about such a place. They are not all dependent upon the mines. There are a few stores occupied by butchers, painters, paperhangers, grocers, &c.

1741. They are all dependent upon the miners?—Yes.

1742. Are the people generally in favourable circumstances?—Moderately fair.

1743. Have they been enabled to pay their way hitherto?—Some of them may be in arrear.

1744. Were they compelled to fall in arrear owing to the circumstances?—Yes. I believe there are some who have got a long way back in the store-book owing to not being fully employed.

1745. Do you think there are more people to work at the mines than the mines can give employment to? Has there been any movement to reduce that number or are they trusting to the mines being extended?—I do not know what the movement could be, or where the men could go to. A good many men have left, particularly young men, those who have got the means to go away.

1746. Would that three hundred men, finding employment in the mines, be really the only mining population there—that is, the two hundred who could get full work and the other hundred occasional hands?—We calculate there would be a hundred and fifty out in case this present difficulty ends, and all the available places start work.

1747. What is to become of the other hundred and fifty?—They will have to share the work unless there is additional pit-room provided, or they could get away to other work.

1748. This sharing would bring down the average wages?—Yes; it brings down the weekly average for each man.

1749. Not to the employer?—No.

1750. Are the rates you have mentioned—viz., 4s. and 2s. 10d. per ton—calculated on the change of working, or would they still be required if the men were working full-time? Is the reason of the change of these rates because there would be a hundred and fifty surplus men chipping in with you and interchanging?—No. You see it is not possible at present under any circumstance to work more than an average of four days per week.

1751. That is, four days out of six, at, say, 12s. per day per man. Then in the other two days another portion of the men get on who otherwise would be idle?—They change with those who occupy the places. This is what reduces the average to each man.