

MONDAY, 27TH OCTOBER, 1890.

Mr. WILLIAM DUNN sworn and examined.

2501. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Mr. Dunn?—A coal-miner.

2502. How long have you been in Brunnerton?—It will be eleven years in January since I came to Brunnerton.

2503. Did you come from the Old Country then?—Yes, I came from Durham.

2504. What mines have you chiefly worked in?—I have worked in the Brunner Mine mostly; but I have also worked three months in the other mines.

2505. Have you any official position in the mine?—No, I am employed as a hewer.

2506. Are you an officer of the Miners' Association?—No.

2507. You are a member?—Yes, I am a member.

2508. Can you make any statement as to the cause of the present difficulty with the miners?—Well, I am not prepared to make any statement, but I came prepared to answer any questions.

2509. Do you remember the circumstances that led to the stoppage of the mine in July last, when the managers proposed a reduction of 20 per cent.?—Yes, I remember.

2510. For some time up to that period the hewers had been receiving a price on whole coal, had they not?—No; there had been no whole coal. There was a price arranged for pillar-workings only in the Brunner Mine, and at the same time it was whole coal in the Coal-pit Heath Mine, the pillars and whole coal being fixed at one price, 2s. 10d. a ton. That was from the 10th March until the 19th July.

2511. Then a change was, I understand, proposed at the instance of the company, of a reduction of 20 per cent.?—Yes.

2512. And that was not accepted by the miners?—No.

2513. Were you at that time, as a miner, dissatisfied with the price of 2s. 10d.?—No.

2514. You thought it sufficient?—Yes, the 2s. 10d. for the Coal-pit Heath coal.

2515. What was the price for the Brunner pillars at that time?—It was 2s. 6d.

2516. And did you understand that the 20-per-cent. reduction was to apply to the 2s. 6d. also?—Yes.

2517. What was the amount earned by the miners under the foregoing rates as compared with what they had been under the payment of 4s. on screened coal previous to March?—As to the Coal-pit Heath Mine, I could not say; but I do not think there was much difference. They would be paid considerably better in the Coal-pit Heath and in the Brunner pillar-workings. I am speaking now of the period from the 10th March.

2518. You say they were getting more earnings under the latter conditions than under the former?—Generally speaking, they were.

2519. By how much?—So far as I am myself concerned, I was making considerably more.

2520. *Mr. Moody.*] What was the amount of earnings you had been making before, and also during the time you were making considerably more?—The wages I was making previously, as near as I can tell, would be from 10s. to 12s. a day without offtakes; and afterwards from 12s. to 14s. Sometimes I might make more, sometimes less, also without the offtakes.

2521. By the offtakes you mean lights, powder, &c.?—Yes, and check-weighmen. That item amounts to 4s. 6d. in a fortnight for two men.

2522. Two shillings and threepence each a fortnight?—Yes. Before the Wallsend Mine was opened it would not be more than 1s. 6d.

2523. Do you think, then, that it was unreasonable for the company, finding that they were losing money, to ask for a reduction in the wages?—That is a question open to considerable discussion, and a direct answer Yes or No would not meet the case.

2524. *Mr. Brown.*] Were you satisfied with the rates before March?—Not by any means. In the Brunner Mine, where I was working, the coal happened to be particularly good—that is, in other places it was so much crushed that the amount of screened coal obtained by some of the hewers would not enable them to make more than 5s. to 7s. a day. This was due to the nature of the coal. In other places, however, owing to the coal being less crushed, from 16s. to 17s. a day might have been obtained.

2525. And you say was obtained?—I do not say it was obtained.

2526. And it was this reason that led you to seek the change from payment on screened coal to payment on gross?—Yes.

2527. Then, I presume that after the payment on gross coal was commenced the rate of earnings was more equal to all the men?—Yes.

2528. So that probably some had less than they had formerly?—Yes.

2529. But those who had very little formerly had a fair share?—Yes.

2530. If, under these circumstances, the company found they were actually paying more wages for getting the coal than previously, would that have been a fair reason for asking for a reduction of the price, or to demand an inquiry?—I believe it would be a fair reason for demanding an inquiry.

2531. Was such an inquiry agreed to by all parties?—There was an inquiry agreed to by the executive committee.

2532. An audit was held in Dunedin?—Partly in Dunedin and partly in Brunner.

2533. And the result of that audit showed?—A loss to the company.

2534. Not a very large one, was it?—To take it upon their figures, although the result of the audit at Dunedin showed a slight gain if certain items which were omitted had been included, there would have been a loss.

2535. Do you remember what those items were?—I could not say.

2536. They were objected to by the miners here?—I could not say they were objected to.