

2581. This does not end the difficulty?—No.

2582. How long had similar propositions to these been offered to the miners by the company?—Similar propositions to these were offered by the company to the miners. This is rather less than they asked for in the 20-per-cent. reduction.

2583. So far as the wage question was involved the men were giving way, in fact?—So far as the wage question was concerned, the men did not give way. These were suggestions I was prepared to lay before the men and ask them to submit to.

2584. You certainly would have submitted them?—I feel confident, if these suggestions of mine had been accepted, the men would have been at work this morning.

2585. With a proposed reduction of wages similar to the 20-per-cent. reduction formerly asked by the company?—The 20-per-cent. reduction would have reduced the Coal-pit Heath price by 7d. per ton; the 20 per cent. on the Brunner Mine would reduce it by 5d. a ton.

2586. The 20-per-cent. reduction would reduce the Coal-pit Heath pillars from 2s. 10d. to 2s. 3d.—that was your offer?—Yes; I have offered now 2s. 3d. on the Coal-pit Heath pillars, and on the Coal-pit Heath whole coal 2s. 8d.

2587. There would have been only 2d. reduction on the Coal-pit Heath whole coal; but the Coal-pit Heath pillars would have been reduced by 7d., or 20 per cent., and the Brunner pillars by 6d., or exactly 20 per cent.?—Yes.

2588. In a few words, the price on pillars has been conceded in both mines, but not on the whole coal?—Yes.

2589. But, while the company are insisting now on the 20-per-cent. reduction in pillar-workings, they are willing for solid coal to arrange for only 2d. a ton reduction on Coal-pit Heath, and 4d. on Brunner?—Yes.

2590. *The Chairman.*] So far the miners have practically given way to what the company originally demanded?—So far as the price is concerned, I have undertaken to recommend them to do so.

2591. You have taken it on yourself to recommend the other miners to do so?—Yes.

2592. How do you propose to get over the other difficulty, that led to the second strike—the difficulty of not coaling?—My proposition made no restriction upon them as to coaling any boats.

2593. You would give way on the coaling of the Union Company's boats?—Yes.

2594. And the only point that remains between you is, unfortunately, that they cannot take the whole of the men back?—They insist on bringing a hundred and twenty new hands into the place, while they only take on, perhaps, eighty old hands.

2595. But I presume they were pledged to those new hands before your offer was made?—According to the telegram which Mr. Kennedy showed me when I was making these offers, they were pledged to about fifty.

2596. And did he delay at all in sending his telegram?—That telegram was sent before my proposed agreement was written.

2597. And still it was too late?—I do not think they engaged any more men before 11 o'clock on Saturday. Perhaps Mr. Kennedy could give you evidence on that point. I cannot speak with authority. He has the telegram and correspondence.

2598. Then, I understand that, as far as you are concerned, you are prepared to concede both points upon which the lock-out in July and the strike in September took place?—Yes.

2599. And go to work again?—Yes. I also proposed that three men should work in a place instead of two, although we should get less wages for the time being, and that he might keep the experienced hands to go into the whole coal as they opened up the mine.

2600. We understand from Mr. Kennedy that, if you took a daily wage for a while until the thing was done, the company would pay day-wages to all the three men—that they quite contemplated paying three men's wages?—Yes.

2601. But, of course, when they came to paying by weight of coal, or contract-work, it would be more difficult?—It would not affect him so much.

2602. He said it would be more difficult to know how they should be paid; but he said it might not be a loss to the men working on day-wages if they paid them all, and they were quite prepared to do that; so it seems that both sides are exceedingly anxious to meet one another, and I hope it will be settled somehow?—If they would settle with the men without bringing those new men from Dunedin, there would be no difficulty; but they insist on bringing those men from Dunedin, hence the difficulty.

2603. That brings me back to the question of how long was this or a similar offer under consideration by the miners without their adopting it?—An offer was under consideration by the miners up to the 17th, but the prices offered were not so favourable. That offer required a personal application of the men, and not an agreement with the whole.

2604. *Mr. Brown.*] You say that there is no whole coal available just now?—But it is quite possible there may be in a few weeks.

2605. There are pillars working both in the Coal-pit Heath and Brunner Mines?—Yes.

2606. The concession, therefore, of 2s. 3d. in the Coal-pit Heath and 2s. in the Brunner is really yielding the 20 per cent. asked for on the 19th July?—Yes.

2607. Then, the offer made by the company so far back as the 19th July is only now being negotiated as being accepted by the miners?—It is only offered by me. It is not accepted by the miners.

2608. Those are the terms with which you negotiated?—Yes; and I have every reason to believe they would have accepted them.

2609. This offer has been standing, as far as the company were concerned, for three months?—Yes.

2610. After that the strike took place, not on a question of work or wages?—No.