

565. Did they reply to this?—The reply I received was asking for an extension of time, first to audit the books and go through the accounts of the company. That being granted, they applied for a further extension, instead of a proposal we made in a letter of the 19th July that the mines should be closed on the following Monday to allow of the matter being fully discussed. This is the correspondence which ensued :—

Brunner Mine, 2nd July, 1890.—The Secretary, Miners' Association, Taylorville.—DEAR SIR,—In reference to your request for permission to appoint accountants for the purpose of examining accounts bearing on the costs of coal, &c., as disclosed by figures already supplied to you, also that notice be withdrawn pending inquiry, I may be allowed to point out to you that no amount of examination of accounts can alter the unfortunate position of the company. At the same time, we are ready to submit accounts for the inspection of any competent accountant whom you may appoint, and will withdraw notices during the progress of inquiry, providing that your Association agrees to the reduction of 20 per cent. as per terms of my letter of the 30th June. The above-named reduction to be effective only if the loss exceed the amount claimed, exclusive of interest on capital and depreciation of plant. The books to be examined here are our pay-books, showing working-costs. Royalty and railage are fixed charges. Sales and receipts accounts are kept at the head office in Dunedin, and any accountant appointed by yourselves may inspect them there. As stated at the outset, no examination you may make can alter the position of the company; and, feeling sure that your members are fully alive, as we are, to the gravity of the situation and the necessity which exists for prompt action, we ask you to give the matter your early attention; and should you require any further information we shall be glad to supply same, or meet any members of your executive who may be appointed to confer with us on the subject.—I am, &c., JAS. BISHOP.

Brunner Mine, 11th July, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Coal-miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—You may take it for granted that your request for extension of time one week, to allow of accounts being completed, has been acceded to. I have no definite reply *re* brick and coke accounts. Will communicate decision soon as it comes to hand.—I am, &c., J. BISHOP.

Brunner Mine, 14th July, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Coal-miners' Association.—*Re* coke and brick accounts.—DEAR SIR,—The directors reply, "No need to enter on the above accounts, as they in no way affect the loss on coal; would only prolong investigation. If Association decide to lease mines, can have coke and bricks also." I may just add that I hope you are pushing on your inquiry, and that you will be able to complete during present week.—I am, &c., J. BISHOP.

Brunnerton, 14th July, 1890.—Mr. James Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—I have received your note which refuses to permit inspection of the coke and firebrick accounts. It is certainly a matter of regret that the company should have taken up this position. Enginemen's wages: I have to point out, for fear of any misunderstanding, that we consider Bainbridge and Fergusson to be working under their former rate of wages (and this is their own impression too). If this is not so, it will be for you to stop them at once. In regard to Pender, McGrath, and Meehan we do not differ from you. Williams, Meehan, McGee, Smith, and Henderson, truckers, out of employment, have been offered division of work with men at work. If you offer no objection it will be done on same terms as with miners.—Yours truly, S. ANDREW, Secretary.

Brunner Mine, 15th July, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—Your favour of yesterday's date reached me this afternoon; and, in reply, I may be allowed to remark that, instead of the "non-inspection" of brick and coke accounts being cause for regret, it should be quite the reverse, as no good purpose can be served by mixing two sets of accounts. *Re* Bainbridge and Fergusson: There need be no misunderstanding. The men have been informed their pay is now 10s., as per my notice, and I see no need to send them away, or, as you say, stop them at once. *Re* truckers: In this case your notice reached me after the arrangement had been given effect to, and, I regret to say, with considerable loss to the company, as, by sending men into the mine who were strangers at the jiggling, the same amount of coal could not be got as with the old hands. I have therefore to offer a decided objection unless we have due notice and time to arrange for the men being placed as we require them.—Yours, &c., J. BISHOP.

Brunnerton, 17th July, 1890.—Mr. James Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—I have been informed by Mr. Newton that the division of work undertaken by the Brunner truckers was done on their own responsibility. I may say also that the committee quite agree with your remarks on this point. In regard to Fergusson and Bainbridge, I understand they are quite prepared to do firemen's work for firemen's pay; but the Association will object to them or any one else performing enginemen's duties for the lower rate. You are requested to treat this case as one between the union and yourself, and not a personal one with the men. They are members of the union, and are bound to act under its direction in a case of this kind.—Yours truly, S. ANDREW, Secretary.

Then, on the 21st July the following communication was received by me :—

Brunnerton, 21st July, 1890.—Mr. James Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—You state in your letter of 19th that the mines will be laid idle on Monday to allow of the wages question being fully discussed, and that work will be resumed on Tuesday providing a reduction of 20 per cent. is agreed to or a reference of the case to arbitration. As you are aware, when the demand for a reduction was first made the Association requested permission to examine the company's books, and that the notice given for the stoppage of the works should in the meantime be suspended. These requests were apparently conceded. Auditors were appointed to examine the Brunner and Greymouth accounts, and, although it was thought desirable that the same persons should examine the Dunedin books also, but, in order to prevent delay or any cause of complaint on the part of the company, it was decided to appoint an accountant at Dunedin, and so hasten the examination as much as possible. You remember also that the company refused to submit the coke and firebrick accounts for examination, which was the means of some delay. The company was well aware that the audit had been pushed on with all speed, and were assured that the question would be considered as soon as the Association was in possession of the reports. It came, therefore, as a surprise to receive notice of an idle day for the discussion of matter which the company must have known as well as ourselves was not obtainable on Monday. The Association is now asked to forego all consideration of the expected report, which it has been at so much expense to obtain, accept the company's statement in full, and unconditionally agree to their demand on pain of being at once locked out. We can only term this a very arbitrary proceeding, when, at the most, another week would have been sufficient (with the expected report for Thursday) to have considered the whole question. Therefore we claim, only as a matter of justice, sufficient time for due deliberation.—Yours truly, S. ANDREW, Secretary.

As a matter of fact, they had exhausted the time that we had promised, and, instead of pushing on the audit, they did not appoint their accountant for more than a week after they had arranged to do so. When this letter was written they had in their hands a telegraphic summary of the accountant's report; then the secretary complains of my action in the matter.

566. What was your action upon this?—The mines remained idle. On Saturday morning, the 19th July, they got the telegraphic report, and they expected to have the full report on the following Thursday.

567. What did you do next?—The mines were then closed.

568. Do you consider that that action was one that constituted a "lock-out" or a strike?—I should consider it a "lock-out."

569. What happened next?—We remained idle for about six weeks, and the following correspondence ensued ;—