

807. Does the check-weighman keep a record?—Yes. In fact, all these questions as to tonnage, which you have been asking me, can be obtained at once from him.

808. Well, we simply wanted to hear what was in your own mind on the subject. We will go back to July, when the mines reopened at the old rate of wages. What was the next stoppage after that?—The next considerable stoppage after that was in April. The Brunner Mine went on working, but it only reopened with nine faces after July, 1889.

809. With two men to each place?—Yes; working double shifts. There were only eighteen hewers started, instead of formerly probably one hundred and twenty.

810. How long did that continue? Has the number increased?—Yes, the number has been increased—soon afterwards. There are now fifty-six coal-hewers.

811. That is twenty-eight places, two men in a place?—Yes. Keeping to this one mine, there was no change except the gradual increase I spoke of until July of this year.

812. What day?—On the 21st July.

813. Then what happened?—Then that was when the lock-out took place.

814. Can you tell us about this lock-out? How did it come about?—I have a circular here, reprinted from the *Brunner News*, which fully sets forth the circumstances; it was written some time in August. It reads as follows:—

SIR,—The following is a brief explanation of the cause of the lock-out and the position of the miners in the dispute: The company having demanded a reduction of 20 per cent., or that the matter should be settled by arbitration, the Association requested permission to examine the company's books with a view of finding whether their operations had been profitable or otherwise. This was agreed to; but on the 19th July, four days before the result of the audit could be obtained, the mines were closed. After considering the auditor's report it was decided to offer a reduction of 2d. per ton on pillar-work, providing the Government would reduce the cost of haulage to port, and the Union Shipping Company the freights by sea. Both the Brunner line and Shipping Company were known to be making large profits on the carriage of the coal, while the coal-hewers were not making over a fair wage, which the following figures, taken from the company's books, will show. During the last sixteen weeks' work the total output was 63,524 tons, which was produced at a hewing-cost of £3,564. This sum was paid for hewing, timber-setting, and other incidental charges connected with getting the coal. In the same period 194 miners were employed, among whom, if the earnings are divided as above, shows the average wages to have been £3 1s. per week. Miners pay for their own blasting materials and lights. Also the average number of days worked per week within the sixteen weeks under review was more than one day above the average when taken over any lengthened period in the past, and more than could be expected to continue through the year. Reductions that must be made on the wage above stated, owing to these considerations, reduce it to about £2 5s. per week during the year. It cannot be supposed that the miners willingly consented, or felt they were justly entitled to suffer a reduction on this rate; but the matter was too serious for them to decline offering some compromise in order that the work should continue. The hewing-prices last paid are: 2s. 10d. per ton for whole coal and for getting Coal-pit Heath Mine pillars, and 2s. 6d. per ton for Brunner Mine pillars. This, as far as the Brunner Mine is concerned, is already 4d. per ton below Denniston hewing-price, which is a uniform rate of 2s. 10d. both for solid and pillar work. The proposed reduction of 2d. per ton on pillar work would make the difference 6d. per ton between Denniston and Brunner Mine prices. Figures have been put out by the company which seem to show very much higher average earnings than those above stated, but in their calculations the whole of the men employed are not counted. It is quite true that a higher average earnings could be made if the company would employ only such a number of men as they could find regular work for. But, in spite of the objections made by the Association, strangers are readily given employment even at the time coal-hewers are out of places; therefore the workman must work under the conditions which the employer imposes. Much has been made of the fact that coal-hewers have divided the work with those who were temporarily unemployed. This has been done in accordance with a rule which it was found necessary to adopt. The following is a *précis* of the rule: In case of breakage of machinery or the flooding of any portion of the workings, causing the workmen there employed to be temporarily thrown idle, arrangements shall be at once made with the manager for them to have an equal share of the work, such arrangement to continue one month only. It must be evident that this custom is equally an advantage to the employers and men, seeing that it has the effect of keeping skilled labour in the district ready to supply the trade directly the temporary stoppage of any part of the workings has been overcome. In well-managed mines such a contingency ought not often to occur, and it is not probable the rule will remain in force if it becomes necessary to often put it in operation. At the time the lock-out took place fifty coal-hewers were out of places through the flooding of a part of the Coal-pit Heath Mine, and these were receiving a share of the work and money which the manager now attempts to show was earned by a smaller number than has been acknowledged to be in the company's employ by the managing director. The following statement gives the number of men employed at each of the mines on two dates during the last sixteen weeks, and if necessary the names can be given as well as the number: On the 12th April, 56 hewing in Brunner Mine; 108 hewing in Coal-pit Heath; 44 hewing in Wallsend: total, 208. On the 21st June, 56 hewing in Brunner Mine; 71 hewing in Coal-pit Heath; 53 hewing in Wallsend: total, 180. These figures give an average of 194 miners engaged in that period. In estimating the rate of wages the company carefully abstains from giving a general average through the year or per week, and yet every one knows this is the average from which the tucker-bills must be met. You will be kept duly informed of further developments and of attempts made in the direction of a settlement, which we will strive to effect, or otherwise as the case may be.—S. ANDREW, General Secretary, A.M.L.A.

815. This, then, is your explanation. You give this as part of your evidence?—Yes.

816. What followed? Was any compromise arrived at?—Yes.

817. On what date?—28th August.

818. What followed then?—Work was resumed on a compromise that there should be a reduction of 2d. per ton on pillar-coal—that was what might be termed permanent—also an additional temporary reduction of 3d., making 5d. in all, pending the report of the Commission.

819. Explain exactly what you understood was to become of that 3d. Was it to be held back in the meantime?—Yes; but it is not a permanent settlement. I mean that, providing this Commission advise the Government to make a reduction, say, of 6d. per ton either in haulage or royalty, that 3d. per ton would be again given to the men.

820. Is there to be any back payment? I mean, would the men consider they had any claim for payment of that 3d.?—No. They say, in case the Government is advised by this Commission, and accepts the advice, not to reduce the royalty, of course the dispute is not ended.

821. Then you agreed to accept a reduction in the meantime of 5d.?—Yes. Then after the report of the Commission fresh arrangements must be made.

822. On these terms, then, you went to work?—A ballot was taken on the 28th in favour of going to work at once.

823. What followed next?—Work went on for three weeks until the general strike took place,