

Mr. RICHARD ARMSTRONG sworn and examined.

1096. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Mr. Armstrong?—A coal-miner.

1097. For how long?—I have been fourteen years in Brunnerton.

1098. Were you a coal-miner before that?—No.

1099. Never anywhere else?—Only at Brunnerton.

1100. What mines have you worked in?—I have worked in the Brunner, the Coal-pit Heath, and the Wallsend.

1101. Which one have you been working in last?—The Coal-pit Heath.

1102. What class of work were you engaged in?—I have been hewing, but I have been at all sorts of jobs in the several mines at Brunner, especially timber-drawing and repairing.

1103. You have had good opportunities of seeing the mine, I suppose? Are you acquainted with all the circumstances in connection with the various stoppages and short times in the mine?—Yes.

1104. Could you say, in a few words, what the causes of interruption have been?—There are several causes of interruption—for instance, the flooding of the Grey River, the state of the bar, the faults to be met with, the sudden accumulation of water in the mine. All these have a tendency to stoppage.

1105. Anything else?—Of course the present difficulty is one cause.

1106. That is, the strike?—Yes; that is an interruption.

1107. What I wanted more particularly to ask you about is the stoppage in the mine. Have these interruptions you have mentioned caused an actual stoppage on any occasion, or has it been a matter of short time for the men?—It has been a matter of short time chiefly.

1108. Can you give us any case of a stoppage in the Brunner Mine?—In former times there used to be stoppages on account of insufficient storage-accommodation for coal, and even at the present time when the bar is bad and the boats cannot get in there is a want of accommodation for storage. If staiths were erected in Greymouth here it would have a tendency to create a great demand for slack.

1109. Then, you think there would be a breakage of the coal from the staiths?—Yes. As regards faults, when they are met with there is not sufficient pit-room.

1110. Will you explain what you mean by an insufficiency of pit-room?—When there is not sufficient pit-room they have to take the pillars out, which ought not to be done until such time as they have either got to the boundary or proved the fault.

1111. By pit-room you mean that there is not sufficient solid coal won?—That is actually the sense of it.

1112. Then they have to take out the pillars while they are going on proving the fault, or else they have to diminish the work for the hands?—Yes.

1113. *Mr. Moody.*] When you come to a fault the cutting of the whole coal is all done, and the men are put on the pillars?—Yes; that is exactly it.

1114. *The Chairman.*] Then the pillars, in your opinion, should not be taken out? They should not be taken out until such times as they have gone to the boundary or proved the fault.

1115. Do they diminish the number of men so as to cause a stoppage in any case?—Yes.

1116. What was the cause of the stoppage in the Brunner Mine?—Well, they were between the two faults, and when they came to the second fault all the whole coal was taken out, and they had to resort to the pillars.

1117. *Mr. Moody.*] That has reduced the output, of course?—Yes.

1118. *The Chairman.*] Was that the reason of the stoppage of the mine in December last?—I could not be certain as to dates, but I know it materially lessens the output.

1119. Have you been continuously employed yourself?—Yes, more or less. I believe I have worked about as much as any of them up there.

1120. In your experience you have known men to be out of employment up at Brunnerton?—Yes; a great number.

1121. Could you give us an idea, when the mine is in full working, and the output is about an average, how many men would be unemployed there?—I really could not say exactly; but there would be a good few. We were working two shifts, four in a place, and it came to be divided by seven.

1122. That was three in excess?—Yes.

1123. *Mr. Brown.*] What period was this?—During the last six months.

1124. That is as much as to say that the amount earned by the seven men was just exactly what the four should have had?—Yes.

1125. *The Chairman.*] What remedy would you suggest for that? On talking the matter over with your mates, what has been considered the remedy?—Well, more pit-room would give a remedy, and winning more coal by proving the faults; that, in my opinion, would mean a further expenditure by the company of £14,000 in proving the Brunner faults. They have already spent about £15,000.

1126. And it will require £14,000 now in your opinion?—Yes.

1127. How long have they been spending that £15,000? What period has that expenditure been spread over?—Perhaps about nine or ten years.

1128. Now, you say it wants £14,000 more expenditure for proving faults: which fault have you in your mind? I suppose you have some clear idea of the nature of the work you propose?—I mean in trying to prove the inner fault, and going to the dip.

1129. Have you been at the fault?—Yes; it is like all other faults, being a face of stone.

1130. Is there a leader of coal in it?—The outside fault is a dip fault.

1131. What is the inside fault?—I have not examined it thoroughly, and I have not taken particular notice of it.