

between the time occupied in discharging the cargoes of the two vessels. The "Lawrence" was discharged and loaded with coal ready for sea in as many hours as it took days to discharge the "Brunner." I made the statement to Mr. McLean, when he said—and with a smile—that the Union boats were manned with the flower of New Zealand. I must admit that better crews than those who went out on strike never manned the Union Company's boats, for they were able-bodied men who could fill the places; but it cannot be said that the boats are properly manned now. The instance I have mentioned I consider a direct proof of the difference between unionist and "free" labour. I hope the Commission, if it is within the province of their duties, will recommend a board of conciliation in the future.

3169. Has conciliation not always been open to the local bodies contending in the dispute here?—No.

3170. Has arbitration not been offered by the coal-masters here?—They did offer to have the matter settled by arbitration.

3171. But the men refused?—Yes, the miners refused—with which I disagree.

3172. Are you aware of a previous instance in which arbitration was entered upon, and the result was not accepted by the miners?—I do not remember that.

3173. At the same time, you know, I believe, when arbitration was spoken of by the company?—There was a little connection with it, but it was not a free, and open, and decided idea of arbitration. I must admit that I did not agree with the Arbitration Bill before the House, in all its clauses.

3174. *The Chairman.*] What would be your idea of the proper constitution of an arbitration board or Court?—My opinion is, that there should be an actual method laid down by law for dealing with disputes between employers and employed. Of course, you must state some dimensions of a dispute, as it would not be necessary to deal with a single dispute between one man and one employer. It should be a law to deal with disputes likely to affect the commerce of the colony. It should be an Act binding each party to abide by the decision of the arbitrators.

3175. Arrived at upon the issues set forth before they entered into the bond?—Yes.

3176. *Mr. Brown.*] That is a voluntary arbitration on both sides, is it not?—Yes.

3177. Is there anything in law that can bind people to voluntarily bind themselves?—I really believe that, seeing the great mischief that such a strike is calculated to do in the country, it is absolutely necessary to have it as an enactment.

3178. That they should voluntarily bind themselves?—I do.

3179. *The Chairman.*] You mean that the enactment should provide the machinery by which the thing is to be done?—Yes; by which it is to be done.

3180. That they need not necessarily go to arbitration, but if they do, and follow the course of procedure laid down by law, then it will be incumbent upon them to accept that position?—Yes. Of course you would understand that I do not mean that if I, as a labourer, have a dispute with my employer it is absolutely necessary to set all the proposed machinery in motion if he and I can agree without it. I really think that there could be measures adopted to settle a dispute amicably between the parties without entailing such a calamity upon the colony as the present one, and I see nothing for it but boards of conciliation. Of course, when the proposition for boards of conciliation is fully ventilated men will put their heads together to think of what position it should take, or how it should be done; but until it is ventilated men would not think what should be done. These are the difficulties upon which we try to get information from those who have had the opportunity of thinking about them.

Mr. JOHN ROBERTS sworn and examined.

3181. *The Chairman.*] You are a coal-miner, are you not?—Yes.

3182. How long have you been at Brunnerton?—I have been in Brunnerton fourteen years.

3183. You are first deputy there, are you not?—I am manager's deputy.

3184. How long have you been that?—About two years.

3185. Do your duties take you into the mine frequently?—Daily.

3186. What are your duties?—To examine the workings, and see to the safety of the men.

3187. In regard to what?—The timber being put in correctly. I inspect the timber.

3188. The state of the roofs?—Yes.

3189. Do you lay off the work for preparing the roads?—Yes.

3190. Do you measure up the special work?—Yes.

3191. Can you inform the Commissioners about the state of the coal in the Brunner Mine?—At present?

3192. Yes, the condition of the coal that is being worked?—It is all pillar-working.

3193. Is it about equal everywhere, or are some parts more crushed than others?—It is in a place or two. When the weight comes on the pillars the hindmost pillar gets crushed a little more than the others.

3194. That is a thing that follows the working?—Yes.

3195. Does the roof ever move while the working is in progress?—Very little. Sometimes she starts working, and then you withdraw your men and take them to another place while she settles, or draw the timber and let her fall.

3196. In falling, how does it come away?—As a body properly.

3197. In how large blocks?—Some make heavier falls than others. Some go to a great height.

3198. Does it ever go in big cracks?—Yes, if she breaks she will give you indications of it. The stone splinters, there is a crack, and then that is where she will make her next fall from.

3199. How far do these cracks run?—About 20 yards, perhaps.

3200. And do they continue in the same line as the cracks in the roof that has fallen before?—No, they split always.