

328A. You do not know of any other person who is in your position—namely, who is allowed to work in the service although not a member of the benefit society?—No; I do not pay any attention to others.

JAMES ROBERTSON was examined on oath.

328B. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a seaman on s.s. “Waihora.”

329. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—A little over six years.

330. And you belong to the Union Company's benefit society?—Yes.

331. You were already in the service when the society started?—Yes.

332. How were you induced to join; did they tell you it was compulsory?—Most of the men on board joined at the time, and I joined voluntarily with the crowd of them.

333. Do you belong to any other society?—No.

334. Did you ever belong to any other society?—No.

335. *Mr. Fisher.*] What is the amount of your contribution?—It is 5s. 6d. a month; I used to contribute 5s. a short time back.

336. *The Chairman.*] You are not one of the committee?—No.

337. Do you think that the society is properly represented in the six who represent the seamen and the seven who represent the Union Company; do you think their position as servants of the Union Company would influence them in regard to coming to a decision?—It might do so.

338. *Mr. Fisher.*] I suppose you do not take much interest in the society one way or the other?—There is only one of my family who will benefit by it.

339. Still, there is a feeling of security to yourself?—Yes, of course.

340. I suppose you are more satisfied with constant, steady employment?—That is the main thing.

341. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Membership of the society has been a condition of employment up till lately?—Yes; of course I always understood you would get preference. You are employed by the Union Company, and they prefer to have men who are insured in their society.

342. *Mr. Fisher.*] I should take it that you have no complaint to make on your own account?—No.

343. *The Chairman.*] Do you think the feeling of satisfaction in reference to the society is general amongst the crews?—I dare say amongst the married men; I do not know amongst the single men. There are some of the latter who are not very well satisfied with it.

344. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Have you ever received any intimation recently to the effect that the company was going to retire from the active management of the society, and leave the entire management to the representatives elected by the men?—I do not recollect getting any information from the Union Company to that effect. I have heard remarks of something to that effect.

345. *Mr. Fisher.*] Not remarks, Mr. Robertson. You are a member of the benefit society, and therefore entitled to receive any circulars or letters sent to each member of the society. Have you received any to the effect that the Union Company intends to retire from the management of the benefit society and leave the whole management to the seamen?—I cannot be sure of that.

346. Would you know if you got a circular or letter or some official intimation by word of mouth from any person?—I would not be sure. I do not say there was not a circular, but I am not sure of it.

347. Here is a statement made by a gentleman who is the leading manager of the Union Company. He said, “The Union Company intended to retire from the management of the society and leave it to the seamen, firemen, and others?—I do not think that I have had any letter.

348. This statement has gone forth to the public through the newspapers: “The Union Company has intimated its intention of doing at the end of September that which it has all along expressed its intention to do—retire from all participation in the management as soon as the society could go alone, and make it then a purely voluntary association, like any other friendly society.” That is the impression conveyed to the general public, and therefore, as one member of the Commission, I wish to be particular in asking you if you have received in any form whatever an official intimation to that effect—surely you know if you have received any letter or circular?—Not lately; I do not recollect having received anything of that sort.

349. *The Chairman.*] Suppose you belonged to a friendly society, and you had power, as a member of every friendly society has, to know how the funds are invested, would you regard these funds as properly invested as if they were entirely under the control of the Union Company—are your funds under the control of the Union Company, or are they invested as other funds?—Well, I have seen a statement made that they are invested in other things.

350. Some of these small benefit societies' funds are held by the employers, and in the case of such an extraordinary thing as a failure happening to a mercantile company such as the Union Company the funds would be lost, and the men would get nothing for themselves. I am only asking you whether these trust funds of the society to which you belong are invested, or if they are just lodged in the bank in the name of the Union Company?—I do not know.

351. *Mr. Fisher.*] They are not in your name?—No.

352. Do you see any objection, so far as you know, to the society being registered?—I think it ought to be.

353. That is to say, cease to be a private benefit society and become a registered society?—That is so.

354. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Did you receive any intimation recently—within the last few days—to the effect that the Union Company were going to make membership entirely optional on the part of the men?—No, not lately. It was generally supposed to be optional, but we understood that those who joined would get the preference in the matter of employment. We were not forced to join the society.