

193. *Mr. Fisher.*] You are one of the committee, Mr. Wilson: do you know the amount of accrued funds?—Yes.

194. You issued this statement [Exhibit 1]: therefore you have read it all?—Yes.

195. I may take it, further, that you are familiar with the whole of the contents of these reports?—Yes.

196. In whose name are these funds—the £4,300 on fixed deposit—invested in the bank?—In the society's name. These things are to be found in the books; it is hard to remember them.

197. What benefits do the men receive from the society?—£1 a week in case of illness, £20 in case of death, and £10 in case of the death of the wife, if the member is a married man.

198. Beyond that, do you receive any periodical bonus from the fund, or from the division of the interest on the capital amount?—No.

199. Now, has there been pressure or compulsion put upon the men in the service of the company to make them join the society? I would rather have a little more definite answer to that question. Is there pressure or compulsion put upon men who join the company's service?—Not that I am aware of.

200. Several witnesses have said so, and one in particular said that the men on board ship were called into the smoking-rooms, when the rules of the society were read out to them, and they were given to understand that those who were not already members of other friendly societies must join: do you know anything of such an instance as that?—No.

201. If you know nothing of the pressure brought to bear upon the men in the company's service, have you heard of cases of compulsion?—I have heard some grumbling about that, but, as I say, you could not, when you inquired, get any information as to who compelled them. When I joined the society, at its formation, we were all taken to the smoking-room of the ship, and the society explained, and it was left to our own free-wills.

202. I asked you just now if you had read this report [Exhibit 1]. If you have read the report, and if you understand clearly the affairs of the benefit society, surely you must remember this letter, because, if you are a member of the committee, the letter should have been issued with your joint authority. The letter says this: "To Purser, 'Grafton.'—Please enrol Dunning if under forty years of age, and recommended by Mr. McNicol, and inform Dorling that unless he joins forthwith, paying as from the 1st April last, instructions will be issued for his dismissal from the service.—11th May, 1896." And that is not written, as the Chairman assumed just now, far back: it is dated the 11th May, 1896—not so long ago?—I was not on the committee at that time.

203. Well, then, if not on the committee, you were a member of the society, and, as a member of the society, you received a copy of this annual report, and therefore I assume you must be cognisant of the existence of that letter. How comes it, then, that your ideas on the question of pressure and compulsion are vague, with this letter staring you in the face?—[Witness made no answer.]

204. If you do not mind my saying so—I do not say so offensively—your unwillingness to answer conveys the idea that you are not stating all you know?—I am saying what I know.

205. Would it be better, in your opinion, that this society should be registered, or that it should remain an unregistered society?—I think it should be registered.

206. You prefer it should be registered?—Yes.

207. There must have been large numbers of men who, in course of time, have left the service of the company: do you know whether they have ever received any surrender value or any bonus or division of the funds of the society?—Yes; they get their surrender values.

208. How is it divided?—Well, I can hardly explain to you myself. So far as I can understand it, it is according to the time they have been in the society and the amount of funds. I fancy it is paid according to the time they have been in it.

209. You say that you should prefer the society to be registered?—Yes.

209a. Would you mind giving us, in your own language, your reasons for that opinion?—Well, I think it would be more under the Friendly Societies Act.

210. Are you a member of the Seamen's Union?—Yes.

210a. I take it you are familiar with the provisions of the Shipping and Seamen's Act and its amendments?—Well, I understand them generally.

211. Have you ever been ill yourself while in the service of the company?—Yes.

212. And left ashore?—Yes.

213. Where, and for how long?—In Dunedin; my home is in Dunedin.

214. How long?—I think, four weeks the first time—I cannot be exactly sure—and, I think, three weeks the second time.

215. The medical and other expenses came out of the funds of the society?—Yes.

216. Did the company pay your wages?—No.

217. Well, I suppose you are aware that under the Act you are entitled to receive all your wages?—It was before the new Shipping Act.

218. Can you say, in the case of men who are put ashore through illness—of course, I am speaking generally—if it is the rule of the company to pay these men's wages while ashore: in your case you say you were not paid?—I signed clear of the ship.

219. The drift of my question is this: that, while this benefit society defrays the cost of the sick-pay and attendant expenses out of the funds subscribed by the men themselves, the company does not comply with the provisions of this Act, by paying the wages of the men who require medical attendance while in their service. So I ask you generally whether you know if the company, as a rule, complies with the provisions of this Act by paying the wages of the men who become sick in their service?—I cannot answer that question.

220. Just explain, in your own language, how the committee is elected?—They were elected by proxy.