

society, or any other society; they entirely object to the principle. Their contention is that they engage to do a month's work for a certain amount of pay, and they say that they should be totally unhampered by any conditions of any sort whatever in reference to joining this or any other benefit society. I see it has been stated that it is not altogether compulsory for men to join this benefit society. There is no necessity to argue the point about that. I will give you Mr. James Mills's own words in connection with this. I have here newspaper reports of the proceedings of the dispute between the Seamen's Union and the Union Company recently before the Conciliation Board in Dunedin, where Mr. Mills most emphatically states he considers the Union Company have got a perfect right to make it a condition of employment. These are the words he used: "We consider that we [the Union Company] have a perfect right to make it a condition of our employment that members of the company's crews should be members of a benefit society." Reading that in conjunction with their rules, which state most specifically that those who are not members of other benefit societies must join the company's society, the inference is that they must join the company's society, provided they are eligible through not being a member of a union. Then, again, Mr. Chairman, I will quote still another statement made by Mr. Mills, which occurs in a leading article in the *Otago Daily Times* of the 11th February, 1897, where they pour out a little of their spare vituperation on the head of your humble servant on account of his connection with the Seamen's Union. It is as follows: "Mr. Mills frankly admits that one of its [benefit society] objects was to keep the men in touch with the company, and endeavour to create a mutual interest, so that if strained relations arose at any other time they might probably consider the company's interests as much as their own." That, I think, most conclusively shows what the object of the Union Company was in instituting the benefit society. They have always claimed that it has been done for philanthropic purposes; but it seems a most peculiar thing that men who evince so much interest in the welfare of their employes should with one hand reduce their wages, and then force a benefit society on to them to which they have to contribute—all with the object of studying their welfare. For my own part, I cannot see where the welfare of the employes is studied at all. With reference to the compulsory conditions on joining the society, I have three declarations here. They were never attested before a Justice of the Peace, but were made before myself and another witness, and I would respectfully ask that the names of these individuals should not be made public. One statement was made before Mr. Millar, M.H.R., when he was secretary of the union, and the other two before myself. I will read them if you gentlemen would like to hear them.

*Mr. Fisher:* So long as the Commission is satisfied as to the genuineness of the documents.

*Witness:* Yes; and I think perhaps their names can be given to the public. The first is as follows: "Dunedin, 8th June, 1893.—I, Thomas Samuels, fireman, of Westport, joined the 'Kawati,' February, 1893, and left her 8th June, 1893. Was never asked to join the society until June, 1893, when the mate, Mr. Brophy, was collecting the money. Hagan asked me for mine. I replied that I had plenty to do to pay into one society, and would not pay. Brophy then said he would damned soon make room for some one who would pay, and upon arrival in Dunedin I was dismissed. My discharge shows no faults at all. Am a member of the Loyal Westport Lodge, M.U.I.O.O.F., and have been since 1887. Was dismissed by chief engineer under instructions from Kirby. Anderson, fireman, was present.—(Signed) THOMAS SAMUELS. Witness—J. A. MILLAR." In connection with this man, I may tell you he was away from Dunedin for some years, and he eventually got a situation in one of the Union Company's boats, and that man told me distinctly the last time he was in Dunedin that as soon as the vessel got alongside the wharf he was confronted by Mr. Kirby, and asked what he meant by making such statements, and allowing them to be made public. That shows you how keenly they watch any one who attempts to give any evidence against their society. This is another statement that was made before myself: "Dunedin, 26th March, 1896.—I, William Graham, of Port Chalmers, late fireman on s.s. 'Rotokino,' owned by the U.S.S. Co., do hereby certify that I was discharged from the s.s. 'Rotokino' on the 16th February, 1896, no reason being assigned for my dismissal. On making application to the company's labour engager for further employment I was informed by him that I would receive no further employment from the company because I was too old to join the Union Steamship Company's Mutual Benefit Society, and there were numbers of men who were members who would get work before me. I am a financial member of the All Nations Lodge, U.A.O.D., in Port Chalmers, also a financial member of the Protestant Alliance. I am fifty years of age, and am still quite competent to perform my duties as a fireman, and no complaints have ever been raised by engineers in this direction. I make this statement knowing it to be true in every particular. (Signed) WILLIAM GRAHAM. Witnesses—W. Belcher and R. Clark.—26th March, 1896." I may tell you that at the present time this man is in one of the small boats on the coast earning his living as a fireman. Here is another statement: "Dunedin, 19th January, 1897.—I, W. J. Coleman, do hereby state that at the inception of the Union Company's benefit society, and when called into the social hall of the s.s. 'Tarawera' to be notified of the fact that all employes had to join same, I was distinctly given to understand by Mr. Ness that all those who did not join the benefit society would be debarred from getting employment. I have been a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows about twelve or fourteen years, and have paid my contributions to both societies since forced to join the Union Company's society. I am also insured with the Australian Mutual Provident Society.—(Signed) W. J. COLEMAN, Begg Street, Musselburgh. Witnessed by W. Belcher, this 19th day of January, 1897. Witnessed by A. Y. Bracegirdle." I may tell you that this statement was not got in a surreptitious manner. The man was in my office speaking to me about another matter, and was complaining about being compelled to join the Union Company's benefit society, and he told me he was in another society. I asked him if he would be prepared to sign a written statement to that effect. He said he would, and I wrote out the statement and read it over to him, and he signed it.

8. *The Chairman.*] Who was the witness?—A. Y. Bracegirdle. He was here the other day.