

must have been some time previous to my taking office in 1894. There was a circular sent with this round-robin requesting those of the men who were dissatisfied with the benefit society, and wished to see it abolished, to sign. This was headed as follows: "Names of members who are opposed to paying any more moneys into the Union Company's Mutual Benefit Society after a date to be fixed upon hereafter should a sufficient majority be in favour thereof; due notice of result of voting will be made known to members." I suppose some twenty-five or thirty boats are represented in this round-robin, and you will see they are pretty numerously signed. And I would like to draw your attention to one name amongst these—that of H. A. Wackeldine, who was the first witness to give evidence before your Commission. He was not a member of the society; and you will see by the evidence he gave before you that he is not a member of the society now, but was opposed to it at the time of its inception.

12A. *The Chairman.*] Then, why did he sign that?—Out of sympathy, I suppose. I just merely bring this before you, gentlemen, to show conclusively by the number of signatures I have here that the men are not so satisfied with the benefit society as some people have tried to make you believe. In connection with this matter I may tell you that the Seamen's Union concluded to officially approach the whole of the benefit society lodges in New Zealand with the object of enlisting their sympathy with a petition to the Legislative Council, praying that legislation should be passed either abolishing or restricting the operations of private benefit societies generally, special attention, of course, being directed to the Union Company's. I will supply you with a copy of the circular [Exhibit 7] that was sent out by the Seamen's Union, and with a copy of the petition [Exhibit 8] sent to the Legislative Council. I received a large number of them back again from some of the societies—not all of them—and they were pretty numerously signed. There were between two thousand five hundred and three thousand signatures, I believe, attached to this petition, and we received several letters—which I did not bring with me, but they are amongst our records—from secretaries of friendly societies expressing sympathy with our views, and sending along the signatures of their members. Here is another matter I wish to bring before your notice to further prove that there was compulsion in connection with the benefit society. It is a circular that was issued to the crews of the Union Company's steamers at the time they made the last reduction in wages, and this is one of the clauses in it: "The directors are of opinion that the circumstances of this colony are not so unfavourable as to necessitate at once so sweeping a reduction as has been made in Australia, where wages of seamen, firemen, and trimmers have been reduced by £2 per month; and they also recognise that membership of the mutual benefit society, and its accompanying obligations, should be taken into consideration in connection with the question of wages." The inference there, I believe, is that is a responsibility that the men have got to take upon themselves willy-nilly. There is a matter in connection with their finances to which I wish to draw your attention. It may mean a great deal or it may not. This is one of the Union Company's society's balance-sheets [Exhibit 4], and it is a statement of accounts for the year ending the 30th September, 1892. You will see by it that their money was deposited in certain ways. At this date there was deposited with the Union Steamship Company £850, and there was £1,300 to their credit in the Bank of New Zealand. You will see by the copy of the original rules that provision was made there that the funds of the society could, if they so wished, be deposited with the Union Steamship Company, and I must say, in justice to the Union Company, that they have never followed that out only in this instance, and the money deposited with the company has since been transferred to the bank. But here is another balance-sheet [Exhibit 4] for the year ending 30th September, 1895, which shows that the society kept two accounts. They had a fixed deposit in the Bank of New Zealand of £940, and in the Colonial Bank they had £1,920. What I wish to draw your attention to is this fact: that the £1,920 at that time was almost the exact amount of the Union Company's subsidy to the benefit society.

13. *Mr. Fisher.*] What is the inference?—Well, I may tell you that all the financial operations of the society are carried on in the Bank of New Zealand; but the Union Company's contribution stood there by itself in the Colonial Bank, and was never operated upon at all. All their cheques for disbursements for sick-pay, and so on, I believe, were drawn on the Bank of New Zealand. I have commented upon this matter before, and I drew attention to this through the Press; and the inference I have drawn from it myself is that the Union Company's money, standing there by itself, was never operated upon at all; and, if at any time they so wished, their alleged subsidy to the society could have been withdrawn without anybody being the wiser of it. Now I do not know what state the thing is in since the amalgamation of the banks has taken place. It seems a most peculiar thing to me that the Union Company, having their business with the Colonial Bank, should have deposited that subsidy with the Colonial Bank, while the men's moneys were deposited in the Bank of New Zealand. There may or may not be anything in it at all.

*Mr. Fisher:* I do not think there is anything in that now, because the present balance-sheet shows that there is £4,300 on fixed deposit in the Bank of New Zealand.

14. *Hon. Major Steward.*] In regard to those round-robins which you have produced, I think you told us they represent about twenty boats?—I will make sure by counting them. There are twenty-four boats represented.

15. How many boats are there in the service?—I could not say from memory.

16. Well, then, approximately?—I think, between forty and fifty, at the present time.

17. At the time these round-robins were signed, how many were there?—I would not like to say.

18. At any rate, that represents about half the boats?—More than that.

19. Are we to infer, from the fact that only twenty-four boats of the fleet are represented, that the men on the other half of the boats did not sympathize with the views of this half?—No, you are not to infer that at all. I might explain the reason, probably, why more boats were not represented. Some of the fleet may not have been in commission then, or Mr. Millar, our secretary at that time, might have experienced a large amount of difficulty in getting some reliable man on the other boats to take charge of the "robin" and get it signed.