

“Wairarapa” has been the only one where the nominees of the Union Company and the men’s representatives clashed.

94. Will you kindly tell us something about it?—After the “Wairarapa” was wrecked the widows and orphans of the men who were lost got the funeral benefit, but the survivors had nothing but what they stood in. It was moved at a meeting of the committee that a little be voted from the benevolent fund to assist them in getting an outfit. The fund for that purpose is for assisting any one outside the regular sick and funeral fund. I made a motion, and one of the company’s nominees made another motion, and so the two sections on the committee clashed.

95. *Hon. Major Steward.*] What was the nature of his amendment?—I moved a motion that £10 be voted from the benevolent fund to each man, to give him a new outfit, and one of the company’s nominees—Captain Cameron—thought £7 would be sufficient, and moved an amendment to that effect.

96. Which was carried?—The motion for £10 was carried against their amendment; and that was only carried by two of the company’s nominees voting on our side.

97. So that on that occasion, although there was a collision between the representatives, some of the Union Company’s nominees were independent enough to join with you?—Yes.

98. That has been the only difference of opinion?—Yes. I suppose they thought the men deserved it, and they had sufficient independence to vote against their employer in that direction.

99. *The Chairman.*] Will you explain how they were voting against their employer—the Union Company—in voting this money?—It was their employer’s representative that moved the amendment, and, of course, these men were nominated by the company. That is where it is. Of course, lots of people, by the evidence, which I am trying to contradict, want to make out that the men’s representatives are afraid to speak their minds, and that in the case of any great affair coming forward the nominees of the company would vote in the way the Union Company directed.

100. *Mr. Fisher.*] The “Wairarapa” incident referred merely to a matter of administrative detail. The question I put to previous witnesses was this: that the company, in the event of any crucial question arising—any large and difficult question—has the dominant power on the committee. First of all, they have seven to six on the committee. Suppose, then, there was to arise, I will say, for want of a better expression, a hand-to-hand combat between the company and the men of the fleet—any question affecting the financial strength and existence of the company and the general welfare of the men for all time to come—who would have the governing power? Suppose a strike—and this is the most extreme instance I can give you—were to arise, who would govern on that committee?—Well, in the case of a strike, which is not very likely to occur, and suppose there should be a suspension of the society, and it should come to a distribution of the funds, I do not think for one moment that the Union Company would have the benefit of the matter, because there are four of their nominees on the committee who are paying, on the average, about 5s. per month into the society. If they say, “Well, we had better leave the funds in the Union Company’s hands,” they are giving away their own money. Suppose it came to the Chairman moving that the funds of the society be left in the company’s hands, and one of the men’s representatives moved to the contrary—that the funds be distributed amongst the members, is it likely that the company’s nominees would allow the company to dictate to them, seeing they would be paying away their own money. They are paying just as much into the benefit society as I am. They are all working-men; at least, two of them are.

101. Yes; but in the event of a difficulty arising, you see, the men’s funds are invested in the bank on fixed deposit in the names of the Hon. George McLean and Mr. James Mills as trustees?—Yes; in the name of the society, and Mr. Mills and Mr. McLean as trustees to the said society; but not in their own names.

102. Well, surely you know, in the event of friction arising between the two parties to the contract, who has the whip-hand—who has the controlling hand over these funds?—In the event of a dissolution of the society the committee can wind up that society. It must come before a vote of about one-third of the whole members.

103. *The Chairman.*] On what authority?—One of the rules.

104. What is the value of these rules if you went into Court?—One of the cleverest lawyers in Dunedin drew them up.

*Mr. Fisher:* You might burn them up.

*Witness:* If I had a little longer time I might be able to contradict you, as we have just sent to the man who revised the rules to see if there is any legality in them. We have not got his answer yet.

105. *The Chairman.*] We want to know if they are enforceable at law?—I do not know. A lawyer drew them up, and, for the sake of his reputation, he is not going to draw up laws that have no force.

106. Is there any other point?—Well, there is only one question I would like to mention, and that is in reference to the registration of the society. I myself am in favour of registration; and not only myself, but, in fact, dozens of men have come to me, as a committeeman, and complained about what you say, and they advocate the registration of the society. I am perfectly satisfied with the rules, and, candidly speaking, I am satisfied with Mr. McLean and Mr. Mills.

107. *Mr. Fisher.*] That is a mere question of honour and *bona fides* between you two?—Yes. There is another little question I would like to mention—that is, in reference to members belonging to another society joining the Union Company’s society. I know two personally, and I know of two or three more who had joined the company’s society before the last reduction in wages who sent in notice that they were going to suspend their payments. They suspended their payments to the company’s society, and no exception was taken to this, so long as they were members of another society. There is one of them who has been working at Port Chalmers for the last two years to my knowledge.