

83. *Hon. Major Steward.*] That is very good. Now, the Chairman has referred to a paragraph in the agreement between the company and the Federated Seamen's Union, in which it is stated that there will be no compulsion for the members to belong to the society. It is a fair question, I suppose, whether the company intends to retain the option of selecting persons who do not happen to be members of the society. That power is with you still, and if exercised would amount to the same thing, would it not?—Yes; but the men who engage hands want the best men, whatever they are. You will find that if the men engaging the hands see a good man belonging to another society they will have no hesitation in picking him. They would take that man although he did not belong to the Union Company's society.

84. But, all things being equal, I suppose the probability is that preference would be given to a man who was a member of the society?—I do not know. As I say, it would no doubt be the best men who would get the work. I am pretty sure it is that way now.

85. After the agreement comes into operation, would the fact that a man is not a member of a benefit society still operate as a disqualification?—You will find that the good men are the frugal men, and that they do belong to a society.

86. *Mr. Fisher.*] For the purpose of information, what is the meaning of this: Clause 6 of the recent agreement says, "The company shall have the same right as at present to engage hands by agents;" what is the advantage of engaging hands by agents?—That is, having a man ready to ship them. I believe the clause refers to a case of that kind. It affects the coastal boats. You could not stop to take them, as was proposed, to the Customhouse, and ship them there. It is admitted that that is not practicable, and I think it is that case the clause covers, although I am not sure.

87. Will you give us your view in regard to this evidence: One witness who was not unfriendly to the company said he joined because "he was told it would be better for him to do so, he would have a better chance of employment"?—I dare say that some time ago that would probably be held out to a man as an inducement, but for some time it has not been held out.

88. The same witness says, "He was always of opinion that some men were not joining of their own free-will"?—I fancy that a number of the young men who never paid into any society joined this one thinking they would get a preference.

89. He also said that "the existence of the society, in his opinion, would give the company large power over the men. It would prevent the men organizing or getting up any body similar to the Seamen's Union as it was before the strike." Does that generally express the situation?—I see Mr. Belcher says he has five hundred members in the union here, and that is a proof that the society does not hinder the union. Apparently the society stands in no way as a bar to the carrying-on of the union.

90. This is not Mr. Belcher's evidence I am reading now?—No; but Mr. Belcher says he has five hundred members in the union, and that is an answer to your question.

91. Now, is this statement by Mr. Bracegirdle correct: "In the event of any large or crucial question arising the committee are almost powerless. . . . The representatives of the men are virtually powerless, not the committee as a body"?—How can they be powerless? They have their own representatives—the men elected by themselves; and then there are two wharf-labourers, who would join them; also, probably, the engineer foreman. That would leave the company with three representatives as against the others. It is ridiculous to make a statement of that kind, and I am satisfied the members of the committee, if asked, would say they had freedom in working the society.

92. The gist of the witness's evidence was that the seven who represented the company are a concrete seven, and that in the event of any feeling of extreme antagonism arising between the men on the one hand and the company on the other the company without doubt would exercise the dominant power. Is that so or not?—It would not be so, owing to the constitution of the committee now. If the company wanted the power no doubt they would put their own officials on the committee, but instead of that they put in two wharf-labourers and an engineer foreman. If any crucial contest came on I think these men would side with the men's representatives.

93. How do you explain the existence of the feeling which one witness's answer indicated? This man, though he spoke generally in favour of the company and the society, added, "If I had a free hand I would speak differently"?—I could not say as to that. I do not know any man who has not a free hand. Every man is at liberty to speak out his mind in any way he likes so far as the company is concerned.

94. I should like to explain to you, Mr. McLean, that I am only assisting you so far as I can to test the value of this evidence?—Yes, I see that, Mr. Fisher. Thank you.

95. You have explained, so far as your own personal ideas are concerned, what in your opinion led to the origination of the benefit society in connection with the Union Company—that was, to prevent your men being taken away from your company by other persons whose feelings might be antagonistic to the company—that is, so far as your company is concerned. How do you account for the existence of so many of these benefit societies all over the colony? Have you any opinion on that?—The societies are for the frugal people who wish to provide for their wives and families in a proper manner. Naturally, the men cling to these societies. The young men, however, who go to sea have not that care upon them, and, unless there is some inducement given to them to join the society, they will spend their money in other ways, and make no provision for times of sickness. I have always looked on the Seamen's Union in this way: The men pay in the money, and they get no benefit; their money is gone. They might pay it in with a view to using it as a fighting fund, but I do not think fighting will do anybody any good. I have had enough of it. I am not anxious to have another strike in my lifetime. It is not good, either for the men or the owners; and I would say this too: At one period, when times were bad, things became so depressed that I often discussed the position with the officers of the union. I said to them that they would have to take a reduction