

the affairs of the benefit society, and he gave evidence generally in favour of what one might call the company's view. That was the general tendency of his evidence. But, still, he said this: "That in the event of any large crucial question arising the committee are almost powerless—the representatives of the men are virtually powerless, but not the committee as a body." Do you agree or disagree with that statement?—I look upon that as an unbusinesslike statement, because I cannot believe that the committee of any society would deal with a crucial question. It is not their business.

221. His point is, I think, that the part of the committee which is composed of the men's representatives would be powerless. He says distinctly here that in the event of any large question arising that part of the committee would be virtually powerless?—He says so, evidently, there. I do not agree with him, because I know how the society is run. I know the feeling of the Union Company towards it, and I know quite well there could never be such a thing as a deadlock, or anything like that.

222. *The Chairman.*] Do you think a strike amongst the employés of the Union Company impossible?—I hope so, since we have an Arbitration and Conciliation Act.

223. You think the Act will go largely towards preventing any strike?—The Court forms a sort of meeting-place which did not exist before, and enables each side to be heard. I think it is good in that way.

224. Matters in dispute could be referred to the Arbitration Court, which would tend to discourage strikes?—Yes; I look upon it as a beneficial measure—certainly of great benefit to the wives and families of those concerned.

225. I would like your personal opinion on the question of establishing private benefit societies, and whether you think the principle is a good one. The Commission think the principle is dangerous, on this ground: that one hardly sees where it is to end. In the case of a company like the Union Company the largeness of the affair makes it absolutely necessary that the accounts should be audited, and the whole thing fair and above board?—The accounts are audited.

226. But, if the same principle is followed by small private employers, do you not think that an unregistered society able to dictate any terms to the men is a rather dangerous weapon to have over the operatives?—If it were made use of in that way, certainly.

227. Of course, the employer in most cases is beneficent as well as benevolent; but on the other hand he may be malevolent. Do you not think the principle is dangerous?—I can only judge by cases. In the case of our company it has been of benefit to the men. Of course, the very essence of a private benefit society is that the employer's contribution gives the men advantages they would not receive in a society without that subsidy.

ARTHUR MORRISON was examined on oath.

228. *The Chairman.*] You are a member of the House of Representatives?—Yes.

229. You are a member of a friendly society?—Yes; I am District Grand President, U.A.O.D., for Otago and Southland. I have been a full financial member of a registered friendly society for between twenty and thirty years.

230. Can you tell us some points in regard to these private benefit societies—for instance, do you consider the Union Company's society, or any other society, has been a hindrance or loss to the registered friendly societies?—Yes; I can perhaps advance one or two reasons why, in my opinion, these so-called private benefit societies are not what I might call fair competitors as compared with registered friendly societies. I am not going to attack the Union Company's benefit society, or any other particular society. But I may say, as one who has taken a great deal of interest in friendly society work in this colony for a number of years, that there is a strong feeling of antagonism amongst registered friendly societies as against the like of the Union Company's society. I remember in 1891, or the early portion of 1892, a convention was held in Dunedin of representatives from all the various friendly societies in this locality—from the Druids, Foresters, Oddfellows, and so on. At that convention some strong resolutions were passed, and they were forwarded to the then members for the City of Dunedin. But nothing came out of that. We asked then, as friendly society men, that the Government should exercise some control in regard to the establishing of societies that were going to be run on the lines of the Union Company's benefit society, because they had a tendency to take away members who had been contributing to our funds, and who had been members of our lodges for a number of years; men felt that if out of employment and offered a job in the Union Company's service it was made a condition of their receiving that employment that they had to join the benefit society. They naturally demurred to this, and said, How can we afford to pay contributions to the society we have been attached to for so many years and pay contributions to a society over which, simply speaking, they had little or no control? To the men out of employment, however, it was simply a case of between "the devil and the deep sea," as the saying is. A man out of work, and needing a job, naturally threw over the registered friendly society of which he had been a member for years and joined this society, on which his employment was, in a manner of speaking, dependent. That is where we felt it was unfair competition to which the registered friendly societies were being exposed. Now, that is one phase of the question. Another phase of the question is this: It is found absolutely necessary, in the interests of the community, that the Government should pass an Act which is known as the Friendly Societies Act, which compels all friendly societies to conform to certain conditions which are laid down. The Act says you shall observe so-and-so; you shall make annual returns to the Registrar; and you shall only allocate your funds in certain directions; and you shall do this, that, or the other thing. Now, is it fair that our societies should be brought into competition with a society which is not only drawing our members away from our own ranks, but is also picking up members outside the societies who would in all probability join a registered society. This society is not registered, and has no control over the funds. There is nothing in connection with