

JAMES NESS was reheard.

1. *The Chairman.*] You wish to add something to your evidence?—Yes; there are a few points I have noticed in the recent evidence.

2. I hear from Mr. Gray you have some other evidence to call in regard to friendly societies; but, really, we must make an end to this phase of the inquiry, or it will be interminable?—My only reason for asking is that yesterday the Commission heard several secretaries of friendly societies, who were, apparently, quite antagonistic to the Union Company's benefit society. I think it is only fair that we should have the privilege of bringing forward other men, who hold very prominent positions, to confute some of the statements brought forward yesterday, although I must say these same men brought forward no evidence bearing upon our society.

*The Chairman:* You will notice I was very careful in asking each witness to say of their own personal knowledge how many men had left their societies, and they said one or two.

*Witness:* Well, if you would simply call one—Mr. Asher—I would be satisfied. I do not think he would detain you long.

*The Chairman:* Mr. Kirby has been here with another witness, and it may drag on for ever.

*Mr. Fisher:* The only point is this: Mr. Ness bases his request on the ground that the Union Company should have the privilege or right to produce evidence contrary to that of yesterday; and I am afraid, if the Union Company or its representatives put forward a request of that kind and we decline, it will be fairly open to them afterwards to say they wished to tender evidence which the Commissioners refused to receive.

*Hon. Major Steward:* We will take all evidence tendered; at the same time, I think Mr. Ness will see we wish to get on to the other societies in Dunedin, and that it will be very inexpedient to sandwich in evidence relating to the Biscuit Company's society and others with evidence in reference to the Union Company's benefit society. The better way will be to let Mr. Ness call this man, and bring him at once.

*Witness:* I will ring him up and ask him to come.

3. *The Chairman.*] Will you mention the points you desire to lay before us?—I see by my former evidence I was made to say that about two hundred and fifty of the Union Company's men were members of other societies. That is not correct. What I intended to convey was that about two hundred and fifty did not belong to our society. Only between eighty and ninety, out of a total of eleven hundred, are members of other societies.

*Mr. Fisher:* I made that point quite clear for my own information through Mr. Kirby.

*Witness:* I would like, again, to deny Colman's written statement, which was brought up by Mr. Belcher, I think, in reference to being forced to join the society. I remember Colman's case quite well, in which he mentioned he was a member of another society, and also in the Australian Mutual Provident Society.

*The Chairman:* I think Colman, in his evidence, said that he joined just because he thought he might as well belong to both. He said it was only paying a few more shillings a week to get more benefits.

*Witness:* I can assure you we never had the slightest intention of forcing this man into the society. It was the other way about. I was always strong in impressing upon the secretary and Mr. Kirby, "Whatever you do, do not take these men in if you can avoid it; always refuse them." Although at least forty or fifty of our permanent shore hands at Port Chalmers were asked to join the society about four years ago, only seventeen did so, the rest being members of other societies.

*The Chairman:* We had evidence from shore employes of the company as to membership never having been compulsory.

*Witness:* Yes; I want to point out that these men are still working. It never made the slightest difference to them; the same permanent hands are employed in the same old way. To show the liberal spirit of the Union Company towards men injured in the service, I may mention that at Port Chalmers at the present day we have at least nine such men for whom employment has been found. They have been working at Port Chalmers for periods extending over fourteen or fifteen years. These are men injured more or less in the service of the company, who had no actual claim on the company, but who have had little jobs found for them. These men are employed in various directions—as sailmakers, upholsterers, one is a watchman, one potters about the ships laid up, keeping them clean, and so forth. I just want to show we are not so bad as we are made out to be. With the exception of McCann, not one of these nine men are members of the benefit society. In addition to these nine, there is the case of a man, George Smith, I think, a sailor of the "Wakatipu," who lost his leg through an accident on board. He has been given light employment, and is now watchman on the wharf at Wellington. In yesterday's evidence I read that Mr. Higgins stated that the society is not on a sound financial basis. I may say that before our rules were finally adopted the Government Registrar of Friendly Societies approved them and fixed the rates of contributions.

4. *The Chairman.*] You say he approved of your rules: do you mean they were officially submitted to him?—In a semi-official way. I think he was asked in a semi-official way for his opinion. Of course, he would not lay down the law to us.

*The Chairman:* I feel sure Mr. Mason would deny having given such an opinion.

5. *Mr. Fisher.*] Are you sure Mr. Mason advised on the rules?—They were sent up to Wellington, and I am almost sure it was Mr. Mason. It might prove interesting to know how many registered societies have been approved by an actuary, although the order of which Mr. Higgins is Grand Master is one of the few societies whose contributions and benefits are looked upon by actuaries as financially sound. The Registrar, I understand, does not fix the rates of contributions to the various societies; it is done by the members themselves. In reference to the statement about the man Cardno in yesterday's evidence—I forget who brought it forward—Cardno