

made an application to the Union Company to be registered for a job on the 4th December, 1895. In January, 1896, he was appointed as assistant-baker for the Sounds trip. At the conclusion of that trip—it was only a temporary job—he was reported upon as being not quite fit for the job. He was appointed on the 8th April, 1896, as baker on the “Waihora,” and discharged on the 29th July, 1896, and reported upon by the chief steward as not suitable. That may possibly be some reply to the witness’s evidence yesterday. Mr. Williams also states that members of the Foresters had been compelled to join the Union Company’s benefit society. That, of course, I again deny. With reference to members of committee not being contributing members, there are only the marine superintendent and myself who are in that position; and it has always been my intention to join, but I have simply put the matter off from time to time for no reason whatever. I shall probably join, and that will only leave the marine superintendent as a non-member. All the other members of the committee are contributing members of the society, dealing with their own funds. With reference to our benefits being about on a par with other societies, it might be well to point out that at the time of the “Wairarapa” disaster the committee voted no less a sum than £280 from the benevolent fund to alleviate distress amongst some of the survivors. This was in addition to sick-pay resulting from exposure at that time. I do not think any friendly society in New Zealand could have done such a thing from their benevolent fund. That was principally owing to the donation given by the Union Company at the initiation of the society. The Union Company gave £500, and out of that sum £250 was allocated to the benevolent fund at once. Mr. Haymes also stated that ten or twelve seamen had left his society since the start of the Union Company’s society. Granting this to be correct, it must be remembered that, after the conclusion of the late unfortunate strike, many of our men found their positions filled by others, and they probably drifted into other spheres of usefulness. They probably left the colony; but, if Mr. Haymes can supply the names of those ten or twelve men, the Union Company will, no doubt, be able to trace their whereabouts, and see if they were members of the benefit society. Mr. Morrison stated that an unregistered society had no guarantee of solvency such as a registered society had. I might ask what guarantee any society has. In my opinion, the Union Company’s benefit society has a stronger financial position than many of the registered societies—than the Druids, for instance, of which Mr. Morrison is a prominent member.

GEORGE LEYON ASHER was examined on oath.

6. *The Chairman.*] Are you an officer of a friendly society?—Yes; I have been secretary of the Foresters continuously for about twenty-four years. I have been connected with them for about thirty-two years.

7. Are you connected in any way with the Union Company?—In no shape or form.

8. You saw the evidence brought yesterday by some members of friendly societies: do you wish to say something on the subject?—My experience, as an officer of the society at Port Chalmers, is that the establishment of the Union Company’s society has been a benefit to us there. It has caused men to join us voluntarily whom we would otherwise not have got. We have not lost a single member through the Union Company’s society being established.

9. *Mr. Fisher.*] What are you by trade?—I am shipping clerk of the New Zealand Shipping Company now, in charge of their office at Port Chalmers.

10. *The Chairman.*] Can you give us any idea why these men joined your society, instead of joining another society?—This was just about the time that the Union Company’s society was talked about, and there was an impression that the employés would be compelled to join the benefit society if not already members of a friendly society, and several of the employés joined us straight away in preference.

11. That being the case, it was an impression amongst these men that to join a properly registered society was of greater advantage than belonging to an unregistered society?—I do not know whether that was it exactly, so much as that they did not care for the element of being compelled to join. I think that was more in their minds at the time; that was just when the society was being inaugurated by the Union Company. I may say that, of our members at Port Chalmers, I think some twenty-three are in the employ of the Union Company. I do not know whether any of them are members of the Union Company’s benefit society or not. I have no means of knowing.

12. *Mr. Fisher.*] But you know it is a condition of employment in their service that if a man is not a member of an outside friendly society he must become a member of the benefit society?—I know there is such a condition in their rules. Before their society was established I saw a printer’s proof of a draft copy of the rules. I was asked by the Union Company, as a member of a registered friendly society, if I had any objection to going through them and making suggestions. I did so, and I know some of my suggestions were acted upon. I believe they asked others as well, but I did not know who they were, and I never troubled. I went through a draft copy of the rules.

13. That does not matter now, for we have a legal opinion which determines the validity or non-validity of the rules of the benefit society?—Yes; I notice a legal opinion was given the other day, and that another one is to be put in to-day. I was just going to say, probably every lawyer in Dunedin will give a different opinion. I should think the opinion to be relied upon would be the opinion given by a Judge of the Supreme Court, or something of that kind. I would not place much value upon a solicitor’s opinion.

14. *The Chairman.*] Is there anything more you would like to say?—Only that my own society at Port Chalmers is quite indifferent whether the Union Company’s society is registered or not. We had the matter before us by circular some time ago. We did not care what they did, as we found they did not affect us in any way—the society is rather to our benefit—and we were quite content to let matters go on as they were.

15. *Mr. Fisher.*] That is not the question?—That was the question put to us.