

16. The question is whether, for the protection of its members, the Union Company's benefit society should be registered. What do you say to that?—I do not see that it matters a great deal whether it is registered, except that perhaps there are some small matters which could be dealt with in a simpler way if the society were registered than if it were unregistered. Little things might occur that could be settled in the Magistrate's Court if the society were registered, and which they might be compelled, by being an unregistered society, to take into the Supreme Court.

17. Am I to infer that it would be a matter of perfect indifference to you whether the Foresters were registered or not?—Personally, I place little or no value on registration.

18. Even in the case of the Foresters?—I am speaking now as a member of the Foresters.

RODERICK MCNEIL was examined on oath.

19. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a sailor on the s.s. "Hawea."

20. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—About fourteen or fifteen years.

21. How long have you been in the benefit society?—I have never been in it.

22. Will you kindly tell us what you have to say?—When I came over here from Sydney I did belong to the Foresters, but I was unfinancial, and Mr. Kirby told me to join the Foresters afresh. I did join the Foresters afresh. That is all I have to say.

CHARLES GRACE was examined on oath.

23. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am foreman of McLeod Brothers' soap- and candle-works.

24. How long have you been in their service?—Ten or twelve years.

25. You have a benefit society connected with the firm?—We have.

26. Have you a copy of the rules with you?—I have. [Exhibit 12.]

27. Are they in manuscript or printed?—They are written; but we have a printed copy in a frame, for the information of the workmen.

28. How long has this society been in existence?—About nine years.

29. Has there been any grumbling on the part of the men at having to join the society?—Not a single word that I am aware of, and I firmly believe there has not been a single word. I may tell you that the whole concern is in the men's hands. It is entirely optional with them; the affair is carried on by the men entirely. There is a secretary and a committee, and there is nothing for me to trouble about. At the end of the year the funds accumulate to, say, £30, and the men, if they think fit, divide that sum, less perhaps £8 or £10 as a reserve fund. They do exactly as they like.

30. That has been done?—Every year. If there is £1, well and good; if 10s., well and good; the amount is divided, with 5 per cent. interest, which is added to the accumulated funds.

31. By whom?—By the firm. The firm really has nothing to do with the society but in name.

32. Is there any subsidy?—Oh, yes; but beyond that the firm do not interfere with the society. I might name men who do not choose to join it because they are paid their wages if they are laid up, while other men are not. I refer to the clerks and storemen. If they lose time their wages are paid, because it is not usual to stop their wages, and therefore they do not see the fun of joining the benefit society. For that reason they do not join.

33. But, as regards the operatives in the works, they have to join?—There is no such thing as having to join in the place. I have never seen the rules before.

34. A man would not be dismissed if he refused to join?—Certainly not; there is no such thing in that place as discharging men.

35. What is the use of having rules if they are not carried out?—Well, there may be something in that; but they are carried out fairly, so far as I know.

36. Suppose there are sixty men in the works, and the rules say they are all to join: if twenty are allowed to remain outside the funds are not so strong, nor is the society so strong?—That may be so, but the rules are never enforced.

37. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Are there any men except clerks who have refused to join?—No one. I will tell you of an instance of a man withdrawing from the society. He said, "I might be laid up more or less, and I would not like to be a burden on your funds," and he withdrew. We did not bother him, and he is still employed by the firm.

38. Practically, nothing follows on non-compliance with the rules?—Nothing whatever; it is entirely in the men's hands. The management of the works know nothing about this matter. I do not suppose they ever trouble. It is carried on by the men quietly and smoothly, until the time comes for the annual division. Then the secretary—one of our workmen—goes to the managing director, and says, "The men have decided to divide so much money as a bonus; are you agreeable?" The answer, during the time the society has been in existence, has always been, "Oh, yes; quite agreeable."

39. It is in the nature of a temporary society from year to year?—It is more like a savings-bank among the men. They were paying in £1 6s., and they divided £1 each as a bonus, with 5 per cent. interest added; so you see it is more like a savings-bank.

40. They get a subsidy also?—The subsidy is in case of an emergency; we have that to fall back on.

41. What is done with that subsidy?—It remains at interest.

42. It is paid in every year?—I suppose so; it is booked every year.

43. How do you divide the surplus?—The firm takes half as a bonus. We take £30 and the firm takes £30. I do not doubt for a moment, if the money were wanted, the firm would not put a finger to it.