

under Rule 5 and Rule 27 of the society, join that society whether you please or not?—I would not exactly say that. A majority of the members wished the society to be formed, and I fell in without any compulsion whatever. They did not compel me to join; I am an old employé of the company.

180. But Rule 5 says it is compulsory to join, and Rule 27 says all people in the employ of the company must belong to the society?—That is quite right; of course, it is compulsory membership.

181. I take it that is the position?—Yes.

ROBERT GEORGE COOK was examined on oath.

182. *The Chairman.*] You are employed in the Phoenix Company?—Yes.

183. How long have you been in their service?—Ever since the company has been in existence—about ten years.

184. Have you been in this benefit society since it was started?—Yes.

185. You know, perhaps, that two of the rules make membership of the society a condition of employment in the Phoenix Company; have you heard any grumbling amongst the employés at having to pay this money?—No. There was a slight murmur when the society was begun, but a ballot was taken amongst all employés over twenty-one, and I think there were only three blackballs.

186. About how many were in the company's service at that time?—At that meeting there were something like thirty over twenty-one years of age.

187. We were told by the manager that there were about a hundred people working for the company, so that thirty people passed a resolution which bound the young people as well as themselves?—Yes; that is how it was done.

188. Did that cause the grumbling?—No. The suggestion in the first place was thrown out by the then manager, and he gave us one or two rules as a guide, and all the older hands—all over twenty-one—were asked to meet to decide whether a society should be formed. We decided to take a ballot, and there were three blackballs. That was all the dissent I ever knew of.

189. Could you tell us approximately how the sexes are divided in your society? Are the majority women?—No; the majority are male members.

190. Do you remember any employé leaving the service of the company and wishing to take away the contributions he had paid into the society, but who had to leave behind any money he had paid in?—Yes, I remember one, and he was the person who had blackballed the society. He said there should be some rule that any member not drawing any relief for some time—after two or three years—should be entitled to a surrender value of the contributions he had paid in. He is away from the firm just now.

191. Have you had any funerals?—One—a lad.

192. Of course, as the employés of the firm become older, you will have more funerals: do you think, therefore, that the contributions you are paying now will be able to bear the burial-expenses and sick-expenses of the future?—We have only had one reverse since we started. At the end of one six months we were £4 over the contributions.

193. Including the employer's contributions?—I think so. We have gained in all the other periods. One six months all the contributions were in; there had been no sickness at all.

194. *Mr. Fisher.*] In the case of sickness you receive no medical advice or attendance?—No.

195. *The Chairman.*] Do you belong to any other society?—To the Oddfellows.

196. Do most of the men belong to friendly societies besides this society?—There are four in the factory besides myself who belong to my lodge.

197. Do you think, if you had quite a free hand, seeing that you belong to a friendly society already, you would like to belong to this one?—Yes.

198. To your thinking, it is a thoroughly good thing?—Yes; it has proved very beneficial to some who have drawn upon it.

199. And it is no very great strain on those who do not get anything from it?—No; the contribution only ranges from 1d. to 4d. per week.

200. Is it your opinion that the company does exercise any pressure directly or indirectly on the management of the society?—No; only, as you see by the rules, they will not let us do what we like with the funds. Of course, the manager is our president, but there is nothing to cause any member to be afraid to say what he wants to say at the meetings. The society is worked amongst the men entirely.

201. Now, suppose it was your lot to have to work for somebody who did not manage the affairs of his workmen in such a kind-hearted way as this firm does, do you not think that a society of this sort, with its compulsory membership, could be made an instrument of oppression?—Yes; that could be the case with any one who liked to exercise their power over the men. Our rules are laid down there, and everything is worked just on the rules.

202. *Mr. Fisher.*] Suppose you left the employ of the company, and you enter the employ of another firm where no such benefit society existed, would you take with you a copy of these rules and advocate the establishment of such a society in that new firm?—Well, if I was disposed to have a society I would like to see these rules used.

203. That is not an answer. Would you, if no such society was in existence in your new employ, take these rules and advocate that such a society should be established?—No; I do not think I would be the means of starting another society when I am in one. In fact, I am in it now, and subscribe to it because it might make other people not in the society join.

204. *Hon. Major Steward.*] If such a thing were possible as that you should be the father of all the employés, would you, in their interest, seek the formation of such a society with such rules?—Yes.