

72. Can you offer any suggestion as to how the society could be improved?—No; I think it is working very satisfactorily at the present time as it is.

THOMAS OLIVER JOHNSON was examined on oath.

73. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am pay-clerk at the Kaiapoi Clothing Factory.

74. There is a benefit society connected with the factory?—Yes.

75. Are you an official of that society?—I am secretary.

76. Have you brought a copy of the rules?—Yes [Exhibit 32].

77. How is the funeral fund called up—by levy?—No, by weekly subscription; but we resolved to abandon it during last year, as it was not self-supporting.

78. Then, this is a purely voluntary society?—It is purely voluntary.

79. How many employes are there in the factory?—440.

80. How many are in the society?—150—about one-third.

81. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Does the society, in your case, give any subsidy or assistance?—Not now. When the society was started in 1883 they gave £30 per annum, but that only lasted four years. They found the society in such a flourishing condition that they withdrew that £30.

82. *The Chairman.*] Have you a balance-sheet?—Yes [Exhibit 33]. I would like to say, in regard to the falling-off in membership, that it was compulsory, but two years ago the compulsory clauses were done away with at the directors' desire, and consequently the membership has fallen off considerably.

83. Explain "consequently"?—That the compulsory clauses have been taken away.

84. But, if the society is a benefit, why should members fall off?—That is one thing I cannot exactly understand. I do not know, myself, why the people do not contribute more towards the funds, but the fact remains that they do not. I have a rough statement here as to the position of the society since it started [Exhibit 34]. You see there at once the falling-off that took place after the compulsory clause was removed.

85. In your opinion, was it a mistake to withdraw the compulsory clause?—I think it would be better if the compulsory clause had remained.

86. We have been informed that one of the great benefits of these societies is that they take in as members persons who are too young or too old for ordinary friendly societies, and have consequently been a good thing for them when they fell sick?—Yes; it has been a good thing for them in many instances.

87. If the numbers should still fall off, will this rate of contribution be sufficient to keep the society going?—It has been self-supporting so far. Of course, when the compulsory clause was taken away the majority of people liable to be sick remained in the society. Those healthy and strong, of course, did not want to remain, and consequently the amount of sick-pay is heavier in proportion, because the rate of sickness is greater.

88. *Mr. Fisher.*] What generally is the mental character of your employes: are they either very wise or very ignorant?—I think you will find them the average of the general body of people assembled together—you will find them both wise and the reverse. I may just say there are a good many hands earning fairly good money. Of course, they have comfortable homes; they are nearly all girls, and I suppose they feel that this 3d. per week comes out of their own pockets, and that if they are sick their parents will keep them. That has been my experience.

89. *The Chairman.*] Of what nature was the compulsion before the compulsory clauses were abolished?—It said every person employed in the factory must be a member of the society, provided they were in good health.

90. What did "must" mean?—They were compelled. Of course, they were led to understand they must be members of the society. I do not suppose they would have been discharged if not members, but they would have been, as the saying is, called over the coals for not joining. Of course, the old rules simply said any person not joining within a certain period would be reported to the manager of the factory—that was, the management of the factory would simply deal with that member as they thought fit.

91. What reason had the management of the factory for interfering in this business?—Because they thought the society beneficial to their employes, and prevented subscription-lists being handed round the factory when people became sick and were not able to keep things going.

92. Have any accidents happened in your time in the factory?—Nothing worth speaking of; nothing of a serious nature.

93. Are you quite sure?—I cannot remember for the moment. I do not think we have had any accident worth reporting.

94. Were the employers annoyed at the compulsory clause being withdrawn?—It was their desire that membership should be made voluntary. I think it was about twelve months ago when the Private Benefit Societies Bill was being introduced. They thought to save any further annoyance they would have the compulsory clauses withdrawn.

95. The result has been a partial paralysis of the society?—Yes.

96. *Hon. Major Steward.*] In your opinion, in any legislation regarding these private benefit societies, do you think provision should be made to enable a majority of members to make membership compulsory?—Yes; I most decidedly think so. I think it should be in the power of the employes, by vote or otherwise, to make membership compulsory or otherwise.

97. That is, from your point of view, it would be an advantage to the society if such an Act were passed?—Yes.

98. *The Chairman.*] I suppose, under the present circumstances, and with so many of your employes out of the society, the old subscription-list nuisance may come into force again?—Yes; of course it might, but I think they clearly understand that no subscription-list of that nature is allowed, because the society is there to provide against that sort of thing.