

136. And the machinery not too cumbersome?—Quite so.

137. We were told by some witnesses that one great advantage these private benefit societies have over friendly societies is that young people can join, and also people can join without medical examination: do you consider this a very great advantage?—Well, in our society they have to be in good health before they can become members. We have employes whom we do not admit as members, owing to their not being in good health.

138. *Mr. Fisher.*] We had before us this morning a society called the Christchurch Railway Annual Sick Benefit Society. In that case the whole government of the society is in the hands of the members themselves, the employers standing quite apart, and almost every workman appears to be a member: do you think, if there were the same freedom in your employ, that those who withdrew from the compulsory operations of your society would again become members?—I think we have a society with equal freedom.

139. How was it so many withdrew?—I cannot answer that; I do not know the reason of their withdrawal.

140. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Your employers do not interfere at all?—No. We have perfect freedom from any interference whatever on the part of employers, directors, or management.

141. *Mr. Fisher.*] I can hardly understand the statement of Mr. Johnson that immediately on the withdrawal of the compulsory operation of the rules such a large proportion of the members immediately also withdrew from the society: what is your explanation of that?—I cannot understand the reason why they do not participate in the benefits to be derived. It is one of those things we cannot understand.

142. You see, I do not understand the reason: I prefer to have your reason, you being in such close contact with them?—I have no reason why that state of things came about.

143. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Are the bulk of the employes young girls?—Yes.

THEOPHILUS WILSON was examined on oath.

144. *The Chairman.*] Are you manager of the Kaiapoi Clothing Factory?—Yes.

145. Are you an officer of the benefit society?—No.

146. Are you a member?—I am an honorary member; they made me a life member.

147. What did they do that for?—For the time I have been connected with it.

148. You had been working for the society for some years?—Yes; I find I joined the company four or five months after the society started, and the company came forward with a proposal for a society and, I think, £30 per annum. A meeting of the employes was called, and the then manager brought the matter before the employes, who passed a resolution that it was desirable to form such a society.

149. Then, the idea originated with the employers first?—Yes.

150. For what reason?—To help the employes.

151. It was simply out of love and affection?—Yes, without doubt; and in order to give the thing a start they contributed £30 a year. In that way I find they contributed £120.

152. For this, did they take any share in the management?—They appointed Mr. Wilson, chairman of directors, president. Mr. Pascoe, who was manager of the clothing factory then, was made vice-president, and they had a committee from amongst the employes.

153. Those were the only office-bearers they had in positions of influence on the committee?—Yes; and, of course, they held their meetings monthly, and the business of the meeting was transacted through the committee. In 1885 I was elected on to the committee, and consequently since that time I know a great deal about the working of the concern, and I say emphatically that the directors never in any shape or form tried to control the management of the society. They deemed it was to the advantage of the employes that they should be members of this society, in order to provide against sickness. I believe previous to that there had been sickness amongst the employes, and these subscription-lists had been passed round, and had come pretty heavily on the generosity of the people. It is always those who do not provide for themselves who get into trouble in that way. Of course, the resolution in the rules was that all working in the place should be members of this society. Provision was made that the committee should have the right to refuse as members those who were in a chronic state of ill-health—those who were bound to be a strain upon the society. I think there were two or three who were refused admission when they came to work in the place. One in particular said it was not right that he, who had this disease on him, should come with his eyes open to receive the funds of the society. To my knowledge, since I have been connected with the factory none have been refused work there for that reason.

154. What would happen to any sick employe if there was no such society? Would anything be done by the firm?—I do not think so. They would have no claim upon the firm in any way.

155. Are you able to account at all for the immense falling-off in the number of members since the society became voluntary?—Simply by neglect. While that compulsory clause was there it was almost the last month before ever they would pay at all. They were always going to pay, but put it off from week to week until it simply lapsed.

156. You never enforced payments through the firm?—Never.

157. And never deducted it from the wages?—Never.

158. You think it is possible, if a vigorous canvass were instituted, that membership could be worked up once more?—It is a matter in which these people would just lapse back again in the same way. When they are sick they pay up every penny to get the benefit. They have done that time and time again. They all admit it is a splendid thing, and a good investment, but through sheer carelessness they neglect to keep up their membership, and then they do not care. That is the only reason I can give. Of course, as you will see, the whole of the money is divided amongst members at the end of the financial year. Well, I think the first year I was there, having paid in £1 6s., we received £1 1s. 6d. back again. So far as I can see, it costs about half the amount to run the sick fund, which is 1½d. a share for a matter of 5s. per week, if all contribute to it.