

to escape paying the wages of men ashore through sickness : can you give us any direct evidence on the subject?—I was just going to speak about that. There are one or two cases, but I do not believe the men would care to come before the Commission, because they are terribly scared.

*The Chairman :* We cannot receive statements of that sort. You know we must have sworn evidence in regard to these cases. Of course, it is very hard to ask the men to come and give evidence against their own bread and butter ; still, unless they choose to do that, we cannot take other people's evidence of what they say.

*Witness :* Quite so. Well, the Shipping Act of 1894 provides that, in the event of accident or sickness, the owner or agent or captain will deposit with the Collector of Customs a sum of money not exceeding three months' pay for the man's medical attendance. There are a great number of instances in which that has not been done. They have paid it quite recently—I suppose on account of this Commission sitting. There is a case of a man who was ashore for a matter of five months with a cataract in the eye. His name was Samuel Rodd, but I do not suppose he would care about coming here to give evidence. The bill from Dr. Mackenzie has been sent to that man repeatedly, although he is a member of the benefit society. Whether the Union Company intend to pay it or not I cannot say. The society's doctor here could not treat the man ; he said it was a case for an oculist.

40. *The Chairman.]* Were his wages deposited with the Collector of Customs, according to the Act?—I do not think so ; they might have been.

*The Chairman :* The inference sought to be drawn by the witness speaking is that the company takes advantage of this benefit society to evade its own obligations. We want direct evidence, and would like you to give it.

*Witness :* There are several cases recently. There are three men under the doctor whose wages have been paid because I told these men to go to the manager and ask for them. The wages were refused by the purser, but they got them from the manager of the Union Company. They did not get them from the Customs. I might say that under the same circumstances the company would have to provide a doctor, whereas the society now provides the doctor. The company is evading its legal liability in that way.

44. *The Chairman.]* You must remember the company has given a subsidy to the society?—I suppose that has something to do with it.

45. The benefits arising to the men from this subsidy of the company to the society allow a far smaller rate of contribution. Do you think, if the Union Company were to withdraw this contribution, that this society would be able to exist with its present contributions?—Well, I do not know that these contributions are less than in other friendly societies. There are some men paying a large amount into this benefit society every month. I do not think this surrender value is equivalent to the power of transfer and exchange possessed in other societies. If I were in the Union Company's society for some years, and left, and wished to join another society, I would have to pay a much higher rate of contribution, on account of increased age. I consider the power of exchange of much higher value than the surrender value. Rule 71 says, "Every member who shall be in arrear with his subscription for three months shall thereupon cease to be a member of the society, and shall not be eligible to resume membership except as a new applicant." There are cases here where men who have been away on a trip to the Old Country for nine or twelve months have been told when they came back that they would have to pay up the whole of their arrears. There is a man in the "Mabinapua" at the present time who has been in one of the Northern Company's boats, and they want him to pay up nine months' contributions.

46. We had evidence that in case of men being sick or out of work the society suspended their contributions?—This man has not been sick ; he has been in the employ of another company. There is a rule in the book providing that every member joining the society has to pass the doctor. My experience has shown me that there is any number of seafaring men who are physically quite capable of doing their work for a number of years to come, but who, under examination by the doctor, would be refused. I do not think it is fair that these men should be handicapped, and that the Union Company should be allowed to pick and choose the flower of labour.

47. Would not the same thing apply to these men if they wished to join the Foresters or Odd-fellows?—It would stop them joining the lodge, but this stops them from employment.

48. Suppose the society were done away with, would not the company be able to make some rule in regard to examination by doctor if they still wished to employ, as you think, the flower and pick of the working-men?—Yes ; but although they might have to pass the doctor they might restrict the examination to certain diseases. There are any number of men who would not pass the doctor but are yet physically capable of carrying out the duties for years and years.

49. Can you give us any idea or suggestion that we could recommend by which the society could be bettered, or is it your opinion that it should be absolutely abolished?—That is my opinion ; I am of the same opinion as John Duthie, in his remarks when he was a member for Wellington. He said, when the Bill was before the House, that he did not think employers should hold undue power over their men in this respect, and that when a man earned his wages he should be at liberty to do what he chose with them.

50. *Hon. Major Steward.]* Are you of opinion that any number of workers in any employment should be by law prevented from joining a benefit society of their own?—Not if they chose to have a society. This society was not started by the men.

51. We have evidence that it was?—What did James Mills say the first session the Private Benefit Societies Bill was before the House?

52. It is not worth while arguing ; we have direct evidence on the point. The point is, simply, if the element of compulsion is entirely eliminated, and if the matter is left entirely in the control and management of the men themselves, should or should not the men have the right to form a society or any organization they like?—Let them have the right, but no compulsion.