

184. *Mr. Fisher.*] Do you know a man named Henry McLaughlan, who was formerly employed on the works?—Yes.

185. Are you aware that he presented a petition to Parliament in regard to the Private Benefit Societies Bill, then before Parliament?—Yes, I have heard of it.

186. Have you read the petition?—No.

187. Still, you are entitled to give your views in regard to the statements in that petition—in fact, three witnesses here this morning say that the society is to all intents and purposes quite voluntary; you say that too?—Yes.

*Mr. Fisher.*] I would like you tell us whether you consider these statements true or untrue: He says, “That a difference of opinion arose between your petitioner and his employers in reference to the Bill at present before your honourable House dealing with the private benefit societies. That there is a private benefit society established with these sugar-works. It is compulsory for all employes to join this society after they have been in the employ of the company for two years. Though the company deny that they use any compulsion, still the compulsion is used, as in my own case I was informed when I declined to join that they intended to shorten hands soon, and the preference would be given to retain those who belonged to the society. So I had to join or lose my position, though I pointed out that I belonged to the Oddfellows and Foresters. I was told to give these societies up.” That is one statement. Then, in regard to the Bill, he said that most of the employes revolted against letters and petitions being got up within the works in regard to this Bill; and then he goes on to say, “This was the feeling of the employes at the works, but still they were compelled to sign letters and petitions against the Bill at present before your honourable House, and I amongst the rest.” Then he says, “In my case I told the manager that it was against my convictions and will that I was signing, but he said I must sign, and I signed the first lot of papers, but refused to sign the last lot, and, on the contrary, I signed a telegram to the Premier congratulating him on the success of the Bill. For this the manager called me up and informed me that I was dismissed, and that I would have to go at the end of the week. Later on he called me up and said that I could wait till the end of the month, as he did not wish the public to say that I was dismissed for sending the telegram to the Premier. Later on he again called me up and said, ‘After what you have done in regard to the Bill it will be impossible for you to stay on here any longer.’” I would like you to tell this Commission whether these statements are true or untrue.

*Witness:* Well, I believe they are all untrue. Of course, I would explain that I do not know what he was told to do. He may have been told to give up these societies, but, so far as compulsion is used, that is untrue.

HENRY McLAUGHLAN was examined on oath.

188. *The Chairman.*] What is your ordinary business?—I have been always a labourer.

189. You were formerly in the employ of the Colonial Sugar-refining Company?—Yes.

190. When did you leave that service?—On the 2nd October, 1896.

191. How long had you been in the employ of the company at that time?—Between ten and eleven years.

192. You remember the start of the employes’ benefit society?—Yes.

193. Do you remember the start of the employes’ provident fund?—Yes.

194. Were you a member of the other society that was superseded by these societies?—Yes; I was in our own society, which was wholly carried on by the men themselves.

195. When the new society was started, did it appear to you to be a benefit at all?—No; I could not see that it was a benefit at all in the provident fund; but the other society was a benefit.

196. So it was the provident fund to which you objected most?—Yes, it is the provident fund that all the men objected to.

197. There was very little objection to the sick and accident fund?—Yes; a great many objected to throwing up our own society and letting the company carry it on. A great many did not care for that, but the majority went for the 3d. per week. We used to pay 6d. per week in our own society, and at the end of every year there was always a dividend.

198. It was a terminating society?—Yes; we always wound it up at the end of the year. It was wholly carried on by the men themselves.

199. A great many of them preferred to pay a higher rate of contribution, and be without the subsidy of the company?—Yes.

200. What was that for? Did you consider the company had any pull on you?—No; but they reckoned it would amount to the same thing, and that it would be much better to carry the thing on by themselves.

201. So that, although you practically paid 6d. per week, you got half of that refunded to you at the end of the year?—Yes.

202. *Mr. Fisher.*] And you had the government of the society in your own hands?—Yes; all in our own hands.

203. *The Chairman.*] When this society was started, in what way was the subject presented to the men? Did the officers of the company come round and insist in any way? What compulsion was used?—Compulsion in this way: I will speak in my own case. I belonged to both the Oddfellows and the Foresters, and they had been at me time after time. Mr. Holroyd, the engineer—he is not at the works at the present time—asked me to join several times. I said I could not afford it, for I belonged already to two societies, and I said I paid 1s. 2d. per week into each of these societies besides into the sick and accident fund at the works.

204. You had three funds to which you were already subscribing?—Yes; but Mr. Holroyd kept coming time after time, and he told me then, “You know men in our society, if we are slackening hands, will always have the preference of the work.”