271. *Mr Fisher.*] We are trying to get now, apart from the technical language of the petition, the state of affairs in regard to the society and the Bill before the House, and the opinion of the men?—When they got up a petition a few would sign it at first, such as the officers, and they would go round and get a few more, and then the talk would go round amongst the men, "If you do not sign it you will only be put off; they will watch you." One would sign it, and another would sign it, and they would be sorry themselves they had signed it, and they were all the time wanting to contradict this, and let the House know this petition was coming. The men were coerced into signing these petitions.

272. You think they would not have signed any letters or petitions if they had been allowed to act without pressure, and of their own free-will?—No; there would have been no petition at all.

273. *Hon. Major Steward.*] What is the amount you are called upon to contribute to this fund?—It is according to the wages; a man with 7s. a day pays 1s. per week.

274. What are the benefits? What is the amount of pension, and when does it accrue?—That lies with the company; it is not fixed. You do not know what pension you will get.

275. Do you know if Rule 21 is in force still?—Yes.

276. *Mr. Fisher.*] Were you ever furnished with a copy of the rules of 1890?—No, I never saw any rules until after I had joined the society.

277. What year was that?—I think that was in 1890.

278. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Do you know the amount payable at death?—I know this much: that a man getting £2 per week, and who pays 1s. per week to the fund, his wife is supposed to get £100 at his death.

279. How many men, on the average, are employed at the Chelsea works?—I suppose, close on a hundred.

280. *The Chairman.*] Did any boys sign that petition against the Private Benefit Societies Bill?—I never saw any of them sign it, but I have been told they signed. A man called Harris was the man who went round and asked the boys to sign the papers, and the boys, after they had signed, asked the others what it was about.

281. This is mere hearsay on your part?—Yes.

282. By the rules of this provident fund it appears as if the New Zealand men had very little control of the fund; the trustees are all either Sydney men or officers of the company; is that so?—No control whatever of the provident fund.

283. What are the powers of the local committee generally? If they cannot touch the funds, what can they do?—I cannot tell you. When they thought the Bill was going to pass Mr. Miller told this James Harris, who was the secretary of the sick and accident fund, to go round with this petition. He told him to let the men know that if the Bill passed its final stages the men would receive no money, as they had no legal claim on the money.

The Chairman: Be very careful about that.

Witness: James Harris told me that himself. He said Mr. Miller had a letter from head-quarters saying that if the Bill passed we would likely lose our money; that we had no legal claim upon it. That is what the man came and told us, and he said then that the men had better get up a petition to see if something could be done. A meeting was called in the school-room to consider what they would do in the matter, and a majority voted to send a petition down. One young fellow named Thompson said, "Well, Mr. Miller, we had better state in the petition that if the Bill passes we have no legal claim on the money," but Mr. Miller said that would not do.

284. *The Chairman.*] Then, the whole idea that was presented to the men in getting up this petition was that the passing of the Bill would put this society in an illegal position?—Yes; that we had no legal claim on the money paid in; that the company would forfeit it. I asked Mr. Miller about that, and he said it was quite right. I said that was a terrible thing, and that I did not want to lose my money, and he said, "I do not want to lose mine either, and I have more in it than you. That is what your Government does for you. The best thing you can do is to get up a petition."

285. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Rule 13 makes membership optional for all persons other than those on fixed salaries—that is, persons employed on weekly wages are not compelled to join. Now, according to your evidence, Mr. Holroyd told you that men who joined would have the preference of work?—Yes.

286. So you say, notwithstanding that the rule says it is not compulsory, that it is the practice of the company to select for their employés those who are willing to join?—I could not say, I am sure.

287. Do you mean to say that notwithstanding that rule compulsion is affected by simply choosing those persons who will join?—Yes.

288. You say you belonged to the benefit society that existed before the present one, and into which you paid 6d. per week: what benefit did you get from it; did you get sick-allowance?—Yes; £1 per week.

289. Did you get doctor?—No.

290. Did you get medicine?—No.

291. Did you get funeral allowance?—Yes.

292. Into the new benefit society you pay 3d. per week, for what benefits? You get sick-allowance?—Yes.

293. Funeral allowance?—Yes.

294. And, if necessary, maintenance in hospital?—Yes.

295. Then, if you pay an additional 4d. per week you get a doctor and medicine for yourself?—Yes.

296. If you pay another 2d. per week you can get a funeral allowance for your wife?—Yes.

297. Besides the 3d. per week you have to pay into the provident fund?—That is according to your wages.