

298. So you would have to pay 3d. per week to one fund and 9d. to the other—about 1s. per week?—Yes.

299. *Mr. Fisher.*] Are the men supplied with a copy of the rules of the provident fund?—That I cannot say; I did not have them.

300. You have been twelve years in the service of the company, and you have never been furnished with a copy of that deed?—I had one, but not for a long time after I joined the society.

301. Did the company furnish you with one?—Any one can get them by applying to the company.

302. Three witnesses this morning said that, so far as they knew, the statements contained in your petition to Parliament were untrue; you now yourself say that, although the petition is a little inaccurate as to form, in substance it is true: you still adhere to that?—Yes.

303. And you say that your opinion, as embodied in that petition to the House, is shared by nearly the whole of the men in the service of the company?—Yes.

304. *The Chairman.*] If the sick and accident benefit society could go on pretty nearly as it is at present, and be legalised by Act, do you see any objection to that?—No, that would be a benefit.

305. It is entirely the provident fund you object to?—Yes; that is what all the men objected to. They say the sick and accident fund is a good thing.

306. *Mr. Fisher.*] As three witnesses have declared your statements in your petition to be untrue, do you know of any workmen who will appear before this Commission to give evidence in support of your petition?—Yes, I do.

307. Will you please let us have their names?—Mr. Thomas Holmwood, Mr. F. Goldsmith, Mr. Walter Ripley, Mr. William Patterson, and Mr. James Patterson.

308. *The Chairman.*] With regard to the company's subsidy to this fund, which the men seem to dislike very considerably, can you tell us the opinion of the men in regard to the generosity of the company, and do they attribute any motive?—I cannot say, I am sure.

309. You do not know the motive of the company in giving this subsidy?—No.

310. It was affirmed in regard to one company into whose affairs we inquired that the company assisted the benefit society so as to get a grip on the men. Now, I do not say this is the case, but is it your opinion that was the motive?—My idea is that it was not to have a grip on the men, although they say themselves it binds both the employer and employé. They say it makes them more friendly, and the men keep their places.

311. Their only object, then, is to create a good feeling and mutual interest?—I say it is a fine thing for the company to have this money. We could never find out anything about it. They say the trustees have the money.

312. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Did you ever see a balance-sheet of this fund?—Yes.

313. *The Chairman.*] So they did issue a balance-sheet to let you see?—Yes.

314. And this society has a properly-registered fund in Sydney?—I do not know about the provident society; the sick and accident society is registered in Sydney.

315. *Mr. Fisher.*] But there would be greater harmony, and the men would probably have greater confidence in the society, if they had the control of the accumulated funds?—They have no control about it. I have heard many talking about paid-up shares, and wondering where the 10 per cent. goes to.

316. When you were in the service were your wages paid in full?—No; 1s. 3d. per week was deducted—1s. for the provident fund and 3d. for the benefit society.

317. *Hon. Major Steward.*] You are not obliged to pay to the sick and accident society?—No, I do not know that we are.

318. *The Chairman.*] Do you think the men would be quite satisfied if the provident fund were abolished, and they were left to carry on the benefit society for themselves?—Yes; they would be well satisfied.

319. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Do you mean they would prefer to forego the company's subsidy to the benefit society provided they managed it themselves?—Yes; they would prefer to go without it.

320. *Mr. Fisher.*] They would prefer to have their freedom of action rather than the so-called benefits out of the provident fund?—Yes; if any one went there and asked the men quietly they would quickly give you their opinion of the society.

321. You think there is no possible doubt about what their collective opinion would be if they had freedom to express it?—Yes, if they had freedom to express it.

WEDNESDAY, 30TH JUNE, 1897.

ROBERT THOMPSON, Jun., was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are in the service of the Colonial Sugar-refining Company?—Yes.

2. What is your position there?—A workman.

3. How long have you been in the service?—Ten years.

4. You remember, then, the formation of both the employé's provident fund and the employé's benefit society?—Yes.

5. Were you a member of the former society that existed?—I was in the Oddfellows.

6. I do not mean a friendly society: were you a member of any benefit society prior to the formation of the employé's benefit society?—I was not.

7. You were a member of a friendly society?—Yes; but I found that too expensive; it used to cost me 1s. 3d. per week. I gave it up and joined the one at the sugar-works, because there were the same benefits to be derived from it as from the Oddfellows at a cost of 3d. per week. In the Oddfellows I paid 1s. 3d. per week, and got £1 per week in case of sickness. Of course, after