

27. And you state you know of persons who have been some thirteen years in the works who have not joined, and who are still retained in the employ?—Yes.

28. Do you know anything about petitions got up during session against the passing of the Private Benefit Societies Bill, which proposed that all societies like this should be registered?—Well, there have been several round the works against the Bill and for the Bill. There was only one that was for the passing of the Bill, and that was Harry McLaughlan's.

29. As regards the petitions against the Bill, was any pressure brought by the company to induce employes to sign?—Not that I remember.

30. Were you asked to sign?—I was asked to sign one that was brought round by a working-man to oppose the Bill.

31. Did you do so?—Yes.

32. You do not know of any petition brought round by or on behalf of the company or manager?—We had a meeting in the village about this Bill last year, and the facts were stated by the men.

33. Who was the convener?—It was got up by the working-men. The company did not call it. The men asked the manager to go to the meeting, and he said he would rather not have anything to do with it. They asked him to go there and explain the rules to the men, and he did.

34. *Mr. Fisher.*] What is his name?—Mr. Miller. The chairman of the society, Mr. Speedy, acted as chairman that night, and he asked who were in favour of that Bill and who were against it. The petition was there, and those who were in favour of the petition against the Bill came forward voluntarily and signed the petition.

35. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Can you tell us what was the impression at the time they took that attitude: were they under the belief that if the Bill passed both branches of the society would be destroyed?—Of course, they were under that impression.

36. That was the reason they objected to the Bill passing?—Not altogether; the majority of the men were in favour of the benefits to be derived from these societies, which were as good as the benefits from any other society in Auckland, and that was the reason they did not want the Bill to go through the House. If the societies were destroyed they would lose all the benefits.

37. Supposing the men had been informed that the Bill would have enabled the society to be carried on, but with legal recognition, would they then have opposed the Bill?—I do not know the men's mind.

38. What is your mind?—My views are that I would not like to see the Bill pass.

39. Why?—On account of the benefits derived from these two societies.

40. Suppose the Bill did not interfere with these benefits?—Then, there would be no necessity for any petitions of any kind.

41. You are aware that one of the societies is registered in Sydney?—Yes.

42. And the fact of registration does not interfere with its operation?—No.

43. What objection would there be to registering it in New Zealand?—None whatever; but the company may have some objection.

44. Then, the men believed that if the Bill passed these societies would come to an end?—Yes.

45. Suppose the Bill did not interfere with the societies or the benefits you would not have petitioned?—Certainly not.

46. *Mr. Fisher.*] Suppose such a Bill should pass, and it secures to you all your benefits, and strengthens your position by legal enactment, would you have any objection to the Bill?—If the Government will guarantee us the same benefits as we get from these societies over there that is all we want.

47. Well, I ask you, would you object to such a Bill which would strengthen your position, and not weaken it?—Of course, we would be in favour of it. I would be in favour of it if the Government would strengthen the position. But there are men over there who, when this petition went round in favour of the passing of the Bill, signed it, and then went and signed another petition against the Bill passing. They signed both petitions.

48. Is that not explainable by the fact that one petition was signed of their own free-will while the other was signed under some form of compulsion?—I have said before there was no form of compulsion.

49. Is it a fact that on one occasion when the men went to receive their wages they were at the same time sent into the manager's office, and asked in his presence to sign this petition against the Bill?—I cannot say that, but I never was asked.

50. Can you tell us whether or not such a thing happened?—No, I cannot say.

51. Can you say it did not happen?—I cannot say it did not happen, because I know nothing whatever about it.

52. Will you please repeat what is the form of refund of contributions; for instance, in the case of a man who is discharged from the company's employment, do I understand he is paid one-half of the amount credited under Scale A, provided he has received no sick-pay?—That is in regard to the benefit society.

53. Suppose a man leaves the service of the company of his own accord, what refund is made to him in regard to the benefit society?—I think it is only 3d. per week that he has contributed to the society.

54. If he leaves the company's service of his own accord after contributing continuously for five years he is entitled to one-half the amount?—Yes, to 3d. per week.

55. Why does the rule go on to say this: "Any member being entitled to a refund of his contributions under these rules, and not making application for the same within thirty days after leaving the service, shall forfeit all claim on the amount"?—A man forfeits all claim if he does not come forward for his money within thirty days.