

good to me as I could get anywhere else. For 3d. per week we receive £1 per week sick-pay; and in the other, if we leave before five years, we get 6d. a week back, and are insured for £104 for 6d. per week.

115. Then, your opinion is favourable?—Yes; I have paid in ever since I belonged to it, and if I left now I would get the whole of my money back.

116. Were you a member of the old society?—Yes.

117. Do you consider this of far greater advantage to the men than the former society?—I never had any advantage out of the old society, but I believe this is just as good a society, and, if anything, I believe it is better. Of course, the company contributes to this.

118. Now, supposing the company withdrew its contribution, the thing could not be carried on with its present contributions and its present benefits. Do you think there would be any grumbling if the men had to pay 6d. a week?—I do not know what the opinion of the men would be.

119. What is your opinion? Would you rather see the society carried on or not?—At the present time, as it stands, I would rather see it carried on. If we could do any better than that I would be satisfied with it, but I am satisfied with the present society.

120. Do you remember petitions going round against the Private Benefit Societies Bill?—Yes.

121. Did you sign any of them?—Yes.

122. On which side?—I signed the petition against the Bill.

123. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Because the impression was that the Bill would do away with the society?—That was not the reason I signed against it, but there were some who signed because of that.

124. What was your reason?—Because I wished the society to be kept on.

125. Supposing the Bill did not interfere with the society at all, and authorised it to be carried on, then you would not have signed the petition against it?—No; if it allowed the society to be kept on I would not have petitioned against it.

126. Then, the reason why you signed the petition was because you believed the Bill would do away with your society?—Yes.

127. *Mr. Fisher.*] Who interpreted this Bill to a whole lot of the men? Who told the men what the Bill meant? From whom did you receive your impression?—I suppose we could read the paper. We saw the Bill which Mr. Millar brought up in Parliament.

128. Did you ever receive the Bill that was introduced to Parliament dealing with private benefit societies?—Yes, the Bill that was brought in by Mr. Millar.

129. No, the Bill introduced by the Premier in 1896; that was the Bill that was petitioned against in the sugar-works. Who explained the Bill to you? Who told you what it contained? Who told you what its effects would be if it passed?—I do not know that any one told us what the effects of it would be.

130. Did you yourself see the Bill of 1896, as introduced by Mr. Seddon?—I do not know anything about it; I may have seen it.

131. Did you sign a petition against the Bill of 1896?—I signed a petition against the Bill.

132. Am I correct in taking your previous answer to be that you had never seen this Bill?—I have seen a Bill about friendly societies; I suppose I have read it in the papers.

133. This is the Bill Mr. Seddon introduced. Have you seen it before?—Yes; I have read that where they have to register within a stated period.

134. What is your objection to that Bill?—I do not know that I have any objection to it. I signed to have the society kept on because it suited me, and because I was satisfied with it.

135. If I say to you that the Bill, if passed, would have had exactly the opposite effect to that represented to you—that it would have kept it on and strengthened it—would you have signed that petition against the Bill?—We would not have required to sign any petition.

136. *The Chairman.*] In the petition sent down to the House it was said “that the feeling of the employés at the works was against the petitions, but still they were compelled to sign letters and petitions against the Bill at present before your honourable House, and I amongst the rest. Letters and petitions against the Bill were drawn up by the employers and brought to us to sign; and when there was any demur to signing we were taken in one at a time to the manager’s office, handed a pen, and told to sign.” Is that the truth, so far as you know it?—There was no compulsion about me signing it, because I went to the first meeting, and I signed the petition.

137. No compulsion was needed in your case?—No.

138. *Mr. Fisher.*] Is this the case: Did one of the subordinate officers go round with the petition, which some of the men hesitated to sign, and then, on pay-day, when they went to receive their wages in one office, they were walked in one by one to another room, where Mr. Miller, the manager, sat and asked them to sign the petition?—I heard that some did not sign the petition at one time, and that they signed it afterwards.

139. Is it a fact that they were walked in one by one to the manager’s office?—I do not know.

140. Did you ever hear of anything of the kind taking place?—I heard that they went into the office and signed, but, of course, I cannot prove that they did so. I was not there to see it.

141. Is this a fact or not in regard to the men who signed this petition against the Bill: that if they had had the exercise of their own free-wills they would not have signed at all?—It would be hard for me to say what was the free-will of every man in the place. Of course, some might have been against signing it, but I cannot say.

JAMES HARRIS was examined on oath.

142. *The Chairman.*] Are you in the service of the Colonial Sugar-refining Company?—Yes.

143. What position do you hold?—I am a workman.

144. Have you been long in that service?—Nearly twelve years.

145. Do you belong to either or both of the benefit societies?—I belong to both.