

146. You have had experience of the working now for some years. Is your opinion favourable in regard to these societies, or to one more than the other?—It would be quite natural for the men to be in favour of one more than the other. From the benefit society, of course, the men derive benefits, but from the provident society you do not receive anything until you come to a certain age, or your family would receive it at your death.

147. Are you a member of the committee of the benefit society?—Yes.

148. The contributions have always been sufficient to meet all demands that are made on the society?—Yes.

149. What becomes of any surplus at the end of the year?—The whole amount is made up and the funds are all kept in Sydney.

150. It is then paid into the hands of the trustees in Sydney?—It is paid into the hands of the treasurer, who is the local manager, and it is then paid into the trustee's hands, and becomes part of the accumulated funds, on which the company pays 6 per cent. each month.

151. In regard to the provident fund, are the men generally well satisfied with the provident fund as well as with the benefit society?—Of course, I cannot answer for anybody else.

152. You are satisfied with it yourself?—I do not see where I can draw the same benefits for the same contributions.

153. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Is it quite optional for anybody to join the society?—Certainly.

154. That is so in the rules, but, notwithstanding that, it is said that preference is given to anybody in the societies in the way of employment?—I do not say it is true, but I can understand it. I would not say it would be fair or right to turn me out after I have been in the service for twelve years, and other men not in the benefit societies kept on.

155. That is not the point. Suppose two men apply for employment, and one expresses his willingness to join the societies and the other does not, would preference be given to the man who expresses his willingness to join?—I do not believe it would.

156. Is it true, as stated by one witness, that there are some men in the employ who have been there thirteen years, and have not contributed to the provident fund?—Yes.

157. Then, if it is optional for any man to join or not, there is nothing to complain about?—Of course, there are some men who want to have the whole control; there is some dissatisfaction about the control. I myself never joined the society until I had thoroughly studied the rules, and saw it would be a benefit for me to do so.

158. What do the men desire with regard to the control of the provident fund: do they want to have the election of trustees, or what is it?—I do not know, I am sure.

159. Do you recollect any petitions being got up during the year of 1896 against the Private Benefit Societies Bill?—Yes; I am the man who went round with the petition.

160. Can you tell us why that petition was got up against the Bill?—I think it was about the 20th or 23rd April last year, just when Parliament began to sit, that notice appeared in the public papers that the Private Benefit Societies Bill was going to be brought forward again.

161. What did you understand by that?—That it was similar to the one brought forward by Mr. Millar, Sir George Grey, and Mr. Reeves, and every time this Bill had been brought forward before we had forwarded petitions against the passing of the Bill.

162. Why; because you thought the Bill would do what?—That it would deprive us of the benefits to which we had been subscribing for a number of years.

163. You were under that impression?—Certainly.

164. And it was for that reason you petitioned against the Bill?—Yes.

165. But supposing a Bill—we will not say that particular Bill—which would simply require all societies such as this to be registered and known to the law, and would not interfere with the operations of the society. were brought forward, would you object to it?—So far as I know, the company would not contribute towards the fund.

166. You know that the benefit society is registered in Sydney?—Yes.

167. Then, the company contributes notwithstanding that?—Yes.

168. If it has no objection to the society being registered in Sydney, and contributes notwithstanding, why should it object to these very rules being registered in New Zealand?—I do not suppose the company would object to the society being registered in New Zealand; it is the provident fund they object to being registered.

169. But supposing that the registration of this society took place in New Zealand, and it did not interfere with the carrying-on of this provident fund, would there be any objection then?—I was secretary of the benefit society last year, and I believe, so far as I can remember, I was informed that, if the Bill passed, and one society was required to be registered more than another, the company would not contribute to either, and that further, both societies would be broken up.

170. *The Chairman.*] Can you understand what reason the company has in subsidising these societies?—I have heard that Mr. Knox went to a great deal of trouble in instituting these societies, and I should like to go back. Some ten years ago it used to be the regular thing with us when perhaps a man would be ill, or something like that, and be laid up for several weeks, to get up a subscription-list at the end of every week. However, myself and several others who had some little experience of this kind of thing—when I was in London, before I came to the colonies, we used to contribute 3d. per week, and if we were ill we received the sum of 10s. per week, and we divided the funds at the end of the year equally between each member. I happened to have one of these old rules, and, on having a talk with several of the men, we tried to get up a society to prevent these subscription-lists coming round. That was the object of our first sick and accident fund during the time the house was being run by the New Zealand Sugar Company. Well, we had this society in existence some five years when the company, hearing we had such a society, and that a number of their other houses also had societies, decided, I believe, to amalgamate the whole into one society, to which they agreed to pay a subsidy of pound for pound.