

We are told we must produce a certain quantity.

(3.) The annual dead rent per acre they are willing to pay on the 1st day of January and the 1st day of July in each year; the amount of rent to be deducted from the royalty of 6d. a ton, hereinbefore referred to.

We were compelled to pay £450 per annum. I do not take exception to the endeavour to work this property, but what I do say is this, that it is very unfair and most inequitable, that men doing their level best not only to pay their way, but to keep the district and the industry going, and beset with difficulties on all hands from start to finish, when they make application to get relief and reasonable concessions, this lease is put forward, allowing any Tom, Dick, or Harry to come in, not having any responsibility. I do not mean to say that the Government are not willing to assist us, for I think the Government are well aware that something must be done for the district, and in consequence of a feeling of sentiment as well as responsibility, Mr. Heywood and myself have come here to tell the Government that, as honourable business men, we cannot go on any longer under existing conditions. If this were my private business, and I went on with it in full knowledge that my capital was gone, and I was working without any, I should find myself in the Bankruptcy Court, and probably in gaol.

25. You think the Government realise the gravity of the position?—Yes. We wish to state that we do not intend to petition the House. The copy of the petition I am putting in (Exhibit returned to witness) will give an indication of what we have endeavoured to impress upon the Government and the House long ago. We have come to the end of our tether, and we will lose our money cheerfully, but we think it is a very hard thing that we should lose it and have to drop this business, as there is a value in it as a going concern. The present workings may last for two or three years, or they may give out in two or three months, so that if the mine is to be continued—and upon its continuance the life of its district depends—money must be provided immediately, to the extent say of £12,000, for the purpose of opening up the Cave District, as shown upon the plan. It will take eighteen months to two years to open up the block, which will probably provide from fifteen to twenty years' work. The Premier and Minister of Mines are fully aware of all this. I was authorised to say to the Government that we, as shareholders, will not contribute one penny more, and that if they will appoint expert valuers with us in the usual way to value, we are prepared to sell our plant and all our interest in our lease at their valuation; or we will do this: If the required funds to enable us to develop the Cave District are provided by the Government or Westport Harbour Board, we will accept a valuation of our lease and plant made by experts as the basis of our interest, and will continue to work the mine as a going concern on the same lines as we have worked it hitherto, and upon such terms and conditions as may be agreed upon. We are willing to do anything within reason to keep open the district. It goes without saying that if we cease work the business goes, and we shall have very great difficulty in recovering it. I may say that I can command the business, and I can place the bulk of the coal in Christchurch easily, provided the quality and condition are maintained. We are willing to continue if this Committee can see its way to recommend anything in the direction I have indicated. If not, we must close down. It is not any use asking the Government or any one else to put any money into this concern, unless the Government sweep away all past liability and give us a clean sheet, in the same way as the offer has been made in regard to the Mokihinui mine. If we are to hold our own in the coal trade, we must have concessions, by remission of royalty and remission of haulage, on the plans I have suggested, or we must have a uniform rate, and I personally do not care if that uniform rate is even 4s. I do not ask for a reduction, as long as it is the same all along the line.

26. Did you calculate that a uniform rate of 2s. 3d. would maintain the present revenue?—Yes.

Mr. JOHN EDWARD GOLDING, Takaka, examined. (No. 2.)

27. *The Chairman.*] Are you a coal-proprietor?—No; I am manager of a small coal-mine for Messrs Taine and Co., of Wellington. The mine is situated at Takaka, in the Nelson province. One seam of coal is 8 ft. thick, and another is 5 ft. We are working the 5 ft.-seam now.

28. Where are you selling your coal?—There will be a shipment arriving here in a fortnight's time, which is the first shipment to Wellington.

29. What price do you propose to sell it at?—At 16s. a ton.

30. *Mr. Holland.*] Where do you deliver it?—At the Wellington wharf.

31. *The Chairman.*] Is it household coal?—Yes; it is termed glance-coal.

32. Did you say the shipment coming to Wellington is your first shipment here?—Yes.

33. Have you sold any in Nelson?—Yes, at 16s., and we have to put it on to barges before putting it on the steamer.

34. *Mr. Tanner.*] Is the mine on the banks of an open river?—No; on the open face of the sea.

35. Do transport vessels lie out in the offing?—Yes.

36. *The Chairman.*] At what rate do you think you could dispose of the coal in Wellington retail?—It would be sold at the ship's wharf at 16s.

37. *Mr. Tanner.*] Can you give us any information as to how much it costs to get the coal out?—Yes; it costs 4s. a ton to fetch it out to the mouth of the mine.

38. What freight do you pay?—6s.

39. Sea carriage?—Yes.

40. Do you pay 6s. to Nelson?—Yes.

41. Just the same as to Wellington?—I get it on the steamer to Wellington.

42. How many men have you got working at the mine?—Only four. We are only just commencing.

43. Are the prospects favourable for employing a large number of men?—Yes, there are prospects of employing a couple of hundred.

44. Do you mean that you could work with a couple of hundred men on the present face?—No; as soon as the openings are done. The trouble at present is that we cannot get a steamer