

FRIDAY, 15TH SEPTEMBER, 1899.

Mr. JOHN FOSTER, President of the Denniston Coal-miners' Union, further examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] In your evidence at the last sitting of this Committee you stated that in your opinion the West Coast mines were not being worked on the most satisfactory principles, and that you did not blame the company, but the Inspector. I want to ask you if you can tell the Committee if there is anything in the Coal-mines Act by which the Inspector is empowered to compel the company so to work a mine as to obtain the greatest amount of coal?—I do not think so. I do not think there is a clause to say how the mine shall be worked. I think that all mines should be worked under the Inspector, and he should say how they should be worked.

2. I would ask the Committee to bear that in mind. It really means that, as the law now stands, if the mine is not being worked so as to secure the best results the Inspector has not the power to compel the company to work it on the most advantageous principles. If this is so, Mr. Foster, does it not point to a necessity for amending the law?—Yes.

3. The Mokihinui Mine is no longer working?—No.

4. Could that be worked satisfactorily by co-operation or otherwise?—Well, that mine is in this position: It could be worked well under certain conditions. It produces no household coal, though it might perhaps produce 10 per cent. Denniston will produce 75 per cent., so it cannot go into the market against Denniston.

5. Is there an abundance of coal in the mine?—Yes. If the Government would utilise it for some purpose it is as good as any other, but there is not enough household coal.

6. Could you suggest any improvement in the method of draining mines?—I think it is a very serious question, and one that should be gone into with the Inspector before the coal is touched. I am of the opinion that it would be better for the Government to subsidise the companies for drainage instead of allowing it to be pumped—where drainage can be got, that is. As I said the other day, the country over the coal is very broken, and it breaks. Consequently we get all the rain-water in, and the pumping becomes so heavy that we cannot cope with it.

7. Your opinion is that where it is necessary to open a mine the draining should be done if possible by fall and not by pumping?—Yes.

8. *Mr. Tanner.*] Are you acquainted with the Mokihinui Mine?—Yes.

9. You have been over it?—Yes.

10. Do you think that a quantity of coal has not been got out that might be got out with proper treatment?—Yes.

11. What is the chief difficulty in the way of the mine not being properly worked? Is it the want of transit or capital?—Want of capital, for one thing; but the principal thing is the want of household coal in the mine.

12. Is it not a coal that can compete with other coals?—No.

13. That is to advantage?—No. I do not think you would get 10 per cent. of household coal in it.

14. *Mr. Duthie.*] You say the Mokihinui Mine is not worked for the want of capital: did not the shareholders who owned that mine sink a large amount of capital in it?—The shareholders did open the mine, but they failed because of the want of household coal. Then, you remember, the Knights of Labour took it up. The same thing happened to them: they could not produce household coal.

15. That goes to show the mine is a failure?—Yes, so far as the household coal is concerned.

16. There has been a large amount of capital lost in that mine?—Yes.

17. Do you know how much the shareholders lost?—No.

18. Then, the colony is induced to contribute to the cost of a railway that is largely lost to the colony?—Yes; I suppose there will be about three miles.

19. Then, there are sufficient coal-mines available for all present requirements—for the prospective requirements of many years—and available and worked within reach of the Port of Westport?—That is a matter of opinion. If any one could bring foreign trade they could open another mine.

20. Are not the coal-seams being worked very extensive?—They are.

21. And ample coal-supply in sight for the next twenty or thirty years?—I should say longer.

22. What would be the good of developing other mines if there are sufficient: what would be the good of investing further capital?—That is a matter of opinion as regards whether people wish to launch into the business or not. I should say there are sufficient mines for the present trade opened, but if people choose to go into speculations, let them.

23. You know nothing of combinations at work to advance the price of coal, or whether there is any reason for the State taking up the matter?—No.

24. There is plenty of coal for all our time?—Yes.

Mr. WILLIAM MOWAT HANNAY, General Manager of the Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company, examined.

25. *The Chairman.*] Will you tell the Committee what coal or class of coal you use for your company, and whether it is New Zealand or Newcastle?—We usually use Newcastle; that is our staple.

26. Can you tell the Committee why you prefer Newcastle?—Yes. We did use West Coast coal to a considerable extent some years ago. I am speaking now somewhat on the reports of officers, because I was not then in the company's service; but it was found there was a great difficulty in getting round coal—the percentage of small coal and dust was so great—and it was therefore difficult to use it to advantage. I may say, however, that since then, within my time, we