

35. They go comparatively empty?—Yes; the colliers go virtually empty. It is only one or two cargo-ships calling at several grain-ports that get much.

36. *Mr. Tanner.*] Your company at present has no interest in any West Coast mines?—No.

37. Had it on previous occasions?—Yes; when Greymouth mines were in want of capital we went in and took a fourth interest in them. After working it for a time we sold out.

38. Did the Westport Coal Company own a half at the same time?—Yes; they had a half, and Kennedy had a fourth, and we had a fourth.

39. That arrangement has long ago terminated?—Yes; three years ago.

40. With regard to the delivery of the coal, is it correct that all the coal taken to Lyttelton for retail purposes is delivered into the hands of one agent—McClatchie?—No.

41. Was it at any one time?—Yes; he was agent for the Westport Coal Company some time ago.

42. Then, he received everything that was to go to the consumer—the coal then all passed through him?—You must employ a man to distribute for you. He sold the coal and took the risk.

43. And was it virtually impossible to procure Westport coal except through him?—Some years ago, yes; but not now.

44. You do not come into any arrangement which takes place between him and the Westport Coal Company?—No. McClatchie is our agent to sell our Newcastle coal, and, as I say, for a while he acted as agent for the Westport Coal Company. That is many years ago, and when it was not easy to sell it.

45. In the case of the Newcastle coal, is your company a purchaser of the coal carried?—We purchase it as return freight for our steamers, which take grain to Sydney, and sell it to McClatchie.

46. *The Chairman.*] I am not quite clear about the position in regard to the Westport Coal Company and yourselves. I understand you to say that the Union Company would not look with favour upon an outside vessel, delivering coal to another port in the colony, obtaining the coal at Westport on the same terms as your company: is that the correct meaning of what you say?—Yes; if it interfered with the loading and despatch of the steamers, otherwise we should have no right to do so.

47. And compete with you?—No; but other ships have gone to California and elsewhere.

48. I am speaking of coal for New Zealand ports?—We can buy coal in Newcastle for 4s. 6d. and 5s., and we have to give a good deal more for Westport.

49. Do you think the Westport coal is better?—Yes, it is better, but not at the difference in price.

50. Would your company's objection be based on this ground: that you might consider the loading facilities at Westport limited, and that you might deem it possible that your boats would have to wait?—Yes, because our whole profit in carrying this coal depends on quick despatch.

51. But now that the Westport Harbour Board are completing better wharves is that difficulty likely to obtain?—Possibly not to the same extent.

52. Supposing that the loading facilities at Westport were such that your vessels could be loaded simultaneously with these vessels, would you still object to the other vessels getting coal?—It is purely a matter of arrangement with them. We certainly would object to be placed at a disadvantage with other people.

53. You would not be placed at a disadvantage?—Yes, we would. You have not the room in the river until you make it.

54. I am assuming if it was made?—Wait till the time comes. I may tell you that at the present time we have to keep our ships moving in order to carry at 5s. 3d.

55. We hear this statement made by persons who seem to know what they are talking about. I have no personal knowledge of it. I am anxious to place the facts on record, and to enable the Committee to arrive at the true facts of the position?—If the companies together did not give and take and carry on their business the way they do the coal freights could not be anything like they are.

56. They could not be so low?—No. I want to place on record that we have no interest in any coal-mines, and that we carry for everybody alike.

57. As a matter of fact, the freights are lower than they have been?—Yes. If you take into consideration the high rate of labour here compared with other places they are very low—compared with from Sydney to Newcastle, only sixty miles, where they can go in and get out in a single night, and they are back again next day. I consider our rates are so moderate that nobody is likely to meddle with us.

58. Our sole object in asking this question is to devise means whereby we can have the coal placed on the market at a more reasonable rate. And so your opinion is that one of the most practicable methods of arriving at this end is to induce the public, if possible, to take the coal as it comes from the face?—Yes.

59. It dispenses thereby with the screening and the loss in screening?—To show you the loss in screening, they have to sell the small coal in Wellington at 16s. and 17s. I do not know if that price is given still, but it is about the same.

60. We have had evidence to the same effect before—namely, that it would be desirable to dispose of the coal as it is mined from the face—but the opinion was also expressed that the public would not have the coal in that state, notwithstanding the manifest advantages. Now, do you not think the reason the public do not take the coal in that state is because it has not been so introduced to them?—It is very difficult to get over the prejudices of householders. Westport coal, even after it has passed through the grate, can be burnt again.

61. If they get it in large lumps they would have to break it?—Yes; and there would be a large amount of small when it was broken. If you could get over the prejudices of householders in this respect they would get it much cheaper.