

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 18TH JULY, 1902.

JAMES COUTTS examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—James Coutts. I am Inspector of Mines for the Auckland District.

2. Have you been Inspector in any other districts than Auckland?—No.

3. *Mr. Guinness.*] What is the usual time taken by the miners for meal-time, or crib-time as it is called, while they are working underground?—Generally half an hour. They have no limit.

4. What is the usual practice or custom?—About half an hour.

5. Not more than half an hour?—Not more. It is supposed to be about that time.

6. *Mr. J. Allen.*] Are you Inspector of Coal-mines or Gold-mines in the Auckland District, or both?—Both.

7. *The Chairman.*] Have you read the Bill?—Yes.

8. *Mr. J. Allen.*] And know the purpose of it?—Yes.

9. What is it, in your own words?—To reduce the hours worked from eight hours and a half, as is practically the case at present, to eight.

10. You have said already that the lunch-time is half an hour?—Of course, the men might be allowed to take more if on wages, but half an hour is the usual time.

11. Are the men for the most part working on piecework or day's wages?—In gold-mining in the Waihi district it is mostly piecework now.

12. Then, if the hours are shortened from eight hours and a half to eight for the pieceworkers, what difference will be made in the production?—It will increase the cost, of course, and the men will be working half an hour less at the face.

13. With regard to the men working on day's wages, if their hours of work are decreased by half an hour a day, will that increase the cost of production?—Of course so.

14. If you were a working-miner in a gold or coal mine, and you had to choose between shorter hours of work underground with less wages and the present hours of work with the present wages, which would you select?—It would depend on circumstances. Sometimes a man, preferring to get a little more in a day, would stick to the present arrangement, but reducing the hours would mean in time an increase of pay. A man must get a living if he works six, seven, or eight hours.

15. Do you think that the Bill would mean that the hours and wages would be reduced?—That is what it would come to; but I should say if the men are getting only a living at the present time they would have to get that if the hours were reduced.

16. The hours would be reduced and the wages remain the same?—That is what it would come to.

17. What effect would that have upon the cost of production?—It would certainly increase it considerably.

18. You know the mines in your district—I refer to the coal-mines, not the gold-mines: do you know whether the owners are making more profit than is reasonable for coal-mine working?—I should not say they are. There are two mines paying a regular dividend, but I do not think it is anything out of the way.

19. If the cost of production were increased owing to this Bill, would that extra cost come out of the profits of the mine-owners or out of the public?—It would be a matter of raising the price of coal, and the public would have to pay.

20. *Mr. Colvin.*] What hours are worked in a coal-mine now by men getting paid so-much per ton—working on contract?—Eight hours and a half is the time worked.

21. In your district?—Yes.

22. Is it not a fact that if the men worked shorter hours they will work harder during those hours, and the production will be very little less?—They work as hard as they can while they are there. I do not see that they can do any more. On their own contracts they do their best.

23. Do you remember the time when the men worked ten hours a day instead of eight, as at present?—Yes.

24. Do they not get as much coal now in eight hours as they did in ten?—No, I should not say that they could. I should say, more in ten hours than in eight.

25. *Mr. W. Fraser.*] It has been asserted that working eight hours and a half in the low levels of a mine is prejudicial to the health of the men: what is your experience in regard to that?—If the hours could possibly be reduced, that should be done. The men do not want to stop there any longer than they can help.

26. Do you consider that eight hours and a half a day is prejudicial to their health?—Yes; the shorter time they are there the better for the men, of course.

27. That is not the question. What I want to know is this: Within your knowledge as an Inspector, has it ever been shown that eight hours and a half a day is prejudicial to the men's health?—No, not more than usual.