

192. Is it not set up to do what it considers fair between the employer and employee?—If the Court settles all differences between the miners and their employers I do not see that legislation ought to take power out of its hands. If it was a good thing to start with it is a good thing to carry on. It would give far more satisfaction to employers, and, I am certain, the majority of the miners—some of them, at any rate—if the Court settled all disputes.

193. But the Court has reduced the rate of wages in different parts of the colony?—Not in the part I come from.

194. It has in Reefton?—No; it did not reduce them in Reefton.

195. Are you aware that a miner got 10s. a day in Reefton at one time?—Yes, and 8s. too in some mines; it made 9s. an average day's wage.

196. For miners working inside the mine; but the men in every mine in Reefton previous to the Arbitration Court got 10s. a day?—No.

197. *Hon. Mr. McGowan.*] The particulars are given at the end of the printed evidence taken last year. There is a copy, on page 81, of the agreement between several companies and the miners. The rate of wages is set out.

198. *The Chairman.*] Are you not aware, Mr. Gordon, that previous to the Arbitration Court being set up the miners on the West Coast, as a rule, got higher wages than at the present day?—I have paid far higher wages on the West Coast than those now paid, but that was years ago. I can tell you this: as far as the coal-mine owners are concerned, their property has gone down, and a great many of them cannot write off anything for depreciation.

199. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] You say that property has gone down. I can prove that properties in this colony have gone up?—I say, some of them.

200. The Westport Coal Company's shares were only £2 10s. a few years ago, but they are now £7 4s.?—I am only speaking of some.

FRIDAY, 7TH AUGUST, 1903.

GEORGE FLETCHER examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—George Fletcher.

2. You reside at Granity Creek?—Yes.

3. You are manager for the Westport Coal Company at Millerton?—Yes.

4. Have you seen my Bill, which is now before the Committee?—Yes.

5. Will you kindly make a statement of your opinion of what the effect of this Bill will be?—That is, your Bill?

6. Yes. You do not understand anything about the Mining Bill?—Not much, except with regard to the employment of men. I would like to give you an outline of what is being done at the present time at our place and at Denniston with reference to the Medical Association. At present the men have a doctor. He is appointed by the colliery-owners, and the men pay 1s. per week each. The company subsidise their funds £100 a year, besides finding a house, a horse, its keep, and a groom, which amount to over £200 altogether.

7. *Mr. J. Allen.*] Including the £100, or without it?—Including the £100. That obtains at Denniston as well as at Millerton; so that the company really pay over £400 towards the Medical Association's funds. I take the Bill to mean that the workmen will have full and absolute control over the doctor, even to his appointment; and you are asking us to deduct from the men's earnings the amounts they may from time to time say are to be deducted. We are to have no say in the doctor. In my opinion this innovation will cause trouble with the men, because they will not, I am afraid, be able to keep a respectable man very long with them if he is to be under the control of the men. I know that the position of colliery doctor is one of the worst positions a man can occupy when he has a body of men to deal with. A clique of them is formed, and they say, "We do not like that man." If there were four doctors down there now all of them would get a certain amount of custom from the men, and there would never be any peace. Moreover, you are penalising the men at the two mines to the extent of over £400 a year. By this Bill you will just give them full control over the doctor. The work that the doctors are doing now is giving every satisfaction, both at Denniston and Millerton. There is not a word of complaint about their services and attention. You are wanting the owners to deduct the money from the wages of the men by the Bill. We put the services of the doctors entirely in their hands, and they can do anything. It gives a doctor no standing in a district when he is under working-men. There is no security for a man. The miners could not get a respectable man to come if he was not recognised by the colliery-owners and felt that he had some security. The object of our directors has been to get respectable men to look after the interests of the working-men and their families. We had a little trouble a few months ago with reference to the appointment of a doctor. The men did not want the company to appoint the doctor. Then the committee of the Medical Association came down from Denniston and interviewed the committee of the Granity association, and the Denniston men advised them that, whatever they did, let the appointment be made by the company, the same as it is with us. We have had no trouble since. Again, if the money is to be deducted at the office it gives the men no option. They may say, "We are dissatisfied with that doctor," but they must pay to him. That is taking away the liberty of a workman. Here is a registered miners' association, and whatever motions are passed every member must abide by. Half a dozen men may say, "I am not satisfied with that doctor. He is not giving sufficient time to us. I would like to have another." If there was another in the place—and there has been one for a few months trying to get a little practice together—they would go to him. But they would find that the deductions would be too great for them to bear—2s. for the recognised doctor a fortnight, and 2s. for another doctor—and they could not keep them up. Therefore it would interfere with the liberty of the working-man. I do not think I can say anything more to enlighten you upon that question. I think it is plain that if the clauses in Mr. Colvin's Bill pass you will be penalising the men and taking away freedom from them.

8. *The Chairman.*] Do you wish to say anything with regard to the bank-to-bank provision?—Yes. This bank-to-bank business means that it is going to reduce our output nearly 7 per cent. in the year. How are we going to be compensated for that? The hours that are being worked