

159. The Brunner Mine is still going?—Yes.

160. Do you think it is likely to close up before the Tyneside?—Yes.

161. How much coal are you putting out?—At the present time 1,500 tons a week, but we hope in a short time, when the appliances are ready, to nearly double that.

162. I suppose you are making a substantial profit out of that?—There is not much after paying for all the appliances.

163. You are making 2s. a ton, and you object to allowing the men this 3d. a ton?—No, we are doing it.

164. You had an award made in connection with your mine?—The agreement was made in 1903, after the passing of the Act.

165. Consequently you are working at a disadvantage compared with the Westport Coal Company?—In that respect we are.

166. Do you not think the Westport Coal Company should work under the same law as you are?—I do not know their circumstances.

167. They are a wealthy company, and I do not see they should have an advantage of 3d. a ton over you?—I do not think they could afford it any more than we can. I am here to speak on behalf of the companies I represent.

168. *Hon. Mr. McGowan.*] You say the State Mine is competing with you and puts you in a disadvantageous position, and you refer to a charge of 9d. what 9d. is that?—I say the State Collieries are better off by 9d. per ton than the private companies, which have to pay 6d. per ton royalty and 3d. a ton harbour rate.

169. How do you know it is 9d. a ton?—Because these charges are fixed by statute.

170. Who collects the money for the Harbour Board?—The Greymouth Board collects the 3d.

171. Did they give you this information?—No; but I see the reports of their protests often, and the parliamentary proceedings have disclosed the fact often enough.

172. That is the only reason you have for grumbling?—I think it is very unfair.

173. You referred to the cost of pumping, and said that increased the cost of production: Do you think that because you have to pay for that the cost should either come out of the miner or the State should not compete with you?—No.

174. You have put that forth as a disadvantage under which you are working?—Exactly.

175. Do you not think, then, that because other mines are in a better position they should be placed in your position?—No; but we are under a disadvantage owing to the extra cost, and we are not enabled to make the same profits that other companies do.

176. You know what the State Mines are paying in railage?—No; but we pay 1s. 10d. from Brunnerton.

177. What is the distance?—Eight miles.

178. Do you pay your men as much as the other mine-owners do on the Coast?—Yes, more.

179. Will you tell us some of the mines against which you pay more?—I have not got their figures. We pay 2s. 4d. for hewing, and for solid coal 2s. 7d.

180. Did you ever hear of the State Mines paying more?—I do not know what they are paying.

181. You seem to know the charges in connection with the wharfages?—Yes, I know all about that. The mining department is not in my line—I am the commercial manager.

W. A. FLAVELL examined. (No. 5.)

182. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—Branch manager for the Westport Coal Company at Wellington.

183. Let us have your views with regard to clause 2 of the Coal-mines Act Amendment Bill?—I do not know that I can add anything that is new to what has been said by other witnesses. Mr. Dixon has put our case very fully. The main objection to Mr. Colvin's Bill is the fact that it does not make any reference to the present decision of the Arbitration Court. Secondly, it would mean that while the hours of labour would be shortened if the Bill passed, the wages would remain as at present, and as we are working under all the other conditions of the arbitration award, with the exception of the shortened hours that this Bill provides for, it would be manifestly unfair to the employers. I think Mr. Dixon mentioned that the increased cost to his company would be £20,000, and we consider that the matter is too important for us to allow the Bill to go through without our entering an emphatic protest against it. The main point is that the Arbitration Court having heard all the evidence in this particular case, they should be the final arbiters in fixing the wages for the work done.

184. *Mr. Colvin.*] The Government have fixed the hours of labour?—If the Arbitration Act has broken down, or the Court will not give an award, then it seems to me that the Legislature should deal with the matter. But apparently the Court is within its rights in refusing to make an award, and it has given ample and full reasons why it cannot see its way to do so. Another main point with reference to the bank-to-bank clause is that the conditions vary so much throughout the colony that many mine-owners do not object to it at all, while on the other hand others do not want it. Furthermore, I see that the Allandale and some other mines in Otago have withdrawn their case from the Arbitration Court because, under the present Act, with its bank-to-bank clause, they were not prepared to risk reduction in their wages. If the conditions vary so much in different localities it seems to me that the matter should be determined by the Arbitration Court. If the Arbitration Court has not carried out its duty, then apparently there is some difficulty which ought to be met by the Legislature dealing with the Arbitration Act. It is not the general question of the bank-to-bank clause, however, that I desire to deal with, but only this particular Bill before the Committee, and the main point is the first one I mentioned: that it seems rather unfair that a Bill should be put through altering the hours of labour while all the other conditions are left untouched.