

76. *Mr. Seddon.*] Have you ever heard of such a suggestion as that there was a grudge against the tunnel?—I know that men have not been satisfied there, but I never heard of an imputation of that description.

77. There was nothing organized?—No.

78. *Mr. Reed.*] You have no unemployed to any extent down the Coast, have you?—Any surplus labour?

79. Yes?—We have 146 men out of work now in Reefton.

80. You said that plenty of labour could be got for the Otira Tunnel if the conditions were better. What passed through my mind was, where you anticipated the labour would come from?—It comes principally from Australia. There are men on the Coast from all over the world. When I said that I had in my mind that you can tell in Reefton by the number of men hanging about looking for a job at a certain mine—you can tell where the best conditions are. There you will always find plenty of labour.

81. How would you suggest that the conditions should be made more attractive at Otira so as to make the tunnel among the first of the works that the men would seek?—There should be better accommodation. It should be possible to obtain a supply of coal there, so that the men would not have to get wood on Sunday. There should be facilities for the men coming away from their work within the eight hours, or a minute or two thereof. At present the men are working, I think, just on nine hours a day instead of eight. I say that if a bank-to-bank clause were put into operation, or means were devised whereby men could get from work quickly and not have to be so long in wet clothes, it would have a tendency to bring labour to the tunnel.

82. When you use the word "accommodation" you mean housing?—Yes.

83. You put first, then, I take it, better housing and better facilities for getting fuel?—Yes.

84. The climatic conditions there, I suppose, will always be a drawback?—It is not a nice place to live in.

85. Regarding wages, has there been any very great increase in miners' wages since 1907?—Absolutely none, except at Otira. Miners' wages are the same now in the quartz-mines round about Reefton as they were eight or ten years ago. The only place where there has been an alteration is Otira.

86. Do you contend that at Otira the wages at the first were less than the recognized union wages on the Coast?—I think that whereas the wages at the beginning may have been considered acceptable by the men, when they got in and had further to walk and the hours became longer in consequence and the tunnel became wetter, Mr. McLean would have to pay more money to get men. When they were near the mouth of the tunnel the men could go right home in a very short time. They are in now two miles, and the men are working nine hours a day, and naturally the conditions are not so good as when the work was started.

87. It was suggested to us that the work was going to cost half as much again as the original estimate on account of the altered conditions of labour—first, that the wages had increased as against those obtaining in 1907, and, secondly, that the result of the labour was not so good as in 1907—in other words, that there was not so much work done in a given time now as was done in 1907; it was stated that the altered conditions that I have mentioned have caused the increase in the cost of the tunnel by half as much again: what do you think of that proposition?—I would not say that it is correct. I do not believe that that is entirely responsible. I should say that, as with any other badly ventilated mine where the conditions are not good, Mr. McLean will get a worse class of labour than a well-ventilated mine.

88. Do I understand you to say that if labour at the tunnel is not giving the result it should, it is because the conditions are not such as to attract the best men?—The good conditions are not there to draw the best class. The better-ventilated mines around, where the conditions are good, draw the best class of labour. A vacancy in a good mine is always in demand.

89. *Mr. Veitch.*] Assuming that a man is a really good man and he goes into a badly-ventilated mine, will he not deteriorate in health and in that way become inefficient?—He will not stop long enough for that. He will go to a better place.

90. *Mr. Reed.*] You made the remark that if tunnels were brought under the Mining Act instead of being under the Public Contracts Act the conditions would be bettered. In what way would they be bettered?—I think good would come from the fact that an Inspector would go there in his official capacity, with power to enforce better ventilation. We should get the bank-to-bank clause too. We should also get time and a half for Sunday work.

91. *Mr. Nosworthy.*] If this work had been undertaken by the Government on the co-operative labour system, instead of a contract being let to the present firm of contractors, do you think they would have been any further through with the tunnel?—I believe they would.

92. Why do you think so?—If the bottom heading were taken on the co-operative system, and the men had the right to pick their mates, and there were good engineers there from the Government and the rest of the work was done by day-labour, I see no reason why there should not be every satisfaction given and the tunnel be as far forward as it is now.

93. You reckon that under the co-operative system the country would have done just as well—got just as far on with the work as the contractor?—I believe there would have been better men there as the result of better conditions, and better men would mean more speed.

94. It would have required more outlay if they had wanted all the conveniences that you suggest are necessary now, would it not?—Not necessarily. If a contractor intends to make money out of a job he will allow for it in his tender, and that surplus might well be used in housing the workmen and making the conditions good.

95. Then you think that under more favourable conditions there is plenty of first-class labour available to complete the work?—I do not think there would be any dearth of labour if the conditions were made good.