

TUESDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER, 1912.

*The Chairman:* There is a point regarding which I understand Mr. McLean would like to make an explanation.

*Mr. McLean:* Yes, sir. I stated in my evidence that Mr. Gavin was employed in 1910. That statement was made hurriedly. It was in 1909 that he was first employed.

HUBERT THOMAS ARMSTRONG examined. (No. 9.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—General secretary of the West Coast Workers' Union.
2. Are you working at the Otira Tunnel?—No. I visit there at times. The union there is a branch of our organization.
3. Have you worked there at all?—I have never worked in the tunnel.
4. *Mr. Seddon.*] What association were you connected with when you went to Otira to consult Mr. McLean?—The West Coast Workers' Union. I was acting under instructions from the Otira branch.
5. Was there a union at Otira then?—Yes.
6. What year was this?—It was in January of last year.
7. Did you go to Otira prior to that?—I had been there a few times prior to that.
8. Will you give us in their order the times you went there?—I went there first in September of 1910, and I have visited there at least fortnightly—sometimes weekly—ever since.
9. *The Chairman.*] Up to now?—Yes.
10. *Mr. Seddon.*] When you went there you went to represent the men's claims to Mr. McLean, did you?—Yes. In the first place I was summoned to attend a meeting at Otira. The men were discussing the conditions that prevailed. They were very dissatisfied with them, and they arrived at the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to set up a deputation, seek an interview with the contractors, and see if a peaceful solution could not be arrived at. When it came to selecting the deputation I was appointed one of them. The branch secretary was sent to Mr. McLean the next morning to ask if he would meet the deputation, and he informed him that he would meet a deputation of his own men, but he would meet no deputation of which Armstrong was a member, nor would he have anything to do with him.
11. Mr. McLean heard you afterwards, though, did he not?—After the men in the tunnel had been idle a couple of days.
12. Did the men strike?—Yes.
13. For what reason?—They struck for the recognition of their organization.
14. Because Mr. McLean would not hear you?—That is so.
15. Mr. McLean heard you afterwards, though?—Yes, after four days' idleness Mr. McLean agreed that in future he would answer correspondence from me and do business with me as the representative of the men, if I was instructed by them to do so.
16. He recognized that you were the accredited representative of the men, and he then heard you?—Yes.
17. What did you see Mr. McLean about on that first occasion?—It was in regard to wet places—six hours for wet places (as was customary in underground work)—time and a half for Sunday work, the bank-to-bank clause, and different grievances that the men had: I cannot recollect them all now.
18. Did the question of wages come up?—Not at that particular time.
19. How did Mr. McLean meet you: did he concede you any points?—Perhaps it would be better for me to make a statement, and I could explain better. I understand that the contractors have petitioned to be released from their contract. I do not want to say anything that is likely to interfere with them in any shape or form; I just want to say a word or two in regard to the labour-conditions, and to justify the stand the men have taken when there has been any labour trouble. I cannot go further back than June of 1910, when a branch of our organization was first formed there. Mr. Hickey was then general secretary of the union. He resigned in September, and I was elected to the position, and took up my duties at Otira. Mr. McLean in his statement to the House has complained—according to the newspaper reports—of being hampered by labour troubles, and says that it is impossible to get sufficient suitable labour. In regard to the labour troubles that have taken place at Otira since my time, I think I can justify the stand the men have taken. They have been actually forced as unionists to take up the stand that they have. I referred before to the deputation that was set up. Never before, I think, in the history of unionism—or, rather, as far back as my memory goes—has an employer of labour refused to meet in conference an accredited representative of the men. Some of the men on that occasion had an idea that Mr. McLean would not meet me, and I advised them to leave me off the deputation altogether; and, when they were discussing with the contractor the differences, to discuss also with him the reason why he would not meet me or do business with me, and perhaps the difficulty would be got over in that way. However, it was decided that I had to be a member of that deputation. When Mr. McLean had refused to meet it another meeting of the men was called, and Mr. McLean was invited to attend the meeting. He did so, and he put the case from his point of view, and then retired. The meeting decided unanimously that none of them would return to work until such time as the contractor had agreed to meet their representative. When our union started at Otira they were working under an award of the Arbitration Court that had been entered into between the contractor and the Inangahua Miners' Union. The conditions of labour were not provided for in that award at all; the rates of wages were not fixed, nor were the hours of labour, or anything else. The only thing that award did was to tie them up for a period of two years, and if they rebelled against the conditions they would be fined for doing so. The award actually provided for nothing. If I understand the