

whereas formerly it was £32 9s., making an increase of £20 9s. annually, which is a very heavy burden. In the gold-mining industry a subsidy is granted on any prospecting-work that is being undertaken, also tracks and roads are provided. Why should not the same provision be made for the mining industry, as from it the country receives a fair revenue—greater than that from the gold-mining? At least assistance should be given to any co-operative party of workers to develop any coal-measures. From it the Government receives royalty on each ton of coal produced, freight on the railway-line, and a harbour-improvement rate. Another matter is that of dwellings for the miners. Departmentally we have been looking into the matter for the last three or four years, but we are under the difficulty that if a man leaves a mine he has to give up his home. At Stockton the company have an excellent system under which the company build houses for the men on a five-years basis of rental. Legislation should be passed by the Government compelling the coal companies to erect substantial dwellings for the men, because unless you have good homes for them you will never have contentment among them. The Labour Department has the matter under consideration at present; but I cannot say what it intends to do. I will hand in, Mr. Chairman, a number of notes I have made on other subjects—clay-deposits, cement, flax, and other products of the district.

*To the Chairman:* In regard to the houses erected by the Stockton Company for their men, the company charge 5 per cent. on the cost of the house; and an additional sum is charged by way of rent in reduction of the capital. I do not favour the nationalizing of the standing mines, but new mines opened up ought to be State enterprises.

*To Mr. Veitch:* As a general principle it is better for the men to own their homes.

T. WILKINSON, Miner and Farmer, examined.

I desire to refer to certain matters connected with an agreement between the State Coal-mines Department and the Seddonville co-operative party of miners as to a lease of plant, including rail and tubs. [Agreement produced, and handed to Committee.] We had to sign that agreement. They originally started about four years ago with eight men. They did not agree as to the methods of working their little mine, and men dropped out until there were only two men left. Up till the time I went in they turned out about 4,000 tons of coal. They paid a rental of £17 18s. half-yearly—£35 or £36 a year. The agreement terminated on the 28th January, and when the new agreement came along we were surprised that we had to pay £80 a year—the rent was jumped up from £35 to £80. We had no alternative but to sign it and take it over. There are five of us in it now, and two boys. We turned out 476 tons last month. We paid the money to Mr. James, and we told him we would take the first opportunity to protest against it. We consider it too high altogether. A lot of the material had deteriorated to a considerable extent. We were doing useful work for the country, and were taking out the coal from the State mine that was left behind. Mr. James said that the matter was fixed by the officials at Wellington; and the rails were also increased in price. We want to get the sympathy of the Committee that the charge be reduced. It is a bit stiff to pay that price in respect to practically worn-out material.

*To the Chairman:* I understand that the party was formed first four years ago. They were under the impression that as they paid this rental credit would be given to them until they had really the rails and tubs as their own. They never went into the thing in a business-like manner, and they let it go on from year to year.

*The Chairman:* I think you had better let the Committee have these two agreements, and we will see if anything can be done. It certainly seems on the face of it that an unfair thing has been done.

*Witness:* I have several other matters to bring up, and now I represent the Seddonville Vigilance Committee. Some time ago, before the State mine was closed down at Seddonville, to get a big area worked, it was prospected, and was turned down as not being a payable proposition, notwithstanding the large quantity of coal reported to be there. There is another big field at Blackburn. We think it would be a good thing for the Government to prospect on the seam of coal to find out what it contains. In the Blackburn field Mr. Morgan estimates that there are 200 acres, with a seam of an average thickness of 10 ft. It is estimated that there are 3,000,000 tons between the outcrops, the seam varying in thickness from 5 ft. to 40 ft.; and the coal is equal to the best Denniston coal. On the easterly side of the outcrop they do not know how far it goes; but on the westerly side it is considered that by surface trenching it can be ascertained how far it goes. On the eastern side it may require thirty or forty holes to thoroughly test it. I think it would be good for the district and for the country to thoroughly prospect and find out whether there are 3,000,000 tons or 30,000,000 tons of coal there. That is one of the points which the Vigilance Committee asked me to bring before the Committee. You will find all about the Blackburn area in Mr. Morgan's report. There is one other thing in connection with coal: I have noticed in some reports of the meetings of the Committee that statements have been made in regard to the coal. Dr. Thomson made a statement that the mineral wealth of this country lies more in the common things like coal and things of that sort rather than in the rarer metals. At the present time we are working at Seddonville. I have brought two or three pieces of coal to show the Committee. In years past Seddonville was noted for the colour of its coal. It is what is called "peacock" coal owing to its bright colours. I consider that this might be a sort of coal that would carry a lot of chemicals. [Specimens of the coal exhibited to the Committee.] The specimen I have here comes out of the Co-operative Mine at Seddonville.

*To Mr. Forbes:* I cannot say that there is a great quantity of this coal where we are working, but that quality of coal exists throughout the district, or, rather, that part of the district. It might be of some value to the country to prospect that "peacock" coal. We have some reefs