

PETITION.

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives of the Dominion of New Zealand in Parliament assembled.

THE petition of the Inangahua Miners' Union (Inc.), of Reefton, humbly sheweth:—

1. That your petitioner has on several occasions applied on behalf of William Mitchell, of Reefton, miner, for a Miner's phthisis pension.

2. That the said William Mitchell worked in the Progress, Globe, Inglewood, Ulster, Energetic, and other mines in the Reefton field from 1904 until 1923, when he had to cease work. Since that time and for the past six years he has been so incapacitated that he has been unable to follow his calling.

3. That although your petitioner had a certificate from Dr. L. J. Wicken, of Reefton, that the said William Mitchell was suffering from pneumoconiosis, the pension has not been granted.

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that a compassionate allowance be granted Mr. William Mitchell in lieu of a Miner's pension, and also that the miner's phthisis pensions law be amended.

And your petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Dated this 11th day of September, 1929.

INANGAHUA MINER'S UNION :
D. MCKANE, Secretary.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER, 1929.

DAVID MCKANE examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your full name?—David McKane.

2. And your official position?—I am secretary of the Inangahua Gold and Coal Miners' Union, and I wish to give evidence with regard to the circumstances connected with pneumoconiosis, and particularly the petition of William Mitchell. Mitchell has worked on the goldfields for eighteen years, and we contend that if he has fibrosis of the lungs it must have been caused in the first instance by the inhalation of quartz-dust. Dr. Wicken has given it as his opinion that quartz-dust was the original cause of his complaint, and Dr. Ringfield says that he has a secondary disease—Potts' disease. Our experience on the Reefton Goldfield has been that if a man has been working underground for any period up to twenty years he has miner's complaint. I do not know of any man in Reefton who has worked in a mine for twenty years and is not a sufferer from miner's phthisis. Mr. Mitchell has been incapacitated for six years, and has spent five years on his back. Let us say that he is at present suffering mostly from Potts' disease, but we think that he had miner's complaint in the first instance. He has been in a very bad way financially. His wife has had to go out to work as well as nursing him. She has reared five children, and besides nursing the patient has had to keep the house and see to the feeding of the family. The union asks that something should be done for them. If the authorities cannot see their way to granting Mitchell the pension we would like to have the Pensions Act amended. If it is found that Mitchell has fibrous lungs, he should have the benefit of the doubt, on the ground that quartz-dust was the original cause of the fibrosis. Even Dr. Conlon admits that he has tuberculosis of the lungs, but until the time comes for a post-mortem examination it cannot be stated with certainty whether his trouble is tuberculosis or miner's complaint. It would require an X-ray examination to establish that he has either of these ailments.

3. Your petition asks for an amendment of the Pensions Act?—Yes. First we would ask that the Act should be amended so as to provide that applicants for the pension should go to the nearest place where X-ray apparatus is available. Miners are often weak and ill when they apply for the pension—they will not apply so long as they can work at all. They continue to work so long as they are fit to do it on two or three days a week, until their finances are exhausted. For examination they have to go to Christchurch, and the train journey is too long. There is an X-ray apparatus in Greymouth, and they could be sent there, or to the nearest town where there is an X-ray expert. We also ask that the white paper which applicants have to sign every month after pensions are granted to them, showing the amount of their earnings, should be dispensed with. All pensioners have an objection to signing it. In some instances pensioners have the opportunity to earn a casual pound or two, but they are required to sign a statement on this white paper that they have earned nothing at all. We contend that that should be cut out of the system. It should be sufficient if the pensioner is re-examined and found to have miner's complaint, and he should be allowed to earn the few shillings a week that are available to him. Sometimes little jobs are open to him, such as keeping the gate of a sports-ground, or something of that kind, but he is told that if he earns money in that way he will lose the pension. When a miner receives the pension he knows that it amounts to his death-sentence, but you can say that it is also a bread-and-water sentence. I know a married man with six children to support on his pension of 35s. per week, and in that case it is actually a matter of bread and water. So what we ask is that the pension be increased, and that the white paper be cut out, that the distances to be travelled