

18. Is he your only customer?—No; but he is the principal customer. His average is about from 500 to 700 tons per month.

19. Do you know what the coal is best suited for?—Steam. It is not of the slightest use for a house.

20. Why not?—Ours is a soft coal.

21. Is the mine capable of being profitably developed to a much greater extent?—No, it has never paid; the shareholders have never had a penny of money out of it. One reason why we have never been able to make it pay is because we struck fireclay. We opened out about a 15 ft. seam of coal, and then got a seam of fireclay which split the coal. The best part of the coal was under the fireclay, and the biggest seam was over it. We had to take the top coal and bury all the bottom, and then we could get no market for the fireclay because it was too pure. I think the railway rate we pay should not be any greater than what is paid for the Taupiri coal. Taupiri pays 1s. 9d. per ton for what we pay 2s. 6d. Ours is classed as a bituminous coal when it is only semi-bituminous. If we could make our coal a house coal we should not feel the injustice so much, but we have not been able to make it a house coal. Taupiri coal brings £1 5s., as against 10s. 6d. for our coal delivered in Auckland at the wharf.

22. Have you anything to say with regard to the inspection or control by the Government over your mine?—The only thing we had to complain about was that, after we had prospected the ground and applied for a lease, the Government kept our money and would not grant the lease. In the meantime the Hikurangi Coal Company started and got the market.

23. But you say they have hard coal and you have soft?—That is so. As far as steam coal is concerned, having once got the market it takes a lot to dispossess them of it.

24. *Mr. Lomas.*] Do the men get paid nothing per yard for headings?—No. This coal is so much easier won that they make, some of them, £1 per day in the mine, taking the pillars and so on.

25. *Mr. Proud.*] Could you not utilise the fireclay by mixing it with impurities?—The trouble is that the Ngunguru is a good clay, and makes a good brick, and has the market. Mr. Craig took some of ours up to try it, and said it did not suit because it was too pure. The company has been worked on very economical lines.

26. It would be an important thing to utilise the fireclay?—We did all we could with it. At the present time we are taking out the pillars. We have only worked about 10 acres, and have about 250 acres yet, but the field is very broken, and you cannot depend upon it at all.

27. *The Chairman.*] What is the distance from the mine to the wharf for which this 2s. 6d. railage is charged?—Just over thirteen miles.

28. *Mr. Lomas.*] How many trucks do they bring?—From twelve to fourteen.

29. What do the trucks carry?—6 tons. I do not think the rate here should be greater than on the railway-line from Huntly. Lately we have got a bigger engine.

30. You have got the light rails here?—Yes.

31. *The Chairman.*] Are there any suggestions you would like to make to us?—No; I think the only suggestion is with regard to freight. Three mines have been closed down at Hikurangi, as they did not pay. Although our mine was the only Government lease there, it was the only mine which had to pay the half-cost of its siding, which was £125. We have had a pretty tough fight, but thought we might get over our difficulties. We have never been able to pay anything. I was one of the original Ngunguru Company, and their mine has faults. At present the difficulty at that mine is the smallness of the seams. The old Ngunguru Coal Company went into liquidation.

#### HIKURANGI.

MONDAY, 17TH DECEMBER, 1900.

FRANK WHIDDON, Working Coal-miner, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are president of the local union?—Yes; the Hikurangi Miners' Union of Workers.

2. How long have you been working here?—A little over three years.

3. Will you tell the Commissioners, from your point of view, the position of the mine, the conditions under which you are working, and make any suggestions you care to with regard to improving or altering them beneficially?—At the present time I think the mine is very well ventilated—in fact, as well ventilated as a good many of the mines in New Zealand. I have worked in the Waikato and Kamo mines for many years. The Conciliation Board has lately sat here and improved greatly our rate of wages. The men will be much better off when they commence to work on the terms granted by the Board.

4. In your opinion, is the safety of the workers sufficiently guarded?—A great deal depends upon the men themselves, in the way they work the places, whether they keep free from accidents.

5. Do you wish to make any statement with regard to the measures taken for the safety of the men?—I do not think I can, anything more than I have said.

6. Do you think the coal is being worked to the best advantage to obtain the largest quantity of coal that may be there?—Yes, I do.

7. Have you any opinion to offer as to the quantity of coal still in your mine?—No; I can only give evidence with regard to that from what Mr. Moody has stated during the last week.

8. Can you give us any information with regard to the other coal in this immediate neighbourhood?—I believe you will find coal all the way from Whangarei to the Bay of Islands. It will be as it is here—in patches.

9. Patches sufficiently large to make it payable to work?—That I could not really give an opinion on.