

286. But the law could be altered?—The men would not like to start at 8 o'clock one morning and 5 the next, and so on.

287. How do they manage now?—They break the shift at the end of the week. One shift starts at 8 o'clock every morning for one week, and 4 in the afternoon the next week, and so on.

288. What was the quartz-mine that you were referring to?—Any quartz-mine; what I have said applies to all quartz-mines.

289. *Mr. Millar.*] How is the ventilation of the Kaitangata Coal-mine?—Very fair, on the whole.

290. The air is fairly good now?—Yes.

291. Do they have much trouble with fire?—Yes. There have always been fires in the mine, and always will be, I suppose.

292. All the work there is done on contract for the drives, stone drives, &c.?—Yes.

293. Pretty well the whole of the work in the mine is by contract, with the exception of the surface work and at a few deficient places?—Yes.

294. That is pretty general throughout Otago?—Yes.

THURSDAY, 24TH JULY, 1902.

HENRY BETTS examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—My name is Henry Betts.

2. Do you belong to any union of miners?—I have worked as a miner for ten years, and have been living in a goldfields district for seventeen years. I refer to the Inangahua District.

3. Were you an officer of any miners' union?—I have been president of the Inangahua Miners' Union for a period of two years, and have been secretary to the same union for the last two years. I am still the secretary to the union. It has a membership of six hundred.

4. Is it a coal-miners' union?—No; a quartz-miners' union. Of course, there are coal-miners who are members of that union. There are several small coal-mines about Reefton, and the men employed in those mines are members of the union.

5. Have you read Mr. Guinness's amending Bills—the Coal-mines Bill and the Gold-mines Bill?—I just glanced at them before I left Reefton a week or so ago.

*The Chairman:* This is one of the Bills; they are both to the same effect. [Bill handed to witness.]

6. *Mr. Guinness.*] You understand that the object of that Bill is to strike out the words that were inserted in the Act of last session, "excluding meal-times"?—Yes, "exclusive of meal-times."

7. What is the usual time taken by the miners for their meal or crib time, as it is called, in, we will say, the quartz-mines?—Generally about twenty minutes. There is no regular time fixed as far as I know. From twenty minutes to half an hour.

8. Can you say with regard to coal-mines?—I could not say anything in connection with coal-mines, except the small mines about the Reefton district.

9. Do you know whether any regular time is taken in those small coal-mines?—They are generally worked by parties of men who own the mines themselves, and these take longer, I think.

10. Since the passing of the amending Mining Act of last session providing for eight hours from bank to bank, exclusive of meal-time, has any reduction in the time the miners are underground been observed?—No, certainly not. In one or two instances the Act of last session would rather increase the hours of labour if it were given effect to.

11. How?—I have in my mind at least two mines that have been working the men longer than eight hours and a half underground, and the very reason why in one instance—I am speaking now of the Golden Fleece, a mine in my district—we have not asked for the enforcement of the Act in respect to that mine is that it would increase the time the men have to work in other mines. In the Golden Fleece Mine the men have to travel a distance of about, I should say, a mile and a quarter to reach their working-places—that is, from the mouth of the tunnel. Of course, to do that they start at 8 o'clock—I am speaking of the day shift—and I suppose it would be a quarter past 8, or possibly twenty minutes past, before they reached their places. They are relieved generally inside—I mean down in the lowest level, not at the faces; and by the time the afternoon shift gets in to relieve them it is twenty minutes past 4. When those men reach the mouth of the tunnel again it is practically 5 o'clock. That is, they are nine hours underground. In other mines, such as the Keep-it-Dark and the Progress, they leave the brace at 8 o'clock, and are all up by about a quarter past 4; that is really eight hours and a quarter. If the Act of last session were given effect to those men would be underground eight hours and a half in these mines that I have mentioned—i.e., the Keep-it-Dark and the Progress.

12. If the words "exclusive of meal-time" are repealed, would there be any difficulty in employing the men only eight hours underground?—No difficulty whatever—not the slightest.

13. What do you say is the language of the Act of last session which compels these men to work more than eight hours underground?—I say it would have been better if it had been left alone and we were allowed to work on as we were working, as far as the Act of last session is concerned.

14. What is the language in the Act that compels you to work more than eight hours?—The words "exclusive of meal-times." Those very words. If the words were omitted, as is proposed in the Bill, that would be suitable.