

should be, I will see that I am safe in my face. But the unfortunate part of it is that a number of accidents happen in these mines through persons who have not had practical experience being employed. No miner requires any warning about a face if he is a practical miner. He will see that the face is safe before he works in it.

102. *The Chairman.*] What about misfires?—They should certainly be reported to the shift-boss. You will see by reference to the Mining Act that if there is a misfire a miner is not supposed to go near that misfire for a certain time. The shift-boss is really the responsible man underground as far as the working of the faces is concerned; and my experience has been this—and I think that if you get practical miners before you they will tell you the same thing: that if there is anything wrong in their face they report it to their shift-boss. Then he reports to the relieving shift-boss, who places men in those dangerous faces who have had the greatest amount of practical experience.

103. *Mr. Herries.*] I would like to ask the witness if there is any dissatisfaction among the miners with the Act of last session?—Certainly there is a great deal of dissatisfaction in having those words included, “exclusive of meal-times.” That is where the whole of the dissatisfaction comes in.

104. You said that, as a rule, none of the miners count the eight hours from face to face?—Oh, no; the men do not work eight hours in the face.

105. Before the Act was passed last session the bank-to-bank principle was pretty well established?—No, it was not pretty well established. As I have already pointed out, if the men had the usual crib-time of half an hour they would have eight hours and a half underground, whereas in some mines, before the Act was passed, and at present also, they are underground actually only eight hours and a quarter; because the union has never tried to enforce the Act of last session in respect to the Golden Fleece Mine, to which I have referred, for the reason that by so doing it would slightly increase the hours of labour in other mines, although it might decrease the hours in the Golden Fleece by half an hour. Consequently the men decided to wait and try to get Parliament to alter the Act of last session by striking out the words “exclusive of meal-times.”

106. Would it be better, then, to repeal the Act of last session and go back to the old system?—No. We would rather have those words struck out.

107. But according to your evidence, as I understand it, they worked less hours under the old system than they would if this Act of last year were enforced?—Yes, that is so with regard to some of the mines. I wish to make it perfectly clear, so that there shall be no misunderstanding, that no alteration has been made in any respect with the hours of labour since the Act was passed. They are going on exactly the same as they were prior to the passing of the Act last year.

108. Are the miners satisfied with the present system—that is, when the Act is ignored in respect to hours?—No, certainly not. They want shorter hours. They recognise that their occupation is an unhealthy one and a dangerous one, and they want to get as much pure air and sunshine as they possibly can. They think that special legislation should be passed to regulate their hours of labour.

109. Do you not think that is a matter for the Arbitration Court?—No; I think it is a matter for the House to take into consideration. At present we are working under an industrial agreement. Rather than have any bother and turmoil in connection with the Arbitration Court we decided to enter into an industrial agreement, and to rely on getting justice done us by the Legislature.

110. Is there any specification of the hours in the agreement?—Yes, there is.

111. What are the hours specified?—Eight hours for five days in the week, and six hours on Saturday.

112. Does that mean from face to face, or bank to bank?—It does not state.

113. Was that question raised when you entered into the industrial agreement?—No.

114. *Mr. Guinness.*] Was the Act of last session passed when you entered into that agreement?—Yes.

115. You made it after the Act was passed?—Yes.

116. *Mr. Herries.*] How is it that no discussion was raised about the matter?—A discussion was raised, but we relied on the Legislature doing us justice as far as the hours of labour were concerned. Of course, the agreement is vague; it is not explicit; and we wish, if possible, to get along quietly and reasonably with the employers. As a union, we do not want to be continually frightening them, and we thought it would be better, in order to smoothe over matters, to enter into this agreement for the time being, and to come to Parliament and get it to regulate the hours of labour, as we think it should. It has done so in respect to factories, and surely should in respect to mines.

117. Is any overtime allowed under your agreement?—No, no overtime rates are allowed.

118. Is any overtime worked?—Yes, at times; Sunday work and overtime.

119. How was it that you did not put in overtime when you made the agreement?—I may say that we have the matter under consideration, and it is our intention before very long to approach the various companies in connection with this matter, and to ask them to enter into an industrial agreement in respect to the rate of pay for overtime and Sunday work.

120. You say that, if last year's Act were enforced, in some mines the men would be working for nine hours?—No; they could not be working nine hours.

121. Nine hours from bank to bank?—Only eight hours and a half from bank to bank—that is, under the Act of last session. It could not possibly be more than eight and a half unless the employers took upon themselves to increase the time for meals—*i.e.*, an employer could turn round under the existing law and make crib-time an hour instead of half an hour.

122. How do you arrive at that eight hours and a half?—By the fact that the men have half an hour for crib.