

123. But does your eight hours and a half include the time from leaving the face and going up to the surface?—Yes, eight hours and a half from surface to surface.

124. If you had an overtime clause, could not you claim half an hour overtime?—No, I do not think so. We certainly could not under the Act of last session.

125. The law says it must be eight hours from bank to bank?—Eight hours exclusive of meal-times.

126. You want half an hour's extension of time?—We want the reference to meal-times struck out.

127. That would make a difference of only half an hour?—Yes; we would be satisfied with that. A miner is not very anxious to work overtime.

128. *Mr. Lang.*] I understood you to say, Mr. Betts, that the miners would rather rely on Parliament than the Arbitration Court for the hours of working: is that correct?—I said that in this particular instance we wish to get along smoothly with the companies, and practically agreed to everything in the reference, except the hours of labour; and we thought that rather than bring the Arbitration Court into requisition it would be better for us to enter into this agreement, and to rely on Parliament doing something in the interests of the workers employed in the mines. That was the position.

129. You had more confidence in Parliament than in the Arbitration Court?—Not necessarily so. We did not want the turmoil and trouble and bad feeling caused by the Arbitration Court being brought into requisition.

130. Then, the Arbitration Court causes a certain amount of turmoil and trouble?—All these disputes do for a time.

131. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] How many men are there employed underground by the Reefton Consolidated Mines Company?—There are two companies—the Progress Mine and Consolidated Company.

132. How many men are there working underground in the Progress Mine?—I should say two hundred men.

133. What is the depth of the shaft?—I could not tell you, but it is over a thousand feet.

134. How long do you reckon it takes to lower the miners?—Not any time at all.

135. How many go down at a time?—Six in each cage.

136. Does it take the cage five minutes to go down and come up again?—I do not think so.

137. How long do you think it takes?—I could not tell you; it is a very short time.

138. Is it a fact that the whole of these two hundred men are only eight hours and a half from the time they leave the surface till they are out again, exclusive of the half-hour for crib?—Some are longer than that underground. The miners hold that their working-time really commences from the time they leave the surface. I may point out that the Mining Act looks at that as well. It recognises that a miner is responsible for anything he does from the time he enters the mine till he leaves it. He is practically in the employ of the owner of the mine while he is underground.

139. You know something about coal-mines as well as quartz-mines?—Yes.

140. Do you think a face in a coal-mine is as dangerous as a face in a quartz reef?—I think it is more dangerous in some instances.

141. You stated that it has never been the custom in Reefton for the men to change at the face?—No, it never has been.

142. Are you aware whether the owners or managers of the mines at Reefton have any objection to the Bill becoming law?—Decidedly they will have an objection to it—no doubt about that.

143. Do you think that objection would be well grounded?—I do not think so.

144. Do you think that if it became law it would be likely to reduce the output by a substantial quantity?—I do not think it would alter the result one iota.

145. Is it a fact that the engine-man on the surface and the brace-man and other men there are employed and paid by the day or the week?—The industrial agreement fixes the wages for the engine-driver at 13s. 4d. a shift.

146. But is it a fact that, whether the wages are fixed by the Arbitration Court or not, the men I have mentioned are employed by the week or by the day?—I think that according to the industrial agreement they are in the same position as the miners—they are employed by the day.

147. Do you mean to tell me that the engine-man at the Progress Mine, for instance, is employed by the day?—There might be a special arrangement made between the engine-drivers and the owners of the mine.

148. What I want to bring out is this: this man occupies a responsible position, and if he leaves at a day's notice there will be some difficulty in finding it, so that, as a matter of fact, a company will protect itself by engaging him for a long time?—Yes; I know that, as a rule, the mine-owners try to keep good men when they have them as winders.

149. Assuming that the brace-man and the engine-man are employed by the week, do you think it would increase the cost of management on the surface if this Bill were brought into law?—Not the slightest.

150. It would not have any appreciable effect?—Not the slightest. As a matter of fact, now, under our industrial agreement, although the hours worked underground do not affect the men employed on the surface, such as engine-drivers and brace-men, yet these men work exactly the same hours as miners and get paid for their shift all the same. Under the present state of affairs they work six hours on Saturday, and get 13s. 4d. for a six-hours shift, the same as for an ordinary shift. No deduction is made in their wages on that account.

151. Coming to the question of the time taken for the meal, you said that the time taken by the men in the Reefton district is generally from twenty minutes to half an hour, but in the case of pieceworkers the men can please themselves—they need not take any time for crib at all unless they like?—Yes, that is so.