

225. *Mr. J. Allen.*] How could a shift-boss in charge of dozens of faces, when there is a change of shift coming on, let them all know? Supposing he was informed just shortly before the change of two or three different places being dangerous, how could he let them all know?—A shift-boss has no right to be in charge of dozens of faces.

226. *Mr. W. Fraser.*] You are working a certain number of hours underground under your industrial agreement?—Yes.

227. *Mr. Guinness's* suggested amendment proposes that you shall work a certain number of hours?—Yes.

228. Is there any difference between the hours you work under that agreement and the hours proposed by *Mr. Guinness*?—Yes; the difference would be that our hours of labour would be reduced. The point is this: You say that *Mr. Guinness's* Bill, if passed, would absolutely compel the working of certain hours—

229. I merely say that it fixes certain hours beyond which a man cannot work?—They are the maximum hours which a person can work.

230. Supposing *Mr. Guinness's* proposed amendment were passed, would you be in a better position as far as hours below ground are concerned than you are in now?—Certainly.

231. To what extent?—Fully half an hour per day.

232. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] You said, in reply to *Mr. Fraser*, that your industrial agreement was for a period of two years, and that the miners hoped to break it if the Bill were passed, as I understood you. Supposing that the law did not allow you to break your agreement, would you break it then?—If the law does not permit us to we will not; but if the law does permit we will.

233. You entered into that agreement and signed it in due course: do you not think that, as honest men, you ought to stick to it, no matter what the law may be?—If the law—

234. Supposing there is no law?—Certainly we will endeavour to carry out the agreement.

235. *The Chairman.*] Would the effect of the passing of this proposed legislation be to break your agreement altogether?—Certainly not; in no respect.

236. *Mr. J. Allen.*] Then, you do not object to our putting a clause into the Bill providing that it shall not break the agreement?—I would rather that *Mr. Guinness's* amendment came into force straight away, as far as the hours are concerned.

237. Do the miners object to our putting in a clause to provide that your agreement, honourably made, shall honourably stand?—I do not see that as reasonable men they could very well object to it. That is my personal opinion.

238. *Mr. Bennet.*] Did you not say before that if the Bill were passed you would take advantage of it to break your agreement?—The law itself would break our agreement.

239. *The Chairman.*] That is what I asked you just now?—Most decidedly the law would break our agreement, and we would certainly take advantage of the law. Our agreement was made after the coming into operation of the Act of last year. If you are going to amend the Act you can bind us who are working under an industrial agreement.

240. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] In other words, you have no objection to a clause like that being put in?—I think it is only reasonable.

241. *The Chairman.*] Are you aware that in some cases in the Thames district six hours have been fixed by the Arbitration Court for those working in very wet places?—Yes, I am.

242. You do not think the men should have to work eight hours a day there, do you?—No; nor do I think they should be asked to work eight hours a day in badly ventilated places.

TUESDAY, 29TH JULY, 1902.

HENRY BETTS (examination continued).

*The Chairman:* I understand that *Mr. Betts* wishes to correct a statement that he made before the Committee on the last occasion when we sat. Will you please state what the correction is, *Mr. Betts*?

*Mr. Betts:* On page 13 of my evidence I said, in answer to a question by *Mr. Herries*, that the industrial agreement entered into with the employers by the Inangahua Miners' Union did not state whether the hours of work were to be reckoned from bank to bank or face to face. As far as the Saturday shift is concerned—the six-hours shift—it is not stated in the agreement whether the time is to be from bank to bank or from face to face; but for the other five shifts—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday—it is stated that the working-time shall be eight hours at the face, with half an hour out of that time allowed for crib. That means about seven and a half hours' work at the face. Then, in the clause dealing with the Saturday shifts, the Saturday day shift, the Saturday afternoon shift, and the Monday morning shift, it is not stated whether the hours of labour in those particular shifts shall be from face to face or from bank to bank.

1. *Mr. J. Allen.*] What mine does that agreement refer to?—To several mines; you will see them set out in the *Labour Journal*.

2. *Mr. Herries.*] According to the legislation we passed last session, which you seek to amend, until your industrial agreement ran out the amendment could have no effect?—That amendment could have no effect; certainly not.

3. Because by the legislation passed last session anything provided for in an industrial agreement or an award of the Arbitration Court is excepted?—We were working under an award at the time the Act of last session was passed.

4. *Mr. Bennet.*] Would it not have been better, *Mr. Betts*, if all these matters had been left to the Conciliation Board and the Arbitration Court, which are set up for the purpose of settling them, than to come to Parliament?—The idea is to make it a uniform thing throughout the colony.