

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 6TH AUGUST, 1903.

HENRY ANDREW GORDON examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—Henry Andrew Gordon.
2. You are a mining engineer?—Yes, a mining sub-engineer.
3. Have you seen the Bills now before the Committee?—I have not read them.
4. Here are copies. [Produced and handed to witness.] Will you give us your opinion on the Gold-mining Bill first—the bank-to-bank provision?—The miners having to count their time from bank to bank will really mean, as far as a coal-mine is concerned, that a miner will work only six hours and a half a day. It will mean that coal will cost 7 per cent. more than before. I have gone into this very carefully, and, being a director of the Taupiri Coal Company, I can speak from experience. The public will have to pay for it, because no person is going to put capital into a mine to get no return from it. That will be the effect of the bank-to-bank provision in a coal-mine. It will have a greater effect in a gold-mine, for the simple reason that, as far as coal is concerned, you can put the extra expense on to the public, but in the case of a gold-mine you cannot do so. You can only get a certain rate; you cannot put any increased cost on to the price of the commodity, as you can do in an industrial undertaking. That is my opinion of the general principles of the Bill.
5. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] Does your statement, that eight hours from bank to bank will mean that the miners will only work six hours and a half a day, apply to the Taupiri Coal-mine?—Yes.
6. Did you intend that statement to apply to that particular mine?—It applies to all mines pretty well on the same basis, for some coal-mines are different from others; it depends on whether their work is near the surface or not.
7. You say it applies pretty well to all coal-mines: will you explain to the Committee what you mean by that?—In general terms, it applies.
8. How wide would the generality be—an hour or an hour and a half?—An hour on an average would not make a generality. The bank-to-bank provision will mean this: The men are there, say, at 8 o'clock; it takes a certain time to go down the shaft and a certain time to walk to the work; and the same applies coming back. In addition to that, there is half an hour for crib in the middle of the day.
9. Do you know of your own knowledge whether they change shifts on the surface or underground at the Thames at present?—The change-house is on the surface at the Thames.
10. So that it would not make much difference there?—Yes, it would, for the simple reason that they have been accustomed to work eight hours underground at the face. They cannot possibly work eight hours at the face now if the time is to be eight hours from bank to bank, because there is half an hour for meal-time to come off.
11. I want to know whether you know of your own knowledge if they change shifts in the gold-mines at the Thames underground or on the surface?—The house for the changing of clothes is on the surface.
12. If they work three shifts at a mine, how can the men work more than eight hours?—It is only a paying gold-mine that works three shifts. Many mines it would not pay to work three.
13. I understood you to say that what you said in your opening statement applied pretty well to all coal-mines—that the men would work only six hours and a half: would that be the general effect on gold-mines working three shifts?—It would make a certain difference, but not as much difference as in coal-mines.
14. The difference of 7 per cent. that you mentioned?—It would not make the same difference in gold-mines as in coal-mines, because there is not the same distance to travel from the bottom of the shaft to the working-faces.
15. You have had large experience of mines, and I would like to ask you what effect working underground in gold-mines generally has on the men's health, speaking from your own experience?—It depends on the class of gold-mine that one works in. In a great many cases people working underground are not so liable to get rheumatics as those working on the surface.
16. What about what is known as miners' complaint?—A certain proportion of the miners get it—a sort of lung-complaint—but only a small proportion.
17. Do you think it is more prevalent among miners than among the general public?—I think that men employed in sluicing operations are just as much liable to rheumatics.
18. I was referring to men working underground—men using rock-drills, for instance, and blasting. Miners' complaint is contracted in dry quartz mines from the fumes of dynamite, &c. Do you think miners are more subject to it than an equal number of the average public on the surface?—Men on the surface when not working in water, as far as that is concerned. I say they are not so liable to it. The price for labour is more for working underground, as a rule.
19. Do you think that is on account of injury to health?—No.
20. What I want you to say is whether, from your experience, you consider quartz-miners who work in mines where there are large operations going on with rock-drills and explosives are more liable to miners' complaint than an equal number of people in ordinary vocations living on the surface?—Certainly they are more liable to it.
21. Are you aware that a very large percentage of young men suffer from this complaint after a few years in a mine?—I am not aware of that. Only a very small proportion of them suffer from it.
22. You keep up with the mining records of the world, I take it?—Yes.
23. Are you aware that the Chamber of Mines in Johannesburg have recently offered a bonus of £15,000 to any one who can provide a remedy, or a partial remedy, for that complaint?—No, I am not aware of it.
24. You have also had a large experience with coal-mines: do you consider coal-mining injurious to health?—Well, no; I do not think it injurious to health—not more so than is the case with any other class of men.