

5. *The Chairman.*] The clause states that the Inspector of Explosives shall be satisfied that it is the best, from a health point of view, that can be procured in the market?—Yes, quite so.

6. Now with regard to No. 5: "That payment under the Coal-miners' Accident Relief Fund be made for deaths through sickness as well as through accident, and that the fund be consolidated and converted into a colonial fund for the benefit of all coal-miners"?—Yes; we have asked for this for many years, and we think it should apply to those dying a natural death as well as to those dying from accident. Supposing a man falls sick and lies in his own house: he has a wife and family who have to battle for existence. If he dies he gets nothing out of the fund that he has helped to accumulate, probably for many years. All we ask is that in case of death through sickness those concerned shall come under the same rule as if death were caused by accident. Where a woman has a husband who is sick for four or five weeks she is put to more cost than she would be if the man were killed. In connection with this proposal I have been asked to say that a man should be in a mine a certain time before he comes under the rule, but under the Coal-mines Act at the present time if he has only worked for a day or for five minutes and meets with an accident his wife is entitled to certain assistance. I do not think we should put any restrictions on men working in the mines. We think the benefits should apply in a case of natural death as well as in a case of accident. With regard to the fund being consolidated and converted into a colonial fund for the benefit of all coal-miners, we think that that would be beneficial, and that it should be done. You will get further evidence on that by-and-by showing that where the accident fund had been in vogue for years there was a good bit of money in the fund, and yet at Tyneside this could not be touched although the miners had contributed to the fund for years. If it were made a colonial fund any miner would be able to get the benefit of it, and I, therefore, think it is a fair and reasonable demand.

7. Clause 6: "That provision be made for a superannuation fund for the benefit of all coal-miners"?—I do not know much about this matter, and I think you will get better evidence later from another member of our party.

8. Clause No. 7: "That Miners' unions be empowered to take extracts from time-books and wages sheets and books"?—I think that is a very needful clause to be put into the Bill. Under the Labour Department Bill you give the Inspector power to inspect a company's books as regards wages or anything else, and if we had this power it would be the means of saving a lot of trouble and time at the Conciliation Board and in the Arbitration Court. I might say, by way of illustration, that during the last arbitration case we had at Westport, I went to the Westport Coal Company's manager and asked him to supply me with the exact amounts of money which his men had earned, so that I should be able to draw up a proper requisition to place before the Court, but I was refused this information. The reference to the Court was in consequence drawn up blindfolded, and if we had had this power to inspect the books we should not have had to place before the Court such a reference as we did. What we require is the privilege to inspect the wages-books for, say, a period of three months, so that we can base our claims upon them before the Court. As it is we cannot do it. Some men will perhaps be earning as much as 12s. and 14s. a day, and will mislead us by saying that they are only getting 10s. We had some thirty-two clauses in our reference to the Arbitration Court, and if I had been in possession of the information now referred to there would have been only about three. We think the wages-book should not be made a secret and kept away from anybody. I was down at Seddonville, where the men told me that Mr. Bishop, the manager there, did not do things in that way, and I was very pleased to learn it, because it allows the parties to consult one another and facilitates things a great deal in Arbitration Court work.

9. Now with regard to clause 8: "That in all mines where safety-lamps are used it be made compulsory for mine-owners to provide a proper gas-tester to enable the miner to test his lamp before entering the mine"?—I think that is a very necessary thing. Where there is gas in a mine the system all through the West Coast has been what is called the blowing process—that is, a man takes a lamp and blows it, and if he cannot blow the light out the lamp is considered to be all right. A proper gas-tester would not cost very much, and the miner would know without doubt whether his lamp was right or wrong. Where these lamps are generally used there is what is called a lamp-man kept, and the only expense would be to supply a little gas-tester, in order that the miner could prove for himself, as well as the man who had given it to him, whether his lamp was safe or not.

10. Clause 9: "That fans be at all times used where artificial ventilation is, in the opinion of the Inspector of Mines, or the workmen's inspectors, required"?—We think that that should be made compulsory. In my opinion if fans were used in such mines we should not have so many fires as we do, and for the sake of the health of the miners they should be used instead of relying on natural ventilation. I have seen mines where there has been natural ventilation in some places and where the smoke has been coming out of the mine, and five minutes afterwards it would be going back again. You cannot depend upon natural ventilation. We do not believe in furnace ventilation at all, but purely and simply in the fan. The Blackball Mine has been a source of great trouble in connection with the air for years, but we find now that since a fan has been placed there there is not a better-ventilated mine in the colony, or a more comfortable mine for men to work in. That offers very good evidence in favour of a fan as against natural ventilation.

11. Now take clause 10: "That, before any person can take the position of shift-boss, fireman, or deputy in a mine, he shall have had at least five years' practical experience as a miner, and shall pass an examination by the Inspector of Mines on gases before he is allowed to carry a closed lamp to detect gas, and shall have a thorough knowledge of ventilation and timbering"?—I think that is a very necessary provision. We have had instances where men have walked into a mine without having seen the inside of a mine before, and where they have been allowed to carry these lamps, which was a dangerous proceeding to all concerned. Such men can know practically nothing about air, and we think they should go through this examination so that they should know. There have been times in my life when I have