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A.W.U. ASKS FOR DEPARTMENTAL INSPECTION AT WITTENOOM

Says Workers' Health Endangered by Dust in Asbestos Mill

FIBRE CAUSES POWER UNIT TO FAIL; MEN NOT COVERED BY COMPENSATION

THE MINING DIVISION OF THE AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION HAS ASKED THE STATE MINING ENGINEER, MR. FOXALL, TO HAVE AN INSPECTION OF THE MILL AT THE WITTENOOM GORGE ASBESTOS MINES, IN THE HARMESLEY RANGES.

Announcing this yesterday, the secretary, Mr. C. T. Oliver, said the union was concerned with the danger to the health of the workers. In the mill, a large power unit had ceased to work when fine asbestos fibre was drawn into the engine.

Discussing conditions generally at Wittenoom, Mr. Oliver said that surroundings were pleasant, and there was plenty of water. However, accommodation was limited. Houses were provided for the staff, but the wages employees were housed in tents and barracks. A township was planned seven miles from the mines, but only one house had been built and several were under construction. Working conditions in the mine were fairly good, but the low back, which averaged only 5 ft., made mining conditions difficult.

No Dust Counts Taken
Mr. Oliver said the union had asked the State Mining Engineer, Mr. Foxall, to have an inspection of plant conditions at Wittenoom. He said he was aware that the ventilation inspector, Mr. J. Lloyd, had made an inspection in January last, but the union believed that at that time the mill was closed and under repair, and for this reason dust counts could not be taken.

"However, the union feels it is not necessary to have the mill in operation for a proper appreciation of the amount of dust created during milling operations," Mr. Oliver said. "Everything about the mill is laden with a thick coating of dust."

"A large power unit failed because fine asbestos fibres were breathed into the engine and blocked the oil screen. I saw evi-

dence of this, and I feel it adequately emphasises the dangers to which the mill workers are subjected."

"When the mill is operating, heavy clouds of dust drift through the plant, including the engine room, fitting shop and offices. The whole atmosphere about the plant is dust-laden. There is no doubt that the health of workers in this section is exposed to serious danger."

No Compensation Risk

Mr. Oliver said the union objected to a Diesel locomotive being worked in dead ends underground in baggage work.

He said the union also took strong exception to men being engaged in Perth for work at Wittenoom Gorge on the authority of a provisional certificate.

He pointed out that these workers were not protected by the third schedule of the Workers' Compensation Act or by the Mine Workers' Relief Act.

The union thought that workers engaged in Perth could be X-rayed at the Perth Public Hospital. These facilities should be used by employers engaging labour for Wittenoom Gorge.

Mr. Oliver said that when he was at Wittenoom Gorge recently, 57 out of 117 men were employed on the authority of a provisional ticket.

PENGAD-Byronne, N. J.

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