

THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY IN MINING.

Editor The Canadian Mining Journal.

Sir,—In your issues of 1st and 15th inst., you deal with the eight-hour day applied to mining.

In considering this question it is important to understand thoroughly that metal mining is the business of extracting metals from their ores and making them marketable at a profit. In accomplishing this, we must also bear in mind the professional and trade relationship that must necessarily exist between the human factor and the economic factor.

We have not only to extract metals from their ores at a profit and make them ready for market, but we must also conduct the various operations of exploration, mining, ore treatment, etc., in a thoroughly safe and workmanlike manner. We have, therefore, to consider the economic feature on the one hand, and the quality of work and the ease and comfort with which it is performed by the individuals in the industry, on the other.

You observe that "if the eight-hour day entails loss upon mine owners, and if the change brings a diminution of output the mine-owners are amply justified in demanding full consideration of their rights" (namely, the retention of a longer day than an eight-hour day). This contention is not sound.

Mining is (barring the discovery of an orebody) practically an uncompetitive business. The forces and the agencies of nature place orebodies in certain places for our exploitation. If an orebody is a profitable mining venture it usually has sufficient metal content within a given area to warrant its extraction regardless of an eight or ten-hour day and regardless of twenty-five cents per hour or thirty cents per hour paid to workmen. There is an irreducible minimum metal content in a commercial orebody which it will pay the industry to recognize. This metal content is such that neither an eight, nine or ten-hour day, or twenty-five or thirty-two and a half cent per hour wage will substantially alter the profit resulting therefrom.

Any vein or formation indicating ore which does not contain this minimum volume of metal, which makes it a mineable venture, is not worth bothering about under a day of any number of hours or a wage of any number of cents—within certain fixed limits. It is, therefore, not worth mining at all, and only worth a certain amount of exploration to prove its unprofitableness. The fact that many companies or individuals will mine any old orebody is no valid argument that the trained employees of an industry should be compelled to work ten hours per day or nine hours per day, or even eight hours per day, to justify the misjudgment of an operator.

Your first editorial deals largely with a letter written by the Cobalt mine managers to Mr. Price, Mining Commissioner. Before discussing this editorial more closely let us look for a moment at the eight-hour principle as applied to metal mining. This eight-hour day has been universally adopted in the Australian States. It has been adopted in many States of Western America, and in other places, and, where adopted, this statement is axiomatic: "That where the tradesmen engaged in mining are properly and systematically trained to their business and working under a systematized eight-hour day the costs of production on given orebodies are lower and the metal content recovered higher than under any other circumstance, always understanding that the human units and the mechanical units of the trade must be given certain irreducible minimum considerations in the form of fixed wages,

fixed hours of work, and fixed compensation for injury." When we have appreciated this we are forced to agree with the editor of The Canadian Mining Journal when he says that in "principle the eight-hour day is sound."

In your editorial of Oct. 1st you note that the mine managers of Cobalt claim that the Cobalt miners are well paid, better, indeed, than any other mining region of Canada. This may be true, or it may not be true. Relatively, it is a matter of little importance, because mining is not concerned, primarily, with the rate of pay that miners receive, but the volume of profit that results from industrial mining. It is hard to follow the statement that miners would lose from fifty to sixty-five cents per day if the work-day be reduced to eight hours. It is not manifestly unfair for a man to demand the same remuneration for eight hours as he receives for ten. The remuneration should depend entirely upon the production per man employed.

The statement that the cost of prospecting and working unproductive claims renders the final cost of silver generally above the market value has nothing whatever to do with the exploitation of the orebody and, therefore, cannot enter into the merits or demerits of an eight-hour day. If individuals will explore ground (the result of which are doomed to failure from the outset) they cannot demand recognition from a systematized industry. Territory which has been explored and has failed to disclose profitable orebodies will, however, have to be considered, and will be a properly borne charge upon the existing profitable industry. But it cannot be accorded other labor considerations than those given to profitable territory.

Severe climatic conditions are the very best reason for considering to a great extent the human element in the industry.

The sixth point taken up by the mine managers, that underground work is not injurious to miners' health is not in accordance with established facts anywhere. Mining is not the most healthful of occupations. The powder gases, dust from machine drilling, and the other disabilities, such as water, etc., which miners are compelled constantly to work in contact with, are reasons why they should be well paid and not worked too long at any one period. Their occupation (statistics to the contrary notwithstanding) is always dangerous, hence the recognized higher rates of pay than many other callings.

The seventh reason taken up in your editorial is the real reason for an eight-hour day. Mining labor in Northern Ontario is probably not so well organized as in the Western States, and, therefore, mining is conducted not so economically as in the Western States, and, therefore, miners of Ontario are compelled to work longer hours through lack of experience in their trade and through lack of systematization in their work.

For an eight-hour day to be successful every man employed upon a mine must be thoroughly trained and thoroughly systematized as to his work. Mine managers themselves, their deputies or foremen, are those who are responsible for the proper training and selection of their workmen; the manager and engineer are the men responsible for the proper systematization of their effort. Given skill and given systematization, the eight-hour day, wherever applied in metal mining, is a more profitable day to the owner and a more humane day to the employee than any longer day still used. Generally speaking, where metal mining is conducted by a nine or ten-hour day, there is the clearest