

8 hour day report already mentioned, find that the health and physique of coal miners in Great Britain compares favorably with that of other workpeople, although the 8 hour law was in fact adopted there. The best information I have been able to get shows metalliferous mines as a class to be generally less healthful than coal mines.

The prevailing view expressed in the reports received from the inspectors and other officials of British Columbia and the Western States, is that in their opinion underground work is more injurious to the health than surface work, and that there are special reasons why underground men should have shorter hours than other workmen. The 8 hour mining laws, as a rule at least, seem to be based upon that assumption, some of the United States statutes specifically so declaring. I am not unmindful in considering the above reports that officials will naturally be disposed to favor their own law, and that the employers whose opinions they refer to in support of the law may not feel disposed to complain of what they cannot help; nor do I forget that the exigency of the situation in the United States from a constitutional point of view may have something to do with the legislative declarations as to the injuriousness and danger of underground employment. Neither do I neglect what is said by the mine managers here, which I think is to a great extent true, that men after getting used to working underground prefer that to surface work; but higher wages and a certain fascination about it, and a sense of pride or dignity in having attained to a higher or more important stage in the mining occupation, probably account largely for the preference. Whatever the reason may be such a preference is not incompatible with the statement that the occupation is in fact unhealthy and injurious.

Undoubtedly the air in mines even under favorable conditions is not as good as ordinary air. It contains a smaller percentage of oxygen (especially where hydraulic air is used), is more or less laden with dust or small particles of rock or mineral and with powder gas—the prevalence of which, however, varies very greatly in different cases—and as natural ventilation is always poor other impurities also are pretty sure to be present. There is besides usually more or less water or dampness underground, though our inspectors say that as a class the Ontario mines would be considered dry in comparison with others. Working under these conditions, and always by artificial light, I think cannot reasonably be contended to be as good for the worker as working under ordinary conditions, and the element of danger may add something to the burden. It is estimated that 80 per cent. of the underground men are under 40 years of age and 90 per cent. under 50.

Upon consideration of everything I have been able to gather I think the conclusion must be that working underground is unhealthy and injurious, though not at all to as great an extent as is claimed by a number of the men or as is ordinarily believed by persons unfamiliar with mining conditions.

Some of the statements put forward as arguments for or against the law are not relevant. That the workmen have among them persons who favor the law upon grounds that do not commend themselves to the general community, or that they have in their ranks or in the organization to which a number of them belong, individuals who are not a credit to them, should not condemn their case if it is in fact meritorious; though I think the importance to any body of men of so controlling their members as to maintain public opinion upon their side can hardly be over-estimated. I should be sorry on the other hand to see any law put in force for no better reason than that those upon whom it may be assumed to be a burden are making large profits and are well able to bear it, even where that is the case.