

Britain's Coal Production

(By F. W. GRAY, Canadian Mining Journal)

Bolchew Vaughan's annual meeting elicited some figures regarding this company's Durham coal mines which go far to explain the stand pat of attitude of the British Government in the coal mines question.

Comparing 1914 with 1920, it will be seen that there is an increase in the number of men employed, a decrease in the tonnage of coal produced, a doubling of wages paid, a trebling of the ton cost of coal and no reduction in the quantity of coal consumed for colliery and domestic purposes. The figures, condensed and re-arranged from the remarks of the Chairman, are as follows:

	1914	1920
Number of workmen . . .	8,844	9,487
Annual wages	£735,236	£1,589,036
Average annual wage . .	£83.2s.8d.	£167.10s.6d.
Tons raised	2,320,410	1,616,233
Tons Saleable	2,137,832	1,426,135
Boiler and domestic coal .	182,578	190,098
Percent of output consumed	7.9 p.c.	12 p.c.
Tons raised per man . . .	262	170
Wages cost per ton raised .	6s.4.04d.	19s.8d.

It would be interesting to know the number of men employed in actually mining coal in 1920 as compared with those so employed in 1914. The presumption is that this class of workers must have been decreased, otherwise the great falling off in output is not explainable. Neither is it easy to conceive of a balancing of the working forces that would permit of a drop in production of 30 percent with the workers increased by 7 1/4 percent.

The steadily mounting cost of overhead expense is illustrated by the item of boiler and domestic coal, which is not decreased by reason of the decreased out-put, and naturally has its percentage to the total production much increased. A slightly less than eight percent consumption of the coal produced for power raising and workmen's coal indicates a fair amount of economy in this inescapable item of colliery cost, but twelve per cent is a deplorable large proportion of the coal produced to be allotted to "company's consumption".

The tons raised per man, allowing only five working days weekly, only works out to 0.65 tons per man per day, which by comparison with transatlantic standards is a shockingly low rate of production.

The increase in cost per ton, and the increase in the rate of wages, while sufficiently serious, is merely incidental and secondary to the decreased output of coal.

No stronger arguments than the foregoing figures are needed to support the contention of the British Government that any future increases in wages must be contingent on an increased production of coal, which is what the "datum line" proposal really boils down to.

To illustrate the handicap under which the British coal operator now labors, as compared with the United States producer of coal, the following comparison is submitted as being approximately typical of the relative difference.

	Bolchew Vaughan's 1920 figures.	Typical United States bituminous colliery
Coal production . . . tons	1,600,000	1,600,000
Company's consumption	190,000	144,000
Saleable coal	1,410,000	1,456,000
Tons raised per man . . .	170x	650x
Workmen required	9,500	2,500
Wages cost per ton	\$5.00	\$2.00

x On a basis of 260 working days a year.

This comparison, which is only given as a rough approximation, indicates that the total cost of coal production per ton is probably in the United States less than one-third of what it is in Britain.

Add to all these advantages of the United States producer the exchange premium on U. S. funds, the infinitely greater tonnage of coal available in the United States, and its better physical quality, it would seem to be high time that British miners turned their thoughts from irresponsible discussions of the disposal of a hypothetical surplus from the controlled mining of coal in Britain, and from fine-spun theories that have been so fantastically intermingled with the thinking of the leaders of the British miners, to a consideration of the disastrous array of facts that analysis of the foregoing figures will reveal.

The leaders of the British miners have been leading them on a merry dance to commercial ruin, and the disposition of these men to meet the Government on a basis which will take primary cognisance of production, would indicate that some inkling of impending bankruptcy of the coal-mining industry has come home to them. Not inaccurately has Sir Robert Horne stated that the continued combination of increased wages and decreased production can end only in irredeemable ruin.

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