

From the HIKURANGI COAL COMPANY.

UNDERSTANDING that a proposal is being made to alter the Coal-mines Act *re* limiting hours of labour to eight from surface to surface, including crib-time, the Hikurangi Coal Company protests most strongly against the same, which, if adopted, would virtually mean seven hours' work daily. The cost of production would be increased, and the men would doubtless also demand higher pay-rates to compensate for lesser time worked. The result would be a rise in the price of coal, and a possible decrease in the output on account of competition with imported article. Kindly do your utmost to prevent proposed alteration from becoming law.

From the BLACKBALL COAL COMPANY (LIMITED).

29th July, 1902.

As the Coal-mines Act now reads it means that our miners' time starts the moment they enter the mine-mouth. It takes them twenty-five minutes to reach their respective places and the same time to return at conclusion of shift. This means that they only work seven hours. If the half-hour for meal-time is included in the eight hours the actual time worked is only six hours and a half, and if this applies to all underground labourers it would mean a loss to my company of £25 per week. I therefore, on behalf of my company, strongly protest against deleting the words "exclusive of meal-times" from clause 5 of the Mining Act of 1901.

My company has been working the mine for the past nine years endeavouring to make a dividend for its shareholders, who have never received a penny, though we have kept the miners going all the same; and now, adding to the former labour demands, wish to make a further set-back of some £1,300 per annum. This will have to be borne by the company, as it cannot be put on to the price of coal, seeing that it is regulated by the price at which Newcastle coal can be laid down in this colony.

It must be remembered that Australian miners are paid on the winning of saleable coal, whereas in this colony they are paid for everything, whether slack, dross, or otherwise, and, in addition, our miners are paid eight hours' wages for only seven hours' work. The tendency of increased labour legislation is simply to kill the industry and let in the foreign element.

From the TAUPIRI COAL-MINES COMPANY (LIMITED), Auckland.

THIS company strongly protests against the proposed alteration of the Coal-mines Act by limiting the hours of labour to eight from bank to bank, inclusive of crib-time. Such an amendment would mean to this company a reduction of one-fifteenth of the working-hours, as miners now work seven hours and a half, exclusive of crib-time. Assuming the labour conditions in respect of wages continued as at present, the enhanced cost of production would be 7 per cent. At present prices this would prove ruinous to the company; but, in addition, the earnings of miners working seven hours instead of seven and a half would be proportionately reduced, and they would demand an advanced hewing-rate as compensation. Apart from such demand, if the proposed alteration becomes law the company will have no alternative but to increase the price of coal, but at increased rate the output would be largely diminished, as the company would be unable to compete against the imported article, unless a heavy duty was imposed on such. Trust the Committee will report against alteration in the law, as the effects on this company would be disastrous.

From the NGUNGURU COAL COMPANY, Auckland.

THE proposed alteration in the Coal-mines Act fixing the hours of labour at eight from bank to bank, including crib-time, would so seriously affect the working of the Ngunguru Company's mine that it would certainly have to close down. Our profit is small. We cannot advance the price of our coal, as we have to compete with the imported article, so if the State desires to ruin the company by passing such legislation they will effect that result. My directors trust such unreasonable and ruinous legislation will not be enacted. For the workers' interest it should not. There is no complaint from miners.

From the NEW ZEALAND MINES TRUST (LIMITED).

Auckland, 30th July, 1902.

IN addition to the copies of letters issued to the Mines Committee by the Mine-owners' Association giving certain arguments against proposed amendments, I would like to point out still further that the proposed clause making miners' shifts of eight hours count from bank to bank is really diametrically opposed to the conclusion arrived at by the Arbitration Court after a long and critical examination of the position of the mining industry in the North Island. You will remember that the general tenor of the reasons of the Court for not granting any rise in wages was because the industry could not stand it. Last year, practically immediately after the arbitration award, the bank-to-bank proposal was brought forward in the House and rejected, some regard, I presume, being given to the fact that the mines could not pay the increased cost. I might mention that under the bank-to-bank system nearly one hour per shift would be lost in a big mine at every change of shift, because in going underground, say, at 8 o'clock, no man would start to go down till the clock struck, and in sending down two hundred and fifty or three hundred men fully half an hour would be occupied. At the end of the shift every man would require to be out by 4 o'clock, so that each miner would throw down his tools at half-past 3 to be on hand at the chambers and in readiness to be sent up before 4 o'clock. This sort of thing three times per day occupies three hours out of twenty-four, or 12½ per cent. of the whole working-time, during which all driving, ore-breaking, or ore-winding is absolutely suspended.