

in any way injure a workman physically. Practically the whole question of healthy mining conditions is governed by efficient ventilation. The workman travels to and from his work underground, on the main haulage or travelling roads, in the pure main intake air-currents, which are not vitiated. In fact, the conditions are more congenial than those experienced in a varied way by workmen travelling above ground to and from other employments. To further limit the working-time will tend to indiscriminate and careless hewing of coal, and the filling-away of such coal in a less clean condition than now, with a consequent market-value depreciation and increased cost. Likewise greater hurry to obtain certain wage-results, and thus increasing liability to accident; and anything tending in this latter direction should certainly not be favoured. I submit that the limit of a man's productiveness—that is, without abortive effort—has been reached by the seven hours and a half working-time, which has for some years been in vogue, and without the slightest physical impairment of a workman being recorded, or chargeable to having worked continuously and given effect to the hours stated, and the other conditions attached thereto. To further shorten the hours will decrease a miner's earning-power, and where paid by contract his earnings would proportionately diminish, and where paid wages the employer would not be justly recouped if compelled to pay present rates for lessened amount of work. If the wages now paid are a fair equivalent for work performed in a stated time, then it appears a *sine qua non* that a reduction of rates and wages should accompany reduction in working-time. The commercial aspect requires grave consideration. We are faced with an ever-increasing import of coal from New South Wales (as proved by attached statement of extracts), which coal is mined much more cheaply than can be done in this colony, for certain important reasons, two of which are (a) much more favourable natural conditions in New South Wales as against the natural conditions of the West Coast coalfields, the adverse characteristics of which latter are unfavourable to competitive development and exploitation; (b) the New South Wales mines have a marked advantage in the matter of wages paid. The present rates paid in Pelaw Main and Hebburn, two of the largest mines in the new coalfields, New South Wales, are much below those paid by the Westport Coal Company (extracted from awards ruling at each place):—

Coal hewn and filled away altogether.

	Hebburn and Pelaw Main.	Westport Coal Company.
Solid rates ...	2s. per ton.	2s. 4d. per ton, or 17 per cent. increase.
Top coal ...	1s. 6d. per ton.	1s. 11d. " " 28 " "

The Hebburn and Pelaw Main seams do not produce more than 25 per cent. of small coal, whilst the seam worked by the Westport Coal Company yields not less than 50 per cent. of small coal. It is therefore patent that the former have a marked advantage in this respect alone, as screened coal always has a higher market value than the small coal. The lower wages paid, and the fewer workmen required (proportionately) to deal with natural disabilities met with during exploitation, together with the extra yield of screened coal, enables the mines in the new coalfield of New South Wales to put coal into the market at prices we could not profitably look at under existing conditions.

Yardage Rates for Coal-hewing.

	Hebburn and Pelaw Main.	Westport Coal Company.
Under 9 in. wide ...	7s. 0d.	7s. 0d. : equal.
" 12 in. " ...	5s. 3d.	6s. 0d. : 14·3 per cent. increase.
" 15 in. " ...	3s. 6d.	5s. 0d. : 43 " "

Wages.

First-class shiftmen ...	9s. 6d.	10s. 6d. : 10½ " "
Second-class shiftmen ...	7s. 0d.	10s. 6d. : 50 " "
Wheeling or trucking ...	7s. 0d.	9s. 0d. : 28·7 " "
Labourers (not otherwise specified) ...	6s. 4d.	9s. 0d. : 42 " "
Miners (taken from face to other work)	9s. 6d.	12s. 0d. : 26·3 " "

The mines in the said new coalfield are favoured also by comparatively low traction-rates. Coal in owners' wagons is conveyed by the East Greta Coal Company over their private line from the different mines (Pelaw Main excepted) to the Government siding at 3d. per ton wayleave. This siding is twenty-two miles from the port of shipment at Newcastle, yet the Government, through the Railway Commissioners, haul the coal from this siding to the shipping-dyke, ship the coal, and return the empty wagons to said siding for 1s. 2d. per ton. On small coal for shipment a reduction of 10 per cent. is allowed. Pelaw Main proprietary have now a private line in operation to their own shipping wharves at Hexham, some ten miles from Newcastle. At said wharves they probably ship their coal under 3d. per ton all in. When their coal is hauled to Newcastle it will be shipped at less than 1s. per ton. It is patent from these facts that anything done by statutory enactment, or otherwise, to farther hamper the industry, by greater restriction of output and consequent increase of cost, must ultimately and assuredly result adversely to the worker. The commercial aspect should be equitably and seriously considered as having momentous bearing on the vital operations of any industry, and doubly so in connection with this, the colony's most important industry. The lower wages paid in New South Wales, as compared to those paid here, as also other natural advantages with the mines in the former place, should not be encouraged by legislation in this colony to the detriment of its own industrial life; and the trend of such proposed legislation is assuredly in that direction. There is no apparent legitimate reason why some 300,000 tons of coal should be annually dumped into this colony, and practically all the monetary return therefrom remain in New South Wales. The production of this quantity in our own colony would give direct employment to some 550 men and boys, and circulate between £60,000 and £70,000 sterling in connection with its immediate production, apart from wages which would