

**MINERS & THE
EIGHT
HOURS MOVEMENT**

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Miners & the Eight Hours Movement by C. M. Percy

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C. M. PERCY

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*Combined
M. Assoc.* BY
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AUTHOR OF

“MINE RENTS & MINERAL ROYALTIES.”

WIGAN :

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1891.

DEDICATION.

TO THE MINERS
OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM
THESE LETTERS
ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND
AND WELL WISHER,

THE AUTHOR.

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P R E F A C E .

3-22-27/11/8

DURING the months of January and February, of the present year, a very important Conference was held in London, to consider the proposed Eight Hours Working Day in Mines. The Conference was a very large and representative one of Colliery Proprietors and Miners, and the proceedings excited great public interest.

note-book 28 March 1891

The letters constituting this Pamphlet appeared some of them during the Conference, and the remainder immediately after, and were widely read. Consenting to a general desire, they are now presented in this collective form, in the hope that they may be of some service in enabling the Miners in particular, and the public in general, to understand clearly what the Eight Hours proposal really means. Miners, I know, will be willing to read all that can be said for and against.

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A good deal has been made, or tried to be made, of the fact that in Northumberland and Durham the Coal Hewers do not now work so much as eight hours per day. Still, they are strenuously opposed to a compulsory Eight Hours Day in Mining. WHY? I will endeavour to supply the answer in the words of a very able Mining Contributor to a leading provincial journal (*Manchester Guardian*, Feb. 23rd, 1891.)

“They—Northumberland and Durham—work on the Double Shift System, *the pits drawing coals ten or eleven hours per day, only one shift of boys [and daywage men] who work ten hours per day, being thus necessary.* The Eight Hours Bill would put all boys and daywage men upon an Eight Hours Day, and one of two things would happen to Northumberland and Durham: either two shifts of boys [and daywage men] would have to be employed which *could mean a great increase in working expenses, resulting in a great reduction of wages and an increase of coal hewers’ hours,* or the double shift would have to be abandoned with the result of *throwing half the men employed in and about the mines out of employment, and of forcing those who remained to work eight hours in order that the thin seams of the district might compete with the thick seams of other districts.’*”

That would appear to very much accentuate my arguments that an Eight Hours Day in Mines would *increase cost of production, reduce wages, and operate unequally, therefore unfairly.*

I am glad to see an authoritative announcement by the First Lord of the Treasury that the Government have decided to appoint a Royal Commission upon all the questions affecting Capital and Labour, the hours of labour in Mines included. This is a decision that we can all approve. We want the fullest possible enquiry, *not hasty legislation.*

C. M. PERCY.

KING STREET, WIGAN,
2ND MARCH, 1891.

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

THE CONFERENCE—THE PROPOSALS BEFORE IT.

It is seldom that a Conference is held on which so much of really national importance hinges, as the representative assembly of Colliery Proprietors and Miners' Agents who met in London Jan. 21, to consider the proposal made by the men for an eight hours working day in mines. The proceedings were private, and the only knowledge furnished through the press is that the Conference was adjourned till February 11th.

The question being one which affects the welfare of the public, it will be well to state not only what the proposal is, but to shew what the effect will be if it becomes law, and also to present the arguments for and against.

It must be remembered that the proposal does not mean forty-eight working hours each week, but simply a maximum of eight hours in any one day.

I venture to write upon the measure having been directly associated with mining operations all my daily life, and having been identified with large numbers of the more intelligent of the working miners during a 23 years evening lectureship at our School of Mines in the Mining County of Lancashire.

Some 200,000 of the 600,000 miners of the United Kingdom have decided upon an eight hours working day either by Special Rule sanctioned by the Home Secretary or by Act of Parliament. Why a minority should have the hardihood to act as if it were the whole body, and why those miners who wish not only to maintain themselves from day to day, but desire to lay something by for their families should be debarred from doing so, will need a very able Miners' Agent to explain. Still a good many Members of Parliament have consented to support the demand. Probably in many cases such support has been somewhat hastily promised and without really grasping what this proposal really is.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF AN EIGHT HOURS DAY.

The arguments advanced by the leaders of the movement are:—

(1) That a lessening of the hours of labour will necessitate an increase in the number of persons employed and so reduce the numbers of the unemployed.

Such an argument is not appropriate at present because there is more work to be had in mining operations than workers, and even if it were otherwise we are scarcely called upon to so divide means of occupation as to find work for all the unemployed. There always will be a substantial proportion of the submerged tenth who by choice will remain unemployed.

(2) That the miners have not sufficient time for rest and recreation, and mental improvement.

It would not be difficult to produce statistics from every mining district in the United Kingdom shewing that the average miner does not now work so much as forty-eight hours per week, being one hour in three.

(3) That mining is an essentially unhealthy occupation.

The death rate apart from fatal accidents does not prove it and the strong and healthy appearance of the miners themselves refutes it. People who write about the unhealthiness evidently know nothing of modern mining. The air in mines is as pure as in the majority of mills and factories, and workshops. Improvements in machinery during the last half century enable us to pass through the workings of any colliery practically unlimited quantities of pure air. Miners are absolutely protected from the inclemency of the weather, and enjoy a more uniform temperature all the year round than the ordinary workman.

(4) That the character of the occupation produces great physical exhaustion.

How this can be is not easy to understand. The air they breathe is comparatively pure, and the manual exertion required is not to be compared with many other employments. Machinery, in so far as the haulage of material is concerned, to a very large extent does the heavy work of mining.

(5) That the occupation is especially dangerous and exceptionally so during the latter hours of the working day.

It is true that mining is a dangerous occupation, and as such commands a higher rate of wages, but statistics shew that a person underground in a mine, has less risk than a merchant seaman, whose remuneration is considerably less. Comparing railway servants with miners we find deaths per 10,000 railway servants 11·8; miners 19·1. Injured per 10,000 railway servants 272·2; miners 73·6. By increased care and skill, the dangers of mining have been reduced one half in thirty years, and are lessening daily. That accidents are more frequent at the end of the working day than the beginning is admitted by some and absolutely contradicted by others. Those who are inclined to admit this, say, that before work commences