

The night shift, more commonly known as the "dog watch," is abhorred by all miners, and is known to be an enemy to the health and vitality of the worker. It was unanimously agreed by the Commission that it was detrimental to the health of the worker under the most favourable conditions, and yet the majority did not feel disposed to recommend its abolition. According to the evidence men become very nervous on this shift, owing to the broken rest and the unnatural times at which they are compelled to take their meals, and consequently they are not in a fit state to exercise that care which mining demands in dealing with dangerous grounds and the use of explosives.

The night shift, especially when added to the contract system (which undoubtedly fosters the continuation of night shift and makes it more frequent), has a most injurious effect on a man's health, hence his constitution becomes run down and leaves the worker an easy victim to phthisis. Dr. Oliver said, "When a man is low in vitality it predisposes him to disease." We here quote Dr. Frazer-Hurst, of Waihi, who stated in evidence before the Commission—

My first experience with regard to accidents in Waihi was this: that I found almost in every case I underestimated the duration of a man's incapacity as compared with what I had been accustomed to regard as sufficient in other places. That was for two reasons: firstly, because the men did not seem to have the recuperative power that one might expect from that type of man; then, a man might be well enough to return to ordinary work, but he would not be fit to go back to a hazardous occupation such as mining, where other men's lives depend on his being well.

He further stated,—

My work in the Old Country brought me into touch with men in outdoor occupations, such as shipyards and docks, and there my impression was that the duration of an injury is shorter than it is here.

He also stated that boils and poisoned hands were very common here, which, he said, was usually a sign of lowered vitality. Then, in regard to this matter of lowered vitality he further said,—

One thing which has struck me forcibly in regard to that [lowered vitality] is the nervousness that one meets with in able-bodied men. It has occurred to me that the broken rest that a man on the shift system has to content himself with has something to do with it. They do not seem to get accustomed to a set hour for sleeping before it is changed again and they have another sleeping-time, and thus their rest is not always so complete. I think that also affects the women in the district. It has struck me while I have been in practice here how very neurotic they are, and I have put that down to the broken rest as well as to the anxiety in regard to accidents; that is the effect those things have upon their general health. Then, of course, the working at irregular hours causes digestive troubles, as does also the frequent alteration of the meal-times.

We also quote from an essay by Mr. McCombie, mine-manager, who received the third prize from the Government for his essay on "The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Mineral Resources of New Zealand, and the Best Means of Fostering their Development":—

*Night shift.*—Generally speaking, this shift begins at 12 midnight, and terminates at 8 a.m. It is variously termed the "dog watch" or the "graveyard shift," and it is cordially hated by every one who is unfortunate enough to come under its rule. Speaking from a long experience of the night shift, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that it is injurious to the health and well-being of those who have to work it, and it is not profitable to employers. Turning out at 11 p.m., after a restless sleep of a few hours, men are fit to undertake the duties of an ordinary miner, with its everpresent danger, and the work they perform is not up to the required standard either in quantity or quality. It is an indisputable fact that towards the end of a week spent on the night shift the average miner is scarcely able to drag one leg after the other, and he is working under protest all the time. When in this condition it is absurd to expect a man to do a fair eight-hours' "graft," or to protect himself from the risks incidental to his occupation. As a rule, there are more accidents in a mine on the night shift than is the case upon either of the other shifts, and I attribute this entirely to the fact that the victims of such accidents are so enervated through want of rest as to be incapable of taking ordinary precautions to save themselves. Of course, it is absolutely necessary to employ three shifts in a great many instances in connection with mining and milling gold- and silver-bearing ores, and in this respect it would be unreasonable to lay down a cast-iron rule for the guidance of mine-owners. At the same time I think the three-shift system is often carried out where it could be avoided to a very large extent, and it is a blot on our twentieth-century civilization to permit its continuance wherever it can be economically abolished.