

TABLE 33.—OUTPUT IN TONS PER MINER PER SHIFT WORKED.

Mine.						1913-14.	1917-18.	Increase.	Decrease.
								Cwt.	Cwt.
A	..	..	..	..	..	7.55½	7.55	..	..
B	..	..	..	..	..	5.6½	6.75	23	..
C	..	..	..	..	..	5.95	5.6	..	7
D	..	..	..	..	..	5.78	5.47	..	6
E	..	..	..	..	..	..	6.39	..	..
F	..	..	..	..	..	6.55	6.88	7	..
G	..	..	..	..	..	6.95	7.81	17	..
H	..	..	..	..	..	7.09	8.23	22	..
I	..	..	..	..	..	6.23 (1915-16)	7.92	34	..
J	..	..	..	..	..	5.5	5.25	..	5
K	..	..	..	..	..	4.38	4.25	..	2½
L	..	..	..	..	..	4.7	5.1	8	..
Unweighted average						6.015	6.43	8½	..

It is clear that increased output per miner per shift has in general been associated (though not necessarily as cause and effect) with any tendency to increased voluntary absence from work that may exist.

An appreciable degree of voluntary absence is a feature associated with coal-mining in all countries. It is a tradition or custom deeply rooted in the peculiar nature of the occupation, where men work deep underground for wages at a rate high enough to allow of a tolerable standard of comfort without incessant labour. It is, in our opinion, a result of the strain and disagreeableness of the work itself, and the opportunity for a certain amount of leisure offered by the comparatively high wages. Hotels, gambling, and races are not so much the causes of absenteeism as conditions favouring the easy operation of the real causes, and influencing a certain section of the mining population to spend their leisure in certain ways rather than in others. The misuse of leisure is as great among the general population as amongst miners as a body if we take account of differences in environment and the opportunities of using leisure. In a few mining-fields, where alternative methods of spending leisure are few, the prohibition of alcoholic liquors or horse-racing would probably lead to a slightly higher percentage of possible time being worked; but the average miner is convinced that he works sufficiently long and sufficiently hard, having due regard to his health and efficiency. Any considerable improvement in annual output per man must be looked for as the result of better training of the worker, better organization of labour within and without the mines, and a more intensive application of capital in the shape of machinery, &c., rather than from an extension of the number of shifts worked per year by the miner.

The amount of time lost per man per fortnight (eleven shifts) at the two largest mines in the Dominion during the year ending May, 1918, averaged 1.08 days in the one case for hewers, shift-men, truckers, and horse-drivers, and 1.99 days in the other for hewers, 1.12 for truckers and horse-drivers, and 1.32 for shift-men. At one mine 0.37 and at the other 0.38 days were lost during the three days immediately following pay-Saturday. As already indicated in Chapter I, section 5 (vii), however, figures of this nature afford no measure of the degree of absence through drink. The consumption of alcohol at certain mining settlements for which data was obtainable may be estimated approximately for the period 1913-18, averaged over the total population, as over 20 gallons of ale and beer per year, and a little under one case of wines and spirits. This is more than 100 per cent. higher than the corresponding consumption of the general population of the Dominion for the same period. But intemperance in mining communities, as among the general population, is confined to a certain section. With rising wages this section has undoubtedly spent more money of recent years on drink, and at the same time has been able to afford more time off.

Other causes of absence cannot be said to have shown any special change in their force during the war period. Accident and illness do not appear to have varied from the normal sufficiently to have caused any pronounced tendency to increased absence. The provisions of the Workers' Compensation Act that if incapacity from injury lasts less than seven days no compensation is payable, and that if it lasts less than fourteen days no compensation is payable in respect of the first seven days, were the subject of general complaint by mine owners and managers as tending to increase the time off in connection with minor injuries. This law dates from a time long before 1914, and, though it probably accounts for a part of the time voluntarily lost through injury, it cannot have had any effect in changing the amount of that time within the war period.