

Moreover, there seemed to be a special desire to have miners on the part of the military authorities, who stated on many occasions that miners made the best class of soldiers. They had been used to facing dangers all their lives in mine work. The nature of the employment had developed them and made them strong. They did not require so much training as people who joined from sedentary employments. Within the first eighteen months about a quarter of a million miners joined the colors—or, roughly, 25 per cent of the mine workers.

We found so many miners leaving the mines, there was serious danger that a falling output of coal would interfere with the engineering and munitions works. A very large number of elderly men who had previously been miners came back to the pits, and a large number of outside laborers came in. In addition, some thousands of miners who either broke down in training or were wounded were sent back. The military authorities did not, however, return any Class A men, and the districts managed to keep up output with the additional labor mentioned.

It was evidently the intention of the military authorities and employers that soldiers coming back into the mines and into munition work should be under military discipline and should wear the uniform and work at soldiers' pay. The miners in conference decided that they would insist that these men should have full civilian rights, that they should have to be members of the trade union, and that they should not be used as strike breakers. The government agreed to this line, and the soldiers returned to the mines are in the same position as other workers.

All members of the miners' union who have gone to the front have been kept in full membership without payment while there, and will be accepted back in good standing on their return. All those who have come into the mines from the outside have, of course, linked up with the unions. (The present situation is that in probably 95 per cent of the coal mines of Great Britain all persons connected with mining labor must be members of the organization.) In the majority of the branches of the miners' federation the payment of six-pence per year to the union secures funeral benefits to the miner, his wife and children. Because of the number of miners who joined the army, the deaths at the front have been exceptionally heavy, and death claims have been paid out in all cases. This has been a serious drain on the unions, but as there have been no serious or widespread strikes, they are financially stronger than they were prior to the war. Including those at the front, they number 800,000 miners—60,000 or 70,000 higher than before the war. But no less than three hundred thousand have joined the forces. Since the falling off of the export coal trade the output of the mines is, of course, considerably under that of normal times, not because the individual miner has turned out less, but because there are less men engaged.

Previous to the war, miners usually sent one or two of their sons to learn a trade outside the industry; since the war, all boys of a miner's

family, generally speaking, have gone to the pits or are working on the surface. In Scotland the boys go right to the coal base as drivers; in other parts they go as trapper boys or pony drivers. At all conferences the miners are in favor of raising the minimum age to fifteen and sixteen, but during the war this has not been possible.

There are no women underground in any part of Great Britain, as was the case in the middle of the last century; but on the surface, in Lancashire and Scotland, there has been an increase since the war in the number of women employed to take the places of men and boys in clearing and manipulating coal on the surface. We insist that these women or young girls receive the same wages paid to the men or boys whose work they are doing, and in our last claim for an increase in wages the women got the full increase of nine shillings per week, secured by the men. In nearly all the mining districts outside of Lancashire and Scotland the mine workers object strongly to their women being employed about the mines. If it had not been for the war, the probability is that a strong movement would have been set afoot to have female labor abolished even in Lancashire and Scotland. The question of the women being competitors of the men has not entered in. By insisting on the same wages for the same work we eliminate that. The miners do not think it is suitable work for the future mothers of the race. It is in many cases dirty and hard work. The women who have come to mining work since the war broke out will, in all probability, leave it—after things have settled down. Under reconstruction, if it is seriously gone into in the nation's interest, many channels of employment will open up, and make the pressure on them to earn in this way less severe.

Reconstruction as the Miners See It

I have probably a more unique opportunity for testing the views of the organized workers of the country than most people because I have spent the last three years in addressing mass meetings in every corner of England, Scotland and Wales. The majority of those meetings have been called under trade union auspices, and the chief matters dealt with have been the preservation by organized labor of the liberties which it has taken so many years to secure, and the furtherance of a greater after-the-war reconstruction movement, by which the land of Great Britain will be taken over from its present holders and used in the interests of the people; and mines, railways and workshops will be used for the production of commodities for use, and not merely to build up fortunes for the capitalist class. The miners' conferences are practically unanimously in favor of state ownership of the land and of replacing the people as food producers on land which is now unused. They are certainly determined that as far as in them lies the government shall not only continue in control of the mines, but extend that control to state ownership. The syndicalist idea of miners' working, managing and owning the mines has not a very deep hold