

## PETITION.

*To His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, the Speaker and the Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia :*

The petition of the Kaslo Board of Trade, humbly prayeth :—

That the amendment made to the Metalliferous Mines Inspection Act, commonly known as the Eight-Hour Day Amendment, be repealed, and that an Act be substituted therefor, in such terms as will constitute eight hours a standard day's work in all mining operations underground, but which will impose no penalties where, by mutual agreement between the employer and the employed, overtime is worked.

Your petitioners beg to submit for the consideration of your Honourable Body the following facts :—

1. That the Kaslo Board of Trade is the only Board of Trade within the limits of the Slocan Electoral Riding.

2. That in this Riding are located the mining camps of Sandon, Silvertown, Slocan City, McGuigan, Whitewater, Ainsworth, Lardo and Duncan, the camps which have produced nearly all the silver-lead ore so far mined in the Province.

3. That the commercial prosperity of the whole Riding, and particularly of Kaslo, is contingent upon the steady and vigorous prosecution of work in the mines.

4. That since the date at which the Eight-Hour Law (so called) came into effect, viz., June 1st, 1899, all of the large, and many of the small, mines of the Slocan Riding have been idle, or nearly so.

5. That the shipment of ores from the Riding has fallen from a total of 32,429 tons worth \$2,779,653, in the year 1898, to a total of 18,078 tons, worth \$1,522,642, in the year 1899 ; and that for the seven months, from June 1st to December 31st, the shipments have fallen from a total of 20,660 tons, worth \$1,675,222, in 1898, to a total of 4,904 tons, worth \$363,954, in 1899 ; and the number of men has been, we believe, for the period in question, less by one thousand than it would have been had the Eight-Hour Law not come into force.

6. That the effect of this diminution of output and employment has been, and is now, great distress among merchants, hotel men, those engaged in the building trades, manufacturing, transportation, and professional lines of business, all of which suffer in sympathy with the depression of the staple industry of the District.

7. That the utmost harmony and good-will existed between the miners and their employers up to the time of the enactment of this measure, and that complaints as to the condition of the mines, or as to the rate of wages, were seldom or never heard.

8. That the news of the passage of the measure in question by the Legislature was received in Slocan Riding with astonishment. There had never been any agitation in favour of such a change, no request for it, no mention of it.

Members of our Board, familiar with the whole history of political discussion on the platform and through the press in this District for the last ten years, declare that they never saw nor heard a suggestion put forward by anyone that such a change should be made.

We have, moreover, been informed that this amendment was brought before the Mining Committee of your Honourable House during the Session of 1899, and that that Committee, composed, presumably, of the members of the House best acquainted with the mining industry, and best qualified to judge of the expediency of proposed amendments, refused to report in favour of it.

9. That the rate of wages paid in the Slocan camp, prior to the passage of this amendment, was \$3.50 per day, which was a rate 50 cents per day higher than was paid in the neighbouring camps.

The mine owners naturally took the ground that they could not continue the high rate of pay for the shorter day, but they offered a rate of \$3 for the day of eight hours, which was a higher rate per hour than they had hitherto paid.

The miners, as naturally, were unwilling to suffer a reduction in pay on account of an enactment for which they had not asked, but which arbitrarily had been thrust upon them.

10. We beg to call special attention to this fact, that the mines of the Slocan camp are nearly all worked by means of tunnels. There are few deep shafts, and, as a rule, perfect ventilation.

It is admitted on all hands that men working in any part of a mine that was wet, or where the air was bad, have always had a shift of eight hours or less, or increased pay for such work.

This law, therefore, affords to men working in such places no relief, but compulsorily and arbitrarily shortens the shift of men working under surroundings that are unobjectionable.

11. We submit that in any case the eight-hour shift is no adequate guarantee against injury to the health of men. Eight hours is entirely too long for men to remain in workings where the air is foul; and the remedy for such a state of things where it exists is to be found in greater rigidity of inspection and a more vigorous enforcement of the law in regard to ventilation.

12. In tunnel mines that are well ventilated it cannot be pretended that labour is any more exhausting than are many kinds of outdoor employment, while the danger of accident and the exposure to extremes of temperature are much less. Men once accustomed to mining are unwilling to take outside work.

13. Hence, whether this enactment be regarded as a privilege extended to miners for their protection, or as a restriction intended to limit their wage-earning power, there is not, it seems to us, the slightest reason why it should be applied to miners any more than to men engaged in the construction of railways, to lumbermen, carpenters, or fishermen.

14. The mines of the Slocan camp are nearly all high up the mountains. The men employed cannot live in town nor establish homes within reach. The time between shifts can only be spent in the bunkhouses, where the means of recreation or enjoyment are limited.

No Sundays are kept at the mines, because the men are unwilling to have an idle day, nor would they be willing to submit at all to the shortening of the day, except for the notion that the owners can be compelled to pay as much for an eight as for a ten-hour day.

15. Your petitioners submit that whereas the miners were at first indifferent or opposed to this measure, they have since been by agitation, and by the persistent and strenuous efforts of the Western Federation of Miners, and to no small extent by coercion, gathered into unions, which unions are now demanding the retention and enforcement of this law, with at the same time the rate of wages formerly obtained for the ten-hour day. We submit that the Western Federation of Miners is an alien corporation, having its headquarters and the great bulk of its membership in a foreign country, and that its avowed and loudly declared purpose is to compel all mine owners and managers everywhere to submit unconditionally to its dictation, to work their mines subject to the inspection of its agents, and to dismiss from their employ all men not members of their organization.

We desire to call your attention to the history of this Society as, according to common report, it has been exemplified in portions of the neighbouring State of Idaho, where its membership has committed deeds of violence and crime, culminating in the destruction of mills and mining works by dynamite, and the murder of unoffending men.

That the laws and authority of that State were, in the Cœur d'Alene camps, set at defiance, and those districts are now, and have been for the last nine months, under martial law and garrisoned by United States troops, and are now, as a consequence, as we are informed, in the enjoyment of a period of peace and prosperity not known during the dictatorship of the Unions.

16. The Miners' Unions now existing in the Slocan camps have been organized on the same basis, have the same affiliation, the same principles, the same laws, the same objects as have those in the Cœur d'Alene camps, and many of the men who left that country, on account of their complicity in criminal acts, are supposed to have come into this District, and to be members of the Unions here.

17. The rate of wages offered by the mines of the Slocan is the same as is paid in the neighbouring camps of Nelson and Rossland (and for some classes of work a higher rate), and is a rate that would be accepted by men in this Province, by men from Eastern Canada, from the United States and from Great Britain. And it is only by the persistent efforts of the Unions, exerted in the form of persuasion, warning, threats and intimidation that such men have been kept out of the mines.

18. The advertisements of the Unions, warning men to stay away from the Slocan camps, have been circulated everywhere, some of those circulated in Eastern Canada containing the statement that it is contrary to the laws of British Columbia for men to come into the Province under a contract to perform labour. The agents of the Unions are on guard at every depôt and steamboat landing, watch every boat and train; labouring men travelling anywhere in the District are watched and followed and compelled to account for their movements. If intending to go to work in any mine which is not working in conformity with the demands of the Unions, the men are beset with persuasion and warning and intimidation, and where these are not successful they are assailed with foul abuse, and with thinly disguised threats of vengeance. And it has only been, we believe, for lack of provocation and lack of opportunity that so far actual conflict and violence have not occurred.

19. The threat has been plainly made and published in the local newspapers in the District that business or professional men showing lack of sympathy with the Unions will be marked for their displeasure. And prominent merchants have been waited upon by officers of the Unions and told that they were suspected of advising men to go to work in the mines, and that if this was proved against them the Miners' Unions could and would ruin them.

20. This system of espionage and terrorism is new to our experience as Canadians and business men, and it has reached a point in this District where it is intolerable. We consider that all combinations, either to force the rate of wages up or down, are against public policy, and should be, to the greatest possible extent, discouraged by law. But we hold that interference with the individual rights of men (who are not discriminated against by special Dominion or Provincial legislation) to seek employment where they please, and on such terms as they choose to accept, is an outrage that cannot be allowed in this country and, if persisted in, must inevitably lead to such deplorable results as have occurred in the Cœur d'Alene camps.

21. The Kaslo Board of Trade, about two months since, made an effort to bring about a settlement of the difficulty, and succeeded in getting together representatives of the owners and of the men in amicable conference. The result of this effort is now public property. At that meeting, it was stated in the presence of our delegates, that there was absolutely nothing in dispute except the rate of wages.

The mine owners made an offer to give the rate of wages asked for by the men for all classes of work except drilling, for which they would divide the difference of 50 cents per day that existed between them.

This offer of the mine owners we consider to have been liberal, and it was generally so considered by all disinterested people; and according to a published report that we have not seen contradicted, at a meeting of miners, called to consider this proposition, the vote stood 137 to 17 in favour of acceptance. Notwithstanding this vote, however, the proposition was not accepted by the Unions, but a counter proposition was made, viz., that they would accept the rate of \$3.25 only for drillers in stopes; all other drillers to get the full rate of \$3.50 per day; that representatives of the Miners' Union should be allowed to inspect the mines once a month; that mine owners should employ men only on the scale of competency given the men by the Unions, and that the agreement should be terminable upon thirty days' notice, conditions which were inserted contrary to the explicit understanding had at the joint meeting, that there was nothing except the rate of wages in dispute.

22. We believe that a change in the law in the direction we have suggested, which would simply be putting the eight-hour day on the same footing as the ten-hour day has hitherto been upon, would be satisfactory to the mine-owners, and to many of the miners, we believe to the great majority of the miners who are citizens of the country; that it would lead to an immediate settlement of the difficulty, and to resumption of work with the full rate of wages formerly paid.

23. We believe that in densely populated countries, where avenues for the employment of labour are few, the policy of lessening the hours of labour, with a view to giving employment to a larger number of people, may be justifiable. But in this Province, with its paucity of population and its plethora of natural wealth awaiting development, the very opposite is true; and that men of industry and thrift should not be debarred from the privilege of supplementing their ordinary earnings by the proceeds of overtime work.

24. At the same time, we believe that the establishment of eight hours as a standard day's work (which standard would be operative in all cases where a greater length of day was not specifically contracted for) would have a powerful moral effect in fixing that as the ordinary length of a shaft, so that after a few years, without apparent violence or injustice, and without a wanton and arbitrary interference with the right of contract and with the personal liberty that all men of mature age are supposed to have of regulating their own hours of labour, all of the good purposes that are contemplated by the advocates of the measure as it now stands, will be brought about.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Signed on behalf of the Kaslo Board of Trade :—

G. O. BUCHANAN,  
*President.*

O. A. SUTHERLAND,  
*Secretary.*

W. F. WHELLAMS,  
W. J. H. HOLMES,  
H. GIEGERICH,  
*Committee.*

---

VICTORIA, B.C. :

Printed by RICHARD WOLFENDEN, Printer to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty.  
1900.