

THE EXTENT OF CHILD LABOR IN THE ANTHRACITE COAL INDUSTRY¹

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The specific question proposed for discussion at this meeting is framed in the call recently issued by the National Civic Federation:

It is claimed on the one side that there are 12,000 boys under fourteen years of age in the anthracite coal breakers, whereas officials of the State of Pennsylvania, after investigating the matter, claim that there are not over 8,100 all told under sixteen, and that with only 760 of them is there any doubt about their being over fourteen—the age beyond which no attempt is made to prevent employment.

When any statement is made that seems to throw new light upon the condition of child labor in our country, it is incumbent upon every one interested to analyze that statement and the method by which it was obtained. For this reason the National Child Labor Committee cordially accepts the invitation to engage in this discussion, not for the purpose of confirming or disproving any statement, but in a candid endeavor to arrive at the facts.

In an address delivered by the speaker before the National Child Labor Committee at the second annual meeting in Philadelphia, December 7, 1905, is the following paragraph:

In every part of the region visited child labor was found to exist. No colliery has been visited in which children have not been found employed at ages prohibited by the law of the state. Various estimates have been given of the number of boys under fourteen and under sixteen years employed in and about the hard coal mines of Pennsylvania. The figures have ranged from 6,000 to 12,000 under fourteen years. All of these estimates are generalizations, based upon specific data which may, and may not, be

¹This paper was read at the meeting of the National Civic Federation, New York, December 12, 1908, and, in part, in the proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the National Child Labor Committee. It is, therefore, included in this volume.

sufficient. Our own estimates are based on the study of a number of boroughs believed to be typical of the region, and have been gathered in cooperation with school officials, mine officers, and other citizens interested in the moral aspects of our work. Without entering upon a detailed discussion of the statistics collected, it may be stated that we have estimated not less than 9,000 or 10,000 boys under fourteen years of age in the mines and breakers of the region, while the percentage in one borough investigated, if carried through the entire region, would give a total of 12,800. By the laws of the state no child under fourteen years of age may be employed at any labor about a coal mine.

Reference had previously been made to the extent of child labor in and about the hard coal mines in an article published under my signature in the *Outlook*, August 26, 1905, as follows:

Dr. Peter Roberts, in "The Anthracite Coal Communities," has estimated that there are in the anthracite region 6,400 boys under fourteen years of age employed in and about the mines. He based his estimate on the number found in "an area in which 4,131 persons wholly dependent upon the mines lived," and adds that "in other sections of the coal fields the evil of employing children under age in breakers and mines is worse than in our limited area." If the borough we are now studying were to be taken as a basis for such a generalization, the number of boys under fourteen years of age working in the anthracite coal industry would be 12,800 instead! The actual number lies probably between these two figures, but until some accurate method of determining the age of the children has been applied the exact number will never be known.

Possibly it is to one of these statements this call refers. It is doubtless to one of the above utterances the Honorable Chief of the Department of Mines refers in his anthracite report for 1905, in the following paragraph:

During the latter part of 1905 a man by the name of Lovejoy made a tour of the anthracite counties inquiring into the ages of boys employed at the mines. In blazing head-lines the daily papers published, on Mr. Lovejoy's authority, the statement that 10,000 boys were found at work in and about the breakers who were under the legal employment age of fourteen years. A newspaper reporter called my attention to this report, and asked if it was true. I answered that to the best of my knowledge it was not true; that it was a very extravagant statement. One of the district inspectors was also asked regarding the report, and he denied its accuracy, stating that in his opinion there were not more than 2,000 boys who were below the employment age, and even they had certificates from their parents or guardians to show that they were over fourteen.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Roderick was led by "blazing headlines" in "the daily papers" to print in his official report a direct charge of extravagant statement against one whose study of the subject had been entirely friendly and whose statements had never suggested either laxness or inefficiency in the inspection department. But we are confident that a frank discussion will remove any cause for misunderstanding, and the National Child Labor Committee welcomes this opportunity to explain its methods of investigation and of compiling estimates.

It should first be observed that the statement "in blazing headlines" was never made by my authority or the authority of the National Child Labor Committee that "10,000 boys were found at work in and about the breakers who were under the legal employment age of fourteen years." It was said, discussing the estimate made by Dr. Peter Roberts, "if the borough we are now studying were taken as a basis for such a generalization, the number of boys under fourteen years of age working in the anthracite coal industry would be 12,800." It was also specifically said in this same paper, "but until some accurate method of determining the age of the children has been applied, the exact number will never be known."

The Method of Computing.

The borough under consideration was one containing a population of 6,400, with between 2,300 and 2,400 people working in the mines; with a school population of 1,636, a school enrollment of 1,071, and an average attendance of 700. A list of eighty pupils who had left school under the legal age was taken and a personal investigation made of thirty-nine, who were found to range in age from 9 to 12 years, and who were working in the mines or breakers of the borough. In this same borough at one breaker twenty-two boys were interviewed at noon, all but two of whom acknowledged that they were under fourteen; while of the remaining two, one was found by the school record to be ten instead of fourteen, as he had claimed, while the other boy, fifteen years old, had been out of school and at work for more than six years. These boys were all provided with affidavits from their parents certifying that they were fourteen years old, and the outside foreman had pre-

viously expressed his belief that no boys under fourteen were employed.

Not desiring to rely on this personal canvass, a statement was secured from the borough superintendent of schools, a man who could have no interest in exaggerating the estimate and who was entirely friendly toward the mining companies of the borough and the mine inspector of his district. His estimate of the number of children employed in the coal breakers of the borough under fourteen years of age was as follows: 9 years old, 35; 10 years old, 40; 11 years old, 40; 12 years old, 45, and he thought that 40 more would be found between 12 and 14 years of age. This accounts for 200 of the 300 boys believed by mine superintendents and others familiar with the industry to be working in the breakers of that borough. Since 2,350 mine workers (the number estimated in this borough) is approximately one-sixty-fourth of the 153,000 mine workers estimated as employed in the entire region at that time, sixty-four times the 200 in this borough would make the 12,800 referred to.

But the investigation was not confined to this borough. Under-age children with fraudulent certificates were interviewed both at home and at work in many other parts of the coal region. Summaries from two other boroughs may indicate the general trend of the information secured.

The superintendent of schools in a borough of 25,000 population reported that the school enrollment was 3,450; that boys usually left school at 13 or 14, and that "300 at least" under 14 were at work in the breakers. This was in a community in which improved slate-picking machinery has been extensively introduced, and the demand for child labor greatly decreased. In another borough of 12,000 population the school superintendent said 600 boys under 14 working in the breakers would be a conservative estimate. (This borough, it will be observed, if taken as a basis for the entire region, would give a total of 18,000, while if the average for the three boroughs had been made the basis, the total would be 15,200.)

Later Testimony.

Similar estimates have been received from time to time from various localities in the anthracite region and for the purpose of securing data to estimate the effect of the act of 1905, portions of

which were declared unconstitutional, a letter was addressed in November to a number of borough and township school superintendents, and up to the present time the following replies have been received: The school superintendent of one borough, with a population of 6,000, with 900 enrolled in the public school, reports that boys usually leave school at ages ranging from 12 to 14, and that he believes 175 boys between 14 and 16 and 250 under 14 are employed in the mines and breakers of the borough. He also affirms that these boys have no certificates showing them to be 14 years old. Probably he does not regard the parent's affidavit as a certificate. The superintendent of schools in a borough of 18,000 population says that only about 1,840 of the 3,291 children of school age are in school and that the boys customarily drop out of school at 12 years of age to work, but gives no estimate of the number. Another superintendent of schools in a borough of 7,500 people, with 1,520 children between 6 and 16 years of age, of whom about 1,300 are in school, says that he assumes that 200 boys under 16 are employed in the mines and breakers, 50 of whom are under 14 in the breakers. In a borough of 15,000 population, with 4,000 mine workers, the superintendent of schools estimates 200 boys under 16 in the mines and breakers, but says the number under 14 is small. The superintendent of schools in a township of 15,181 population, in which the new child labor law was enforced even after its constitutionality was denied, and in which 400 under-age children were added to the school rolls last year, estimates that not less than 100 boys under 14 are working in the breakers. These, he claims, are working without certificates proving their age. This is in a township in which, after several days' stay, we had found a much smaller number. In another borough of 18,000 population, with 3,050 children in the schools, the superintendent estimates that of the 3,800 people employed in the mines and breakers, 350 are under 16, while 200 are under 14 years of age. In making this estimate, he says "conditions right in the borough are not so bad." He then explains that 9 of the largest breakers are just outside the borough limits, and that the larger number of miners are employed in these; but the 300 includes only those who work in the mines and breakers within the borough limits. Less than six months ago he had estimated 1,000 boys residing in the borough who were work-

ing illegally in the collieries, whether within or outside the borough limits.

These, with the three boroughs above referred to, give 9, with definite replies from 7. Taking the replies from these seven boroughs which give definite estimates, we found an aggregate population of 90,083, a school enrollment of 14,993, a mining population of 25,000, or approximately one-sixth of the mine workers of the anthracite region, in which these school superintendents estimate not less than 2,460 boys are working under age with certificates based only on the unsupported affidavits of the parent.

A Reasonable Basis.

That this portion of the field constitutes a fair percentage as a basis for computation, and that this method is entirely justified, is evident from a comparison with methods pursued by the United States Bureau of Labor in its investigations. In the eighteenth annual report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1903, on "Cost of Living and Retail Prices of Food," a total is estimated on the basis of an investigation of 25,440 families, representing 124,108 persons, or one person in every 644 of the population; while we here have an estimate based upon one-sixth of the entire population concerned, or 100 times the foundation on which the government rests its report. If the same proportion of child labor prevailed in the entire region which is estimated here by these school superintendents, the total would be six times 2,460, or 14,760 boys working under age, with falsified certificates, in the mines and breakers of the region. It is not claimed and has never been claimed by this committee that the number of boys under age in the breakers is six times the 2,460 estimated by the school superintendents of these seven boroughs. The nearest approach to such a claim has been that if the same percentage prevailed throughout the region as found in these boroughs for which estimates were given by the school superintendents, the number in the *mines and breakers* would be not less than 10,000 or 12,000, but estimates of the number have been always accompanied by the contention that "until some accurate method of determining the age of children has been applied, the exact number will never be known." The school superintendents, the class of public officials most familiar with the children, com-

plain of the difficulty in determining the age of the children in default of accurate vital statistics, while the obstacles met by the mine inspectors have been clearly set forth in this report of Mr. Roderick.

Not Unfriendly.

The superintendent of schools in the borough estimating the largest percentage of child labor says the "mine inspector is a warm personal friend of mine, and is very vigilant in the borough. As soon as we get on track of any children in the borough working under age I report and he does the rest." This sentence expresses the attitude of many of these superintendents who have corresponded with us on the extent of child labor in the mines and breakers, and may well serve to indicate the spirit in which our work has been prosecuted. Having taken up the discussion in the *Woman's Home Companion*, September, 1906, of the prevalence of child labor in the anthracite field because of the defective law in Pennsylvania, I reported the results of an investigation made in April and May of the present year, and said:

Such instances do not reflect on the integrity or the ability of the mine inspectors. Each one is set to do the task of five or ten men, without even the arm of an enforceable law to support him. An inspector may be assigned to visit from fifteen to thirty mines, and frequently a mine will contain from forty to one hundred miles of gangways and headings, all of which should be carefully inspected for gas, loose overhanging slate, defective timbering and faulty ventilation. The thorough inspection of a large mine may require from five days to two weeks. It is requiring of a man nothing less than superhuman knowledge and ability to expect him to read at sight the ages of two or three hundred boys—especially in the face of legal documents which justify their presence.

This attitude is far removed from that suggested in the report of the Department of Mines for 1905, which says:

The general public by this most unreliable authority was asked to believe that through the neglect of the mine inspectors 10,000 children were allowed to work in and about the breakers in plain violation of the law.

Difficulties of Inspection.

The whole spirit of the work of the National Child Labor Committee has been friendly to the Department of Mine Inspection, and every spoken or written utterance on the subject has laid emphasis

on the difficulties attending the work of this department in view of the intolerable law now on the statute books of Pennsylvania governing child labor in the mines. This is admirably set forth in Mr. Roderick's report in the following words:

The difficult thing is to get at the correct ages of these boys, as at least seventy-five per cent of them were born in foreign countries. Besides this, the department has neither the time nor the money to spend in prosecuting the parents or guardians of these children. If the next legislature could be induced to appropriate about \$50,000 for this purpose, the department could enter proceedings to get at the true facts in the matter.

This is a clear admission, perhaps unintentional, of the inability of the Department of Mine Inspection to secure with the funds and laborers at its command an accurate census of child labor in the anthracite region, and no one would more sincerely approve this wise recommendation for an adequate and accurate investigation than the National Child Labor Committee. We should regard the published results as an inestimable aid in our efforts to arouse public sentiment on the subject. The report cites one case in point of a boy reported by Mr. Nearing, secretary of the Pennsylvania Child Labor Committee, as at work under the legal age in a coal breaker. The department took up the case at once, but the attorney for the boy's father presented an affidavit from the father that the boy was two years older than the parents had represented to the witness of the commonwealth. The report continues: "As the oath of the father would have more weight than the oath of the agent of the society, the department felt that it could do nothing else than drop the case and pay the attorney's fee and expenses."

A Startling Claim.

Yet in the face of this acknowledgment of the extreme difficulty in gathering reliable data, the department makes the remarkable statement that "the boys of doubtful age number a little over 9 per cent of the total number employed." The inspector found 760 boys of whose age they were in doubt, though the chief reports that "it is very probable, however, that many of the 760 classed as doubtful by the inspectors are over 14."

It has been the contention of the National Child Labor Committee from the beginning of its study of this field that the mine

inspectors have been hampered in their work by the fact that nearly all the boys have sworn certificates to their legal age for employment; by the fact that the records at the mines show all boys to be of proper age; by the fact that the visiting inspector is usually known to the boys, who are thus on their guard against any compromising confession; and also by the extent of the field to be covered. The department reports an average of 45 mines for every deputy inspector, which, as every one familiar with the industry try knows, would require superhuman speed and strength of every one of these 15 representatives of the state. In his report for 1903, Mr. Roderick criticises the law requiring every mine to be inspected at least every two months in these words: "This requirement defeats the very purpose of the act and reduces the inspector to a mere walking machine with time only to note the most trivial matters." Discussing the legal age of boy employees, this report says:

The law is emphatic in its requirement of properly attested certificates for children applying for employment, but unfortunately, under the present system no protection is afforded in cases where the age is falsely represented. The inspectors may frequently have doubts as to the eligibility of the boys who are given employment, but as the certificates have been accepted by the mine foremen, they are without authority to take action in the matter.

After referring to his demand that the companies should require certificates of all boys employed showing them to be 14 or 16, according as they were employed outside or inside, he says (report for 1903):

While the certificates attested to the ages fourteen or sixteen, it was evident that many of the boys were under that age.

Not only are the mine inspectors dependent upon the records of affidavits in the office of the mining companies and the statements of the boys themselves for information regarding the number under 16 years of age—for these records show none under 14—but every step they take toward preventing the employment of a boy of doubtful age must be taken in the face of a legal document, which is *prima facie* evidence of the employer's right to hire the child. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that only 760 children of doubtful age were found by that investigation. The Department of Mine Inspection is to be credited with commendable energy in

discovering even so many. But to grant that this is the total number would be quite another matter.

The Census Bulletin on Mines and Quarries for 1902, which reports 11,857 boys under 16, does not find any boys under 14 working (Table 7, page 14). The same Bulletin (Table 90) which shows an average of 3,822 boys employed under 16 above ground in the anthracite mines, does not find any boys under 16 below ground. Yet the commission appointed by President Roosevelt to arbitrate the coal strike of that year had no difficulty in finding that boys under 16 were employed in the mines and boys under 14 were employed outside in the breakers. These facts were not shown in the census for the obvious reason that the census collectors were dependent for information upon sources which could not furnish the facts discovered by the commission. No employer could have been expected to go through his file of work-certificates, which the state provides, and say "20, or 30, or 50 of these are based on false representation of age"; he would have been doing an injustice to his employees had he done so. This is no criticism of the census, but is intended to point out the wrong done by the state to the child, the parent, the employer, and the accuracy of the census by this defective law. And it would be as reasonable for the Director of the Census to come forward and affirm because his representatives found no boys under 14 in the breakers and no boys under 16 in the mines, that there were none, as for the chief of the Department of Mines to insist that only 760 boys of doubtful age are employed, because only that number were found.

While there is no way of determining the number of boys under any given age in the industry, the following figures from the last three annual reports of the Department of Mines will be instructive. The tables which classify the employees show for the kinds of labor in which boys are employed:

	1903.	1904.	1905.
Drivers and runners	11,252	11,607	12,069
Door-boys and helpers	3,067	3,173	3,284
Slate pickers (boys)	11,430	12,128	12,040
Slate pickers (men)	5,234	5,599	4,734

Excluding from this list the 4,734 slate pickers classed as men, it will be seen that the number of drivers, runners, door-boys, help-

ers and slate pickers (boys) in 1905 was 27,393. In view of the large number of young boys to be found in all these branches of the industry, and the fact that their age certificates are so untrustworthy, the estimates given by the school superintendents of the number of under-age boys employed do not appear exaggerated.

Sacrifice of Life Increases.

Despite the discrepancy in the figures given by the mine inspectors and the school superintendents of the mining boroughs, no doubt all agencies working for the protection of childhood and all federal and state officials will, without prejudice, unite in their effort to ascertain and present to the public an accurate estimate. But with the recommendation in the report for 1905 (Department of Mines, page x) for the "enactment of one law, making the employment age 14 years for boys employed in and about the anthracite and bituminous mines," we are compelled to take issue. The effect of the adoption of such a recommendation can be seen by a study of the menace to life and health in the coal industry. The report of this department for 1905 shows that the number of fatal accidents in that year was larger than in any of the past twenty-five years. This might reasonably have been expected from the increase in the industry, but the same report shows (page xxxvi) that the number of lives lost inside the mines *per thousand employed* was larger in 1905 than in any year since 1883 with the single exception of 1891, and the number lost outside was larger per thousand employed in each of the years 1903, 1904, and 1905, than in any year since 1880; while the entire number lost per thousand employed was larger in 1905 than in any year since 1880. The report also shows (page lviii) that with the single exception of 1895, there has been no year in the past eleven when so many lives were lost in proportion to the coal produced as in 1905. This is, indeed, a bad showing for an industry in which improvements in machinery and methods are constantly being made, and in which, even were there no humane motive, the financial loss of such fatalities would prompt the employers to extreme precaution. With improved machinery, better ventilation, electric lighting and electric haulage, the loss of life should be reduced to a minimum instead of constantly increasing.

Caused by Youth and Ignorance.

The cause of this sacrifice of life is revealed in this report, and is a positive confirmation of the need of such protection as we are urging. There were, according to Mr. Doderick's report, in 1905 16,774 slate pickers, 8,124 (48.4 per cent) of whom were under 16 years of age. Yet 75 per cent of the slate pickers killed were under 16. In other words, the average boy under 16 years in a coal breaker takes something over three times as much risk as the adult of losing his life.

The report offers two lines of explanation of this sacrifice of children: the first relates to child nature; the second to education. First, the report says (page xi):

The dangers that menace the boys in and about the anthracite breakers are perhaps more serious than those that menace the boys working inside the mines. If the boys tending doors in the mines would stay at their work they would be practically safe from danger, but when there is a slackness in the work they frequently run away from the doors, and when they hear the cars coming, in their haste to return to their post of duty, they are apt to fall and be run over, or they are so late in opening the doors that the cars come upon them before they get out of the way, and the result is often injury or loss of life to themselves or the drivers. The same observation will apply to boys in the breakers. If they could be compelled to remain at their working places when the breaker is running empty, instead of going about, they would incur very little danger. The fact is, however, that the minute the chutes are cleared the boys run loose, climb on top and over the safety guards, and frequently fall on or into the machinery, and are injured or killed. They also run and jump on moving cars, and in many other ways invite disaster. The management should impose the penalty of discharge upon a boy who leaves his work in the breaker or in the mine.

In other words, the breaker boy is surrounded with so many dangers that for his own protection he must be denied even a moment of respite in his eight- or nine-hour day bent over the coal chutes. The report recognizes that play is natural to a child of this age, but proposes its suppression by the immediate discharge of any boy who leaves his task for a moment.

Second, the report shows that the larger number of accidents are suffered by non-English-speaking people. During 1905, 130 English-speaking miners and laborers were killed inside the mines, while 326 non-English-speaking miners and laborers were killed.

"The department is unable to say," says Mr. Roderick (page xxxv), "what proportion of the employees in the mines are English-speaking persons, but it is evident that the fatalities among the employees designated as non-English speaking are largely in excess of their proportionate number. This is not surprising, however, and will continue to be the case until these people acquire sufficient knowledge of the English language to understand orders given by foremen, and thus be able to protect themselves in the performance of their duties."

With the record of this preponderance of accident and death falling to children and to non-English-speaking employees, it is difficult to harmonize Mr. Roderick's argument for a reduction of the age limit for employment in coal mines to 14 years. He says (page xi):

Under the present anthracite law great injustice in many instances is done to heads of large families, and more particularly to poor widows, by reason of their boys being prohibited from entering the mines until they are sixteen years of age. They are by this extreme enactment deprived of a natural and much-needed support. I am not, however, in accord with the bituminous law that makes the employment age twelve years. Both laws are radically wrong in this respect and should be amended on reasonable lines. In the anthracite region, as before stated, they bear unjustly upon the widows and heads of large families, and in the bituminous region they work injury to the boys by permitting them to go to work at too early an age. The bituminous workers contend, however, that the employment age should not be raised, for the reason that there is no employment for the boys in that region except inside of the mines. In my opinion there is no reason whatever for making any distinction between the ages of boys outside and inside the mines.

With the appeal for a uniform age standard in both fields we are in full accord, but from the recommendation that the employment age should be fixed at 14 years, it would seem that every person and agency interested in child protection must dissent. Not only has the report demonstrated that boys are more liable to injury than men because they are boys and lacking in prudence and the appreciation of danger, but also that the mine workers who have no knowledge of English fall easy victims to dangers of which they are ignorant. But how are these ignorant mine laborers "to acquire sufficient knowledge of the English language to understand orders given by foremen and thus to be able to protect themselves

in the performance of their duties," if they are to be permitted to enter the mines and breakers at 14 years of age, hundreds of them having never spent a year, or even a month, in a public school?

The Hazard Admitted.

That mining is a dangerous occupation is not denied. In the appellate court decision relative to the employment of children in coal mines in Illinois in 1904 (in the case of Struthers, plaintiff in error, *v. The People*), the court declared of the mine law in that state (page 4):

That employment in a coal mine is classed by the legislature among occupations dangerous to life, limbs and health. The title and every section of the act clearly shows it. Minute provision is made for the safety of employees from the moment they reach the shaft and enter the cage to descend to their work until they again reach the surface. It is recognized that danger lurks around them, descending and ascending, in roadways, rooms and entries; wherever they may be or go while in the mine; danger from breaking ropes, falling rocks, damp, dust, explosions, poisonous air and other things and conditions.

To this court declaration should now be added the following utterance from Mr. Roderick. In the report for 1905 he says:

The dangers that menace the boys in and about the anthracite breakers are perhaps more serious than those that menace boys working inside the mines.

From these two authoritative sources we have the strongest possible argument for the enactment of a law in Pennsylvania which would make 16 years the minimum age limit for employment in or about any mine, on the ground that "coal mining is an occupation dangerous to the life and limb of those employed therein." (Illinois court.)

If it were true, as the chief mine inspector affirms, that, "if a uniform law, with 14 years as a minimum, were passed, Pennsylvania would lead all other states and countries in practical and sensible protective legislation on this important question," then we would be constrained to say that other states and countries where coal mines are operated would sadly need reform. Fortunately the assertion is erroneous, for Illinois, Montana and Missouri forbid the employment of children under 16 in mines, while Arizona, Colorado,

Montana, Missouri and Utah limit the employment of children in mines to 8 hours in the 24. Austria forbids the employment in mines under 15 years, while both France and Germany, although not having a higher age limit for employment, require that all children employed shall have completed the common school course of education.

Every advance in the line of protective legislation carries with it the need for an increased corps of officers to enforce the will of the commonwealth. We have every reason to believe that the Department of Mines has done faithful and efficient work in Pennsylvania, but the magnitude of the field and the defectiveness of the law conspire to defeat all efforts. Let the law be so amended as to fix a reasonable age limit, accompanied by educational qualifications, and the requirement of proof of age. Then place at the disposal of the department funds sufficient to carry on its work, and we may hope to see a marked decrease in the sacrifice of children to the production of coal.