

The Toll from Toil: Miners' Phthisis in Bendigo, (Australia) 1880s – 1910

Dr Yolande Collins

Senior Lecturer in the History Program at La Trobe University, Australia.

Abstract

The forces of capital and labour in Bendigo responded to the miners' phthisis epidemic in predictably different ways. This paper briefly describes the responses of mine owners and managers, miners, and the growth of public awareness concerning the social consequences of miners' phthisis. Of particular interest to this study is the apparent impotence of the Bendigo Branch of the Amalgamated Miners' Association (AMA) to affect change in the late nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth century. It is argued that this was due to stiff opposition from powerful mine owners and the division in labour ranks caused by the 'tributing question', the practice of which was very different to Cornish practice and tended to impoverish those miners engaged in it.