

1916

[Antimony in] Bolivia

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FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Bolivia (By Joseph T. Singewald, Jr., and Benjamin LeRoy Miller).
—Antimony experienced one of the greatest “booms” known in the history of the metal during 1915, and this stimulated the dormant antimony mining industry of Bolivia to an extent unknown since the Russo-

Japanese war when the price of the metal soared. Whereas in 1914, the Bolivian exports of antimony were 186 metric tons, in 1915 they amounted to 17,923 metric tons. The exported product is hand-sorted stibnite with which is associated a little of the antimony ochre and ranges from 50 to 55 per cent. antimony. The chief producing centers are the Chuquiutu district and vicinity near Uncia; the country around Porco, the ores of which are brought to the railroad at Agua Castilla, a station on the Potosi branch of the Antofagasta and Bolivia Railroad; and the country around and to the south of Atocha, the present terminus of the line being built from Uyuni to the Argentine border to connect with the railroads of that country. During the middle of the year, the first mentioned district was producing at the rate of 15,000 quintals (1 quintal equals about 100 lb.) per month.

The antimony ores are found in the same general region in which the tin ores of Bolivia occur, but not in the same veins. They occur in separate veins, usually having the black Paleozoic shales that make up to such a large extent the eastern range of the Andes as wall rock. While the veins are comparatively narrow in most instances, the filling consists principally of stibnite, with subordinate amounts of quartz as the most abundant gangue mineral. In some cases the value of the ore is greatly depreciated by the presence of galena, in others it is enhanced by the presence of an appreciable gold content.

The mines are chiefly small crudely worked properties in the hands of the Indians who are financed by the purchasers of the ores. During the "boom" of the past year, the Indians searched the mountains for veins of antimony ore and on finding a promising prospect, brought samples to one of the staff of the larger tin mines of the region, a railroad contractor, or other such person. The latter then had the claims denounced and gave the Indian the privilege of working them, paying him so much per quintal for the ore delivered at the railroad. Many antimony mine owners never saw their mines. The price paid the Indians was about one-half the price received for the ore, so that the profits were large and many of the owners were making considerable money in this way simply because they had sufficient capital to wait a few months for the settlements on a shipment, whereas, the Indian lacking capital was forced to realize on his labor at once.

During the latter part of the year the demand for the ore slackened somewhat and the activity was not so great. These events demonstrated however, that Bolivia is capable of furnishing a considerable tonnage of antimony ore when there is an adequate demand.