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THE MONTH.

THE LABOUR SETTLEMENT AT ROSSLAND.

THE labour conference at Rossland which has so fortunately resulted in the re-opening of the mines of the district should become historical in the industrial history of the province. It terminated a long period of mutual distrust, it prevented a more than threatened outbreak of industrial war, and it set a valuable precedent for the settlement of difficult matters in the future. The first cause of the strained relations between labour and capital was unquestionably the eight-hour law. The conditions under which mining was carried on were suddenly changed. The mining companies felt they had been wronged, not so much by the adoption of the eight-hour system, but by the fact that it was sprung upon the country without warning or consideration. They felt as though a challenge had been issued to capital, and that the dictum had been pronounced that capital was to be completely ignored in the legislation of the province, that it was merely introduced into the province to be placed at the absolute disposal of elements, more ignorant perhaps than hostile, but, at all events sufficiently dangerous. The unrest thus engendered was intensified by the actions of a class of people the most malignant in modern life. Those who have nothing to gain save by fishing in muddy waters have a natural interest in stirring the waters up. Nor are such agitators

to be found only on the side of labour. They exist on both sides. Wild rumours flew about of dynamite destruction and violence and became so all-pervasive that the Rossland mines were paraded with police to the heartfelt astonishment of the working community. Every thing was ripe for a struggle of protracted duration, and much bitterness. The men on the other hand saw in the eight-hour law a tangible and valuable privilege. They saw losses credited to the eight-hour law which were obviously the result of grave defects in management. They have always protested that they were willing to meet the companies half way in mitigating the effects of the change of system upon the profits of capital, but they objected to the results of defective machinery and superintendence being charged to the eight-hour law. They saw nothing in the attitude of the companies save a bull-headed determination to have the eight-hour law erased from the statute book, or nullified in practical working. To say that the trouble in Rossland was caused by the desire of the companies to introduce the contract system is pretty much the same thing as saying that a flood is caused by a superabundance of water. It is true but it is insufficient either for a proper understanding of the trouble or a proper appreciation of the results of the settlement.

It is curious that the disturbance in the Slocan, caused by the introduction of a new system of hours, should have broken out over the question of wages, in Rossland over the method of payment, by piece or by time. But it is remarkable in both cases that the difficulty has been arranged at the expense of the men. In the Slocan they have to be content with a lower wage, in Rossland they have accepted the contract system which at first they bitterly opposed. That is to say, that the burden of the cost of the eight-hour law has fallen upon those whom it was presumed to benefit. Nor is it necessary to suppose that they have not received good value, or that they object to paying the price of their new privilege. But they have paid for it just the same. The amount paid for each foot of ground broken under the eight-hour law will not exceed either in the Slocan or Trail Creek the amount paid before the law came into force. By that it is not meant that the amount of work performed in eight hours is as great as that done in ten; but the pay will be less for the time worked unless the work is done at higher pressure. The value or extent of a day's labour cannot be altered by statute. If it is attempted there is a strain, a struggle, a temporary dislocation of business interests. Eventually the equation is arrived at with the same certainty, with which a stream of water, if it be dammed at one point, will find an outlet at another. In the Slocan the scale of wages was lowered, in Rossland the contract system