

British Columbia Electric Railway Employees' Wages Arbitrated and Reduced.

A new agreement as to wages and working conditions between the British Columbia Electric Ry. and its employes which was signed Sept. 4, is to run until six months after the cessation of the present war in Europe, with a minimum period of duration of six and a maximum period of 22 months. The basis of the agreement is the majority award of the arbitration board, made Aug. 25, which was accepted in its entirety by the company, with certain modifications subsequently made as a result of mediation of H. H. Stevens, M. P., and Dominion Fair Wage Officer McNiven.

The arbitration court consisted of Mr. Justice McDonald, chairman, appointed by the Dominion Government; A. C. McCandless, representing the company, and J. H. McVety representing the men. The board began its sittings July 19, and continued them from time to time until Aug. 13, the case for the company being put forward by W. G. Murrin, General Superintendent, and W. Saville, Chief Clerk, the men's case being presented by F. A. Hoover and W. Gates. The company desired to put in force a new schedule of wages making a reduction of 15% from that previously in force, upon the following grounds:—1. General business depression existing throughout the company's territory, which had led to an almost universal reduction of wages; 2. That the financial position of the company, owing to decreased business, made it unable to continue the old wage rate; 3. That if the rate of wages was determined by the cost of living, such cost had decreased since the last wage agreement was signed in 1913; 4. That the wages paid by the company were, in general, higher than those paid by other street railways; 5. That the wages paid had advanced 8% since 1913, because of the sliding scale, this increase coming in the face of decreased business; and in a general way the company argued that the rate of wages should depend upon the supply of and the demand for labor. The men submitted that there should not be any reduction, claiming that the wage scale which had prevailed could not be designated a living wage; that through the time of prosperity the wages should have been higher, and that the cost of living had increased since 1913.

The majority report, signed by the chairman and A. C. McCandless, goes fully into the questions coming before the board, and the evidence given upon them, and concludes as follows:—"The majority of the board feel satisfied that for the reasons stated we are warranted in recommending the adoption by the parties interested, of the agreement enclosed herewith containing reductions as shown by the wage schedule. After due consideration we trust that it will be deemed satisfactory to both sides. In the working conditions, the seniority clause remains intact. This protection, when coupled with efficiency, creates permanency of employment, more especially to those who, by length of service, have secured to themselves an advantageous position under this privilege. It appeared to us of even greater benefit at this time, when so many men are waiting to fill any vacancies that might exist in the service of the company. In fixing a rate of wages, we have not attempted to capitalize in dollars and cents the concessions above referred to, but have not overlooked their consideration. They have in the past, and doubtless will in the future weigh considerably with the employes, especially those having families dependent upon them. We have also, in making our recommendations,

borne in mind the permanency of employment that will be guaranteed to the employes by the execution of an agreement covering a definite period. In fixing the time during which we recommend the agreement to exist, we thought it well that it should expire within the same period of time as the current agreement. Various changes in the working conditions of the existing agreement were advocated by both sides. The 'seniority clause' was vigorously attacked by the company, and it was strongly contended that its operation interfered with the proper carrying on of the work, especially in the shop and barn department. This point was fully considered before the last board, and we see no reason to interfere with the decision then arrived at. The company then, as now, submitted that the practice infringed upon the principle of control that should be usually exercised, untrammelled, by the employer. What the company doubtless desired, was good results from the workmen. For that purpose, in order to safeguard the company, a clause was inserted and still remains, providing that the company has the absolute right of dismissal in case of inefficiency. The other matters in the working conditions considered were not of vital importance. We suggest some changes, but in the main we deem it advisable not to interfere to any extent with the arrangements that had already been in force between the parties for a lengthy period with little apparent friction. The Board unanimously recommends the adoption of the working conditions as changed."

The following is the wage schedule attached:—City and interurban lines, motormen and conductors shall receive per hour:

First year	26c
Second year	27½c
Third year	29c
Fourth year	30½c
After fourth year	32c

Motormen and conductors in work train service shall receive 1½c an hour in addition to the above rates.

[Editor's note: The previous wage scale for motormen and conductors on city lines was, per hour:

First year	27c
Second year	29c
Third year	31c
Fourth year	33c
After fourth year	35c

The reduction noted by a comparison of the old and new scale in this field of work runs, in general, throughout the entire revised scale.]

On interurban lines, being District 1, New Westminster, (Central Park) line, District 4, New Westminster (Burnaby Lake) line, and also on Saanich line per hour:

First year	27½c
Second year	29c
Third year	30½c
Fourth year	32c
After fourth year	33½c

Brake men, trolley men and baggagemen on these lines shall receive per hour:

For the first six months	25c
For the second six months	26c
For the second year	26½c
For the third year	27½c
For the fourth year and after	28½c

Shop and barn wages:

Car cleaners	25c
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Motor car repairers, armature winders helpers, blacksmith helpers, carpenters helpers, machinists' helpers and sawyers, per hour:

First year	26c
Second year	27½c
Third year	29c
Fourth year	30½c
After fourth year	32c
Freight car repairers	28c

Freight car repairers' helpers	25c
Freight car inspectors	30c
Painters	39c
Freight car and rough painters	29½c
Brush hands	26c
Carpenters	39c
Freight car carpenters	33c
Machinists	42½c
Babbiter	33½c
Trolley retriever repairer	35c
Blacksmiths	42½c
Car wire men	38c
Air brake fitters	38c
Armature winders, 1st class	42c
Armature winders, 2nd class	40c
Armature winders, 3rd class	38c

Leading hands, while so acting, to receive beyond regular pay, 3c extra per hour.

Apprentices:

First year	15c
Second year	18c
Third year	22c
Fourth year	27c

Freight shed department:

Checkers	28c
Truckers	26c

Maintenance of way men:

First nine months	24c
After nine months	25c
Track greasers	25c

Blacksmiths, same rate as shop blacksmiths.

Motormen:

First year	28½c
Second year	30c
Third year and after	31½c

Employees paid monthly, per month:

House light troublemen	\$87.50
Assistant house light troublemen	60.00
Baggage room men (Vancouver)	78.00
do., (New Westminster)	65.00
Teamsters	62.50
Interlocking tower men	60.00

The men's representative, J. H. McVety, submitted a minority report in which he gives reasons for dissenting from the majority report; and states why, in his opinion, the company's contentions should not be accepted, and concludes by recommending the continuance of the old agreement.

Between Aug. 26 and 29, meetings of the employes' unions in Vancouver, New Westminster and Victoria were held, at which the award was discussed and a ballot was taken Aug. 30, at which a large majority of the men voted against the acceptance of the majority report. On the following day a committee representing the men, waited on George Kidd, General Manager, and asked whether the company would put forward any concessions, so that they might be considered when the report on the ballot was made to the men. Mr. Kidd stated that the company had decided to accept the majority report in its entirety, and would not consider any concessions. Communications were then opened by the men with the officers of the International organization at Detroit, and it is said that they refused to lend the necessary endorsement and financial aid, without which a strike could not be declared and carried on.

On Aug. 31, the company's General Manager sent a letter to each employe, in which he said: "The award of the majority of the board is anything but satisfactory to the company, as we contended, and still contend, that we are entitled to a reduction of 15% on our total wage bill, and also to considerable relief from the onerous working conditions contained in the agreement which has now expired. Instead of obtaining the relief for which the company asked a reduction of about 8% on its total wage bill has been recommended, and the working conditions are practically unaltered. Under these circumstances the company would be justified in refusing to accept the award. Bearing in mind, however, the conditions prevailing in the province, and fully realizing the necessity of avoiding any trouble