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# The Monetary Times

Trade Review and Insurance Chronicle

39th Year—No. 12.

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IN ADVANCE.

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### IS ANOTHER COAL STRIKE IMMINENT?

The great strike of several years ago in the Pennsylvania coal mines which caused so much suffering amongst not only the miners themselves but amongst the consumers, who were compelled to pay exorbitant prices for what little coal was available for consumption, was finally terminated, as we all know, after a most bitter and prolonged struggle by a working agreement between the operators and miners. This agreement expires in April next, and, although it has apparently served its purpose, yet there are rumors emanating from the coal fields that another great strike is imminent.

Although it is said that these rumors are disseminated by the operators throughout the trade for the purpose of inducing dealers to increase their stocks of coal at the very high winter prices, and thus make an unusually high profit out of the several millions tons of surplus coal which is available for immediate consumption, and, although President Baer, of the Reading Railway, and President Mitchell, of the United Mine Workers' Association, have made reassuring statements, yet it is admitted that there are certain demands which the mine workers will insist on in April next.

In the first place they want an eight-hour day; and, although the majority of the miners do not now work longer than that, yet dealers say that insistence on this demand by the miners will cause the price of coal to advance at least fifty cents per ton. If this advance occurs it is probable that the consumer will take a hand in the fight, and probably compel the settling of this question by arbitration rather than disturb the operation of the mines for any great length of time.

Then, again, it is questionable whether or not a demand of this kind is a legal one in view of the recent decision by the Supreme Court of the United

States on the New York labor law, which was noted in our last week's edition. Apparently it is illegal for any body of men, be they organized as a trade union or as a State Legislature, to say that a man shall not work more than a given number of hours each day. It is against public policy to allow the personal freedom of the individual to be fettered by restricting his inalienable right to make whatever kind of a private contract he thinks advisable. However, in reality this practically could not be of much moment, because if the union says that one of its members shall only work eight hours a day, if he disobeys their mandate he will suffer materially from their displeasure.

Again, the miners will insist on the recognition of their union by the operators, while the operators say they will never submit to this; and it is this particular demand that may precipitate another strike in April next. It may seem rather absurd that the mine operators should be unwilling to recognize what we all know to be *de facto* true, namely, that such a union (the United Mine Workers' Union) really exists, but the recognition of the union involves much more serious consequences than would appear from the above. It involves the right of the union, once it is recognized by the operator, to negotiate as a union and not as individuals with the operators, and its right to insist on the operators making a binding agreement with the union as such in reference to points at issue, and it negatives the right of the operators to negotiate at all with the members of the union. The great advantage of this, of course, is that once an agreement is made with the union it can enforce the observance of that agreement equally on all its members, and thus be in complete control of the labor market; whereas if no such legal agreement existed between the operators and the union, the union could not compel its individual units to make contracts with the operators according to its regulations.