

## The Electrical Workers Strike in British Columbia.

The placing in jeopardy of so essential a public service as light, power and electric transportation by the action of a body of men who acknowledge no responsibility to the public, is a situation which should not be allowed to pass without a warning. An unprecedented state of affairs arose recently in Vancouver, due to the action of the operators of the British Columbia Electric Ry.'s power plants and substations in wilfully attempting to close down all electrical supply, as a means of enforcing their wage demands and other alleged grievances. The details of the actions which preceded the shutting off of power at midnight on Saturday, July 13, without notice being given to the company or the public, warrant full disclosure.

The agreement between the B.C. Electric Ry. Co., the Western Power Co. and the B.C. Telephone Co. respectively and the electrical workers expired on June 30. Previous to that the men laid a new agreement, embodying many drastic increases and changes, before these companies. The two first named offered the men increases of 10%, but they were refused. Accordingly a conciliation board under the Dominion Act was proposed, but the men refused, thereby necessitating the Dominion Government naming an arbitrator for them. The conciliation board was formed, but the electrical workers refused to recognize it.

In the meantime, an arbitration with the B.C. Electric Co.'s street railway men was going on, but its sessions did not close until June 28, and no time was left in which to bring down a decision before June 30. The men in both unions, decided to go on strike at midnight, July 1, in contravention of the law.

It is believed that the electrical workers fully intended that Vancouver and the surrounding country should have been left without light or power on their going on strike, but the Electrical Superintendent, and some seven or eight of his assistants, maintained the service in a score of substations scattered over the mainland. No inconvenience was occasioned, except by the absence of street car service, both because the street car men were on strike and because the handful of men could not keep the rotaries in operation.

On July 11, about 1.10 a.m., the company came to a settlement with the two unions, agreements were signed, and service was resumed the same day. It was believed that the matters had been finally settled, with the exception of one or two minor details, such as free transportation and a lighting rate concession, which had by consent been left to be adjusted later.

The astonishment of the whole district, the company's management included, may be imagined when it is stated that a few minutes after midnight on July 14, suddenly and without warning, all lights, power, street cars and interurban cars stopped. Thousands of persons were abroad at this hour. Street cars were loaded. Interurban cars were miles from their destinations. One car with 60 passengers and another with about 50 had set out from Vancouver for New Westminster. A train with 70 persons in it was stalled at New Westminster, unable to proceed along the Fraser Valley division. Other interurban cars were stalled on the Lulu Island and Burnaby lake lines, each with passengers in them.

The effect of the stoppage of light and power in hospitals and cold storage plants need not be emphasized. It is evident

that the men intended to make the tie-up complete, because not a switch was left in place in the main receiving station.

The Electrical Superintendent arrived there within a few minutes and found a large group of linemen and operators around the station. Luckily he had an electric torch in his automobile, for without it he would hardly have been able to make his way through the station. There was not a lantern left. The substation had been deserted.

All that it was possible to ascertain was that the operators had received orders from someone unknown, not the load dispatcher, to close down the plant. The operators at the Lake Buntzen hydro-electric plant were telephoned to and they threw off the machines there. All switches throughout the country were pulled, thus entailing a tremendous mechanical task to reinstate them.

Superintendent Newell immediately got in touch with Lake Buntzen and aroused the Superintendent there, who had retired for the night. Other engineers arrived and in 40 minutes the most of the city load had been picked up and an hour and a half later most of the railway lines were operated and cars able to proceed to the barns. Many of them finished their owl runs.

An attempt was made to arrive at the cause of the trouble, but communication with E. H. Morrison, business agent for the electrical workers, brought no coherent account. He intimated finally that they would not meet the company in any way unless the Electrical Superintendent was discharged. On Sunday morning Mr. Morrison called up and asked if this had been done, and when he was told that it had not, he refused to have further communication with the company. He mentioned that other unnamed officials would have to be discharged also.

The company understands, and it has been stated in the newspapers, that the men's union cabled to the directors of the company in London, Eng., demanding the dismissal of the Electrical Superintendent.

On Sunday, July 14, members of the board of trade and the mayor formed a committee to endeavor to bring about a settlement. Street cars were again tied up, owing both to the scarcity of current and to the refusal of the men to work while the electrical workers were on strike. A joint committee was formed, having on it several labor representatives, and the company laid its case before them.

The men demanded transportation and lighting concessions, and although it was pointed out that these had never come up, they were granted forthwith.

They alleged that 25 men had been dismissed in discriminating fashion and strike breakers kept on.

W. G. Murrin, Assistant General Manager, showed clearly that the men who had been laid off were linemen and groundmen, and were extra staff that had been working on special work, who the company expected to lay off several weeks since on the completion of the work. These men were laid off strictly according to the length of their service and not a single non-union lineman or groundman was in the company's employ.

The men demanded the dismissal of Mr. Newell, but it was pointed out that the 25 men had not been laid off by him, but by the foreman in the regular course of work. The company, however, agreed to

submit the case of the Electrical Superintendent to arbitration, while the electrical workers should go back.

This solution was accepted by the joint executive of electrical workers and street railway men, who promised to recommend it to their members. The street railway men met on Monday and car service was resumed the same afternoon. The electrical workers met on Monday night, but refused to carry out the recommendations of their executive and demanded the dismissal of the Superintendent immediately.

The arbitrary attitude of the electrical workers is without precedent in British Columbia, and they should be censured without exception, for their deliberate attempt to tie up the life of Vancouver and district when they shut down all electrical supply without warning on notice on the morning of July 14.

This has ceased to be a matter between the B.C. Electric Ry. and the employees. It is a matter for the public to settle, whether they will allow any person or body of persons to close down such essential services as electric light and power without a moment's notice and without responsibility for the consequences. The men may have the right to cease work, but they have not the right to tamper with the company's property, thereby inconveniencing thousands of persons and causing possible destruction of property, and perhaps death.

It is hard to see what good could have resulted from such action, which affected the public more than the company. The public is well aware who is to blame, and there is no disposition to saddle this disruption of public utility service on any but the men. Whatever grievances they might have had, they were not warranted for a moment in pulling the switches and plunging the country into darkness, without notice, but should have laid them before the company officers, when they would have been given fair consideration.

### Mainly About Electric Railway People.

**W. H. McAlooney**, of Halifax, N.S., and formerly Superintendent of Rolling Stock, Denver Tramways Co., Denver, Col., has been appointed Superintendent of Rolling Stock, Winnipeg Electric Ry., vice G. Garrett, resigned.

**James Anderson**, Vice President and Purchasing Agent, Sandwich, Windsor & Amherstburg Ry., who intended making a trip to the Pacific Coast some two months ago, and had to postpone it owing to his wife's illness, hopes to be able to go in the near future, as Mrs. Anderson, who has been in Wellesley Hospital, Toronto, for some weeks, is convalescing satisfactorily.

**Allan H. Royce**, of Toronto, Vice President, Toronto Suburban Ry., and Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian St. Ry. Association, from 1904 to 1907, who died in North Carolina, April 16, left an estate valued at \$305,854.86. It consisted of clothing and jewellery, \$100; book debts, \$75; mortgages, \$6,204.83; life insurance, \$10,000; cash, \$104,114.86; real estate, \$5,400; miscellaneous, \$75,000; agreements for sale of land, \$30,000. As there was no will, the estate will be divided among his mother and four brothers, one of whom is Lt.-Col. G. C. Royce, Secretary-Treasurer and General Manager, Toronto Suburban Ry.