

STEEL STRIKE AT SYDNEY

On the Orders of the Day:

Mr. J. S. WOODSWORTH (Centre Winnipeg): In the press of yesterday there appeared a despatch with regard to a steel strike at Sydney. I have information from the men that they applied for a board some weeks ago and were refused; that their members are being discriminated against because of their protest against a wage rate of 28 cents per hour, and that yesterday their active members were dismissed, the result being a spontaneous walk-out of workmen. Three thousand men are affected by this strike. Is it proposed that this board shall be granted? What further information can the government give us with regard to this industrial dispute?

Hon. JAMES MURDOCK (Minister of Labour): Some four weeks ago the first information the Labour department had of a possible strike in the steel works at Sydney was in a newspaper item stating that a board was to be asked for to investigate the question of the adoption of the eight-hour day, the check-off system, and an increase of 15 per cent in wages. The article stated that as the steel industry was not a public utility under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, a board would probably be denied by the Labour department. On the 31st day of January application for a board was made; it came to the Labour department on the third day of February. The workmen were advised at once that their application had been received and that we would ascertain from the officers of the British Empire Steel Corporation if they would be parties to the formation of a board. Yesterday the answer of the companies was received. It indicated the company would be unwilling to submit the question of the eight-hour day in the steel industry, to a board for investigation, as that matter had been dealt with in 1920 by a board, which unanimously indicated the belief that it would be impracticable to adopt an eight-hour day in the steel industry. The companies also stated that they would be unwilling to submit the question of the check-off system—which, in substance, means that the company would be required to collect the union dues of all workmen engaged in the steel plant—to a board, and that it would be inadvisable to submit to a board the question of an increase in wages, in view of the low price of steel products and the inability of the company, as it was stated, to make a profit instead of losses, wage increases were not possible. That information has been to-day conveyed to those who are now strikers at Sydney.

The information given the Labour department in regard to the actual strike is this: The day before yesterday an employee there, who thought he should be, for the time being, on account of the illness of a foreman, placed in the position of that foreman—threw some belts onto an idler, or in some other way interfered with the proper operation of the plant, and was promptly discharged therefor. The workers' union took the matter up and insisted on his immediate reinstatement, and when that was not granted they brought on a strike. The information received to-day is that the strike situation is serious indeed and that every effort is being made so to handicap the steel industry at Sydney as to cause—if they are successful in their undertakings—irreparable damage to the steel plant. I may say that is all the result of a campaign undertaken during the past few weeks in Sydney. For instance, I hold in my hand a newspaper containing a full-page advertisement; it is dated February third, but there were others in advance of this one. The advertisement reads:

Wanted!
1,000 Steel Workers
Who Have Courage
Not Fear
Who are Men, not Scabs
Who will demand
An Eight Hour Day,
15 per cent increase of Wages
Recognition of the Union
And Put it Through and Win a Victory
Are you with us, or Against Us?

The strike appears to be a part of the campaign of the Workers' Party of Canada, which to all intents and purposes is the same as the Communist Party, or the party in control of affairs, it is said, in Russia at the present time. That is the cause of the trouble as it has developed, and I may say that we have to-day advised the strikers at Sydney that they should not interfere with the protection and maintainance of the plant to the extent of causing great damage to the property of the Steel Company. That is the situation, briefly, existing for the past few days.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: May I ask, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order. I hope the hon. member does not rise to reply.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I wish just to ask a question.

Mr. SPEAKER: The hon. member has already put a question, but if his further question will be brief, he may ask it, by leave of the House.