

EDITORIAL

THE COBALT STRIKE—STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF LABOUR.

The "Journal" has received the following letter from the Minister of Labour:

Ottawa, Ontario,
Aug. 6th, 1919.

My Dear Sir:—

Some articles appearing in your Journal of July 30th, relating to the Cobalt Miners' strike, your editorial notes and a reproduction of an editorial which appeared in the Montreal "Gazette" have been drawn to my attention.

Do you not think that it would have been but fair to have printed along side the quoted editorial from the Montreal "Gazette" the official statement given out by this Department as to its connection with the Cobalt difficulty and the attempts made to bring about an adjustment of the dispute by conciliatory methods?

The reproduction of the editorial from the Montreal "Gazette" would lead your readers to an entirely incorrect impression as to the attitude of the Department and the Minister, and is quite misleading.

If consistent would be glad to have this erroneous impression corrected in your next issue, by making reference to the official statement given out by the Department which properly sets forth the facts.

Yours very truly,

G. W. ROBERTSON,
Minister of Labour.

Editor, Canadian Mining Journal.

The statement of the Minister—to which we are very glad to give publicity—is as follows:

Interviewed as to cause of Cobalt strike and steps taken to avert it the Minister of Labour stated that, in his opinion, it was due to the expressed determination of the Temiskaming Mine Managers' Association not to deal with or recognize the Miners' Union. The employers base their stand on past unsatisfactory experiences in dealing with the Western Federation of Miners which, in the Minister's opinion, was, at that time, quite justified. During recent years the policy of the Western Federation has materially altered; employers who now recognize and deal with the Federation find the results quite satisfactory. It is, therefore, rather unfortunate that the Temiskaming Mine Managers' Association should judge the Federation now by its policy and leadership of ten years ago, when Mr. Haywood was its leading spirit.

On June 9th last the Miners' representatives brought the existing dispute to the attention of the Department of Labour. An official of the Department visited Cobalt on June 11th, and had conferences with both the Mine Managers' Association and the Miners' Committee, but could not effect an agreement. He, however, obtained an undertaking from the Committee not to call a strike until the Minister returned from the West.

On July 1st the Minister addressed a joint communication to Mr. W. C. Weir, Secretary of the Mine Managers' Association, and Mr. Jos. Gorman, President of the Miners' Union, recommending that inasmuch as both employers and workmen were organized that one or more representative of the men from each of the 16 mines affected and the managers should have a conference, for the purpose of reaching an agreement, if possible. Should they fail it was then proposed that they should agree to refer the matters in dispute to a Board of Conciliation. A representative of the miners came to Ottawa and reported that the men agreed to the suggestions made, but that the employers declined, which statement was confirmed in a letter from the employers to the Minister.

The situation was then explained to the Prime Minister, and

a decision reached to invite a delegation of the employers to come to Ottawa for a conference, which invitation was acknowledged and declined in a wire from the President of the Managers' Association on July 15th. The representatives of the men were then informed that there was only one other alternative left within reach of the Government, which would be to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate the trouble. Subsequently, I believe, the employees offered to accept a commission if the employers would agree to accept its decision. Upon the employers declining to agree to this suggestion the strike was called.

The Minister of Labour emphatically denies Press reports that he encouraged the strike, but, on the other hand, did everything consistent and possible to prevent it.

The "Journal" desires to explain that there was no intentional discourtesy or unfairness in omitting to publish along with the "Gazette" editorial the statement of the Minister, which, when our issue of the 30th ult. went to press, had not come to our notice.

With regard to the Minister's proposal that one or more representatives from each of the sixteen mines affected should confer with representatives of the Managers' Association, there is no doubt that this suggestion was an excellent one, and outlined the manner in which the dispute must eventually be adjusted, but unfortunately the union leaders blocked the proposal by stipulating that at this conference the Executive of the Union should be present. As the whole dispute concerns the question of "recognition" and nothing else, it is clear that the interpolation of this stipulation vitiated the essential fairness of the original proposal and distorted its intent.

In the "Correspondence" we publish a letter from "Another Engineer" who well remarks that "the character of the union has not been the character of its members but of its active leaders," and the objection of the Managers' Association to recognizing the Union, based on the record of leadership of the Western Federation of Miners, is admitted by the Minister to have been justified in the past.

"During recent years," states Senator Robertson, "the policy of the Western Federation has materially altered," and here lies the stumbling block to a settlement. The Mine Managers' Association believes it has no guarantee of the probability of satisfactory dealings with the present strike-leaders.

If the point of recognition of the Western Federation of Mines (or its local affiliation) is eliminated, all the essentials for a settlement exist. Good wages, short working-hours, collective bargaining in its widest and best sense, profit-sharing, and representation of workmen by committees, are all conceded and have been practised for a long time at Cobalt.