The Miners Had the Call

Minister Deputed to Them the Authority of the Governor in Council.

Ignoring All Other Considerations in the Eight Hour Surprise.

"No One Seemed to Know About It" Slocan Member's Remonstrance.

An interesting and comprehensive review of the period immediately precedent to the enforcement of the eight-hour clauses of the Inspection of Mines Act Amendment Act, is contained in the return presented to the legislature on Monday by Hon. J. Fred Hume, of all correspondence in this connection. The return consists of no fewer than sixty documents, comprising an equal number of full foolscap pages, the first in the series of communications being a telegram addressed to the Minister of Mines by F. A. Heap, bearing the Ainsworth date of March 16 last, in which the question is asked:

"Is the miners' eight-hour law to be enforced here?"

Then comes a letter from R. F. Green, M.P.P., to the minister, written at Kaslo on the same date as the quoted telegram, in which that gentleman says:

"Section 4 of the amendments to the Inspection of Metalliferous Mines Act is creating a good deal of excitement throughout the Slocan. You are no doubt aware that the wages in this district have always been $3.50 per day, while at Rossland and in Nelson—notably at the Hall mines—they have only paid $3 per day. The owners here threaten to cut wages to meet the situation, to $3, which will in my opinion result in a strike. Under section 34, Victoria, chapter 134, Consolidated Statutes, the prosecutions under this act can only be instituted by the inspector of mines or with the consent of the Minister of Mines. A delegation of mine owners is on its way to the Coast to interview you on the subject, and I would suggest that you accede to their demands for an assurance that no prosecutions will be instituted until you notify them to the contrary. I ask this for the reason that I had no request from any miner in my riding asking for the eight-hour day, and I desire time to find out their wishes in the matter."

Next, under the date of March 17, is an instruction from the Minister of Mines to Inspector James McGregor, directing his attention to the section of the act, and requesting that he "see to it that the limit of eight-hours in every 24 is strictly adhered to."

The same day Hon. Mr. Hume replied to the telegram from Mr. Heap, expressing a desire to learn the feeling of the miners as to the section under consideration, and stating, "I shall esteem it a favor, therefore, if you will let me know of any expressions of opinion you may have heard with regard to the operation of this particular section."

On the 22nd March, the Minister of Mines replied to Mr. Green's letter, informing the member for the Slocan that the delegation he had referred to had had an interview, and conveying the assurance that their representations—as well as those made by Mr. Green—would "receive every consideration on the part of the government."

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March 14 saw a petition forwarded from the mine owners of the Sandon neighborhood—signed by seventeen large companies, headed by the Payne group, and employers of 884 miners—urging that the enforcement of the eight-hour clause "practically compels the mine owners of the Slocan to adopt one of two alternatives—either to reduce the present rate of wages, or to close down their workings."

The petitioners added:

"In the Slocan district we have consistently paid the highest rate of wages paid in the province, and owing to the climatic conditions prevailing here it is necessary for us to do so in order to obtain skilled workmen. There has so far been no conflict between employers and employees in this camp, but the enforcement of clause 13, Victoria 61, chapter 134, will work unavoidable disaster in this district. We therefore beg you to do your utmost to grant such relief as may lie in your power."

Hon. Mr. Hume acknowledged this petition on the 22nd March, in a letter to manager F. A. Wood of the "Last Chance," with the observation:

"I have received a letter on the same subject from the member for your district, and I would request you to inform the petitioners that their question is receiving the earnest consideration of the executive."

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The workmen in the mines were first heard from on March 30, when President John Leaden and Financial-Secretary James Devine, of the Rossland Miners' Union, wrote to the Minister to this effect:

"You would greatly oblige the officers and members of this union if you could give us some knowledge when the eight-hour law is going to take effect. To us it seems the hour for action has arrived; the men's patience is almost worn out. We think there would be good results if the law was enforced at once."

Three days later, Hon. Mr. Hume replied that the matter was under consideration by the government, and expressed the hope that he would be in a position shortly to send definite instructions to the inspector of mines in the matter.

James Wilkes of Rossland, on the 29th March telegraphed Hon. Mr. Hume that: "Eight-hour law thoroughly enforced; perfect harmony. Never mind Slocan kickers. Expect letter."

Two days later H. G. Needlands sent to the Minister from Nelson, this message: "Delegates leave here Monday to interview you. Will you be in Victoria?"

* * *

William Hunter of Silverton gave his views on the question in a letter addressed to Hon. Mr. Hume on March 31, in which he said:

"You have no doubt received many letters with regard to the new eight-hour shift for men underground. It seems that the bill was pushed through in a hurry, for no one seemed to know anything about it until it became law. Now I do not know how it will work in Nelson or Rossland, where the wages were only $3, but I am afraid that if it is enforced here it will cause no end of trouble, for the mine owners declare that they will shut down before they will pay $3.50 for eight hours' work; and the men say that they would rather work the ten hours for the larger pay. It seems too bad that when things were moving along so quietly, this question should have been brought up, as everyone seemed satisfied with the existing arrangements. The trouble would have come soon enough without the government being the first to move in the matter. Now if there is any way of letting matters rest the way they are in the Slocan it will be much better, for if any trouble arises I am afraid that some of the mines that are only in the prospective stage will be apt to shut down at the present price of silver. I hope you will give the matter your earnest attention, and try and avoid trouble."

The reply of the Minister of Mines to this letter was written on the 5th of April, and contained the following:

"I am afraid that it is more than probable that there will be some little friction in certain localities where this act is enforced, but I trust this will only be of a temporary nature. At the same time, I would have you bear in mind that this legislation was introduced upon the expressed wish of different mining constituencies, and I presume they had fully considered beforehand the probable result of their action."

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On the 1st of April, Charles Angus McKay of Nelson was heard from in a letter to the Minister in which he said:

"In view of so much opposition to your efforts in the enforcement of the eight-hour law, as a representative of labor I beg to offer a few remarks:

"First, we deplore the fact that our newspapers by no means voice the sentiments of labor on the question, but, nevertheless, Labor here is, I may say, unanimous in favor of the law. We appreciate your stand, shown in the efforts you are making to enforce the system. The agitation got up here against the act represents nothing more than the moneyed class.

"Their fancied 'detrimental to the best interests of Kootenay' is false, and will not hold good under experiment. They are mistaken economists. We hold that we can produce just as much in eight hours as in ten, therefore it is no hardship on capital, and is of much benefit to labor.

"Comparing other classes of labor with underground mining, as has been done in the Nelson Miner, is very foolish. Underground men have to contend with bad air, whereas the others have not. Now if we can do a day's work in eight hours, it would be poor economy to stay down in a smoky mine for ten hours, doing the same work.

"The effects of the system will be most beneficial to all concerned, both capital and labor, inasmuch as it will in time result in gathering the best of miners to this country, and in keeping here the good ones that we have now.

"In conclusion I would say that I hope you will do all you can to enforce the measure, and let not any of these seventeenth century political philosophers prevent you from doing your duty, as I can assure you you have the warm support of the great mass of the common people."

As a postscript, Mr. McKay suggested that:

"If you see fit, Mr. Hume, you can give this letter to the press."

It does not appear that Mr. Hume "saw fit."

The Minister acknowledged the letter on April 5, in these terms:

"I beg to acknowledge your letter of the 1st instant, stating that the newspapers do not represent the real views of the people with regard to the enforcement of the eight-hour law, and that the agitation organized in certain districts against this measure represents only the views of the moneyed class. I beg to thank you for this expression of opinion, and I trust that, as you say, both labor and capital will benefit by the action of the government in this question."

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Coincident with Mr. McKay's communication, on the 1st April, M. F. Tweddell, and many other business men of Nelson, addressed the following to the interested minister:

"We, the undersigned business men of Nelson respectfully beg to ask you as our representative to do everything in your power to prevent the disaster which we foresee to us and to the district in which we are interested through the enforcement of the legislation passed at the last session of the legislature affecting the hours of underground labor in the metalliferous mines. From our intercourse with the miners in the neighborhood of this town, we are convinced that they have been satisfied with the wages they have been earning, and with their hours of labor, and from our knowledge of the conditions we believe that they are better off than the miners of the United States, from where many of them have come to better their circumstances here. We have invested our money in this place, and have staked much of its growth and prosperity from the increased working of present mines and the development of new ones, and if, as we believe to be the case, this interference with the free right of contract of employer and employee be persisted in, we anticipate that present operations will be greatly reduced, and that the opening of new mines and the development of the country generally will receive a heavy blow from the frightening away of capital, which is known to be very timorous where there is danger of labor troubles. The results which we anticipate would be so ruinous to us whose business is dependent upon the prosperity and growth of the mining industry and to the district as a whole, that we cannot too strongly urge you to leave nothing undone, or to take any action no matter how strong or unusual, to prevent any interference with the state of things which has hitherto existed here with regard to the relations between employer and employee."

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An independent view of the situation, under the same date of April 1, is contained in the letter of Alfred Bunker of Nelson, in which the writer says to the Minister of Mines:

"Through an excitement caused by the amendment of the mining law constituting 8 hours a day's labo r for underground working, delegation of parties interested in mines has been appointed to go to Victoria, backed up by a petition to the government to repeal such clause said law affecting interested parties regarding the 8 hour section. I would say as a supporter of the government and as a disinterested party, neither employing miners, or wanting employment in mines, that the law is giving general satisfaction, and I think that after giving it a fair trial, and the excitement dies out somewhat, all parties will be satisfied.

"Of course there are miners who are continually agitating for something, and there are mine owners who are never satisfied, no matter how much work they get for a dollar. I think the law should be optional in properties under development, if miners are agreed to work, 10 hours should be satisfactory; in deep workings, where air is bad, 8 hours is plenty. I should advise you to stand pat."

Mr. Bunker also adds: You are at liberty to use this note."

In acknowledging the letter in question, Hon. Mr. Hume says: "The government are giving this matter their serious consideration." The acknowledgements bears date of April 7—"and I shall be glad to place before them your views on the subject."

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The previous day, however, it would appear that the government had arrived at a partial understanding, for on that date a telegram was sent by Hon. Mr. Hume, to Inspector of Mines McGregor, at Nelson, instructing him in the following terms:

"Withold inforcement of Section 4, Inspection of Metalliferous Mines Act, as amended last session, until further advised."

This message was not delivered, as a telegraph company note to the sender says:

"Party addresed left town. Now somewhere in Slocan country—think Sandon."

* * *

The wire was worked from Ymir the same day, April 6, and Hon. Mr. Hume received the following from L. A. Snyder, of the new mining camp:

"Good results obtained by enforcing eight hour law."

Next in order came a petition bearing the date of the 1st of April, signed by the London & British Columbia Goldfields Ltd., the Ymir Gold Mines Ltd., the Hall Mines Ltd., and many others. It read:

We the undersigned owners, representatives of owners, and managers of mines in the Nelson district, desire respectfully to urge upon you the great necessity of using the controlling power invested in you by the Act, entitled "An Act for securing the safety and good health of workmen engaged in or about the Metalliferous Mines of the Province of British Columbia, by the appointment of an inspector of metalliferous mines," Section 34, chapter 27, to render non-effective section 13 of the said Act, amended at the last sitting of the legislature to read: "No person shall be employed underground in any metalliferous mines for more than eight hours in every 24 hours, until such time as the opinion of the electors in the mining districts shall have been ascertained as to whether the enactment of the said clause is in the interest of the progress and well-being of such districts, and we submit the following reasons in support of the justice and reasonableness of our request:

"1. It is universally recognized that changes in the legislation affecting mines should not be made without mature consideration, and for reasons so strong as to render it probable that a change when made will be permanent; as uncertainty with regard to the laws affecting those interests has the effect of deterring capitalists from investing money in a country whose mining laws have been frequently changed.

"2. Legislation affecting such large vested interests should not have been passed without an opportunity having been given to those interested to express their opinions upon the desirability of such legislation.

"3. That the clause in question was not enacted in deference to the spontaneous desire of the majority of those affected by it, but at the suggestion of those representing labor unions, at the dictation of the management of labor union organizations in other places than those districts affected by the act in question.

"4. That it has been concurred in by members of the union in some of the mining districts in the belief that they would receive the same wage for eight hours' labor as they have hitherto received for ten hours.

"We would respectfully submit, with reference to the first objection named, that the amendment to the law referred to was passed so hurriedly, and with so little previous notice, that none of us were aware of the intention to propose this change; and we were therefore unable to make known to you, our representatives, the disastrous effects that we believe will follow the enforcement of such legislation. That you being absent from the house at the time, and most of the mebers being unfamiliar with the conditions of mining in this district, the legislative assembly was influenced by the opinion of an individual member, whose mine owning constituents were unaware of his intention to introduce such legislation.

"With reference to the third reason submitted, we have by inquiry among the employees of our mines elicited the statement that they have been satisfied with the already existing conditions, both as to hours of labor and rate of wages, and we are convinced from our experience that miners in this district have not suffered in health or well-being from laboring underground ten hours a day.

"We beg also to point out that the mines in this district cannot be classed among the dividend payers, and that any material increase over the present cost of working, would render our operations so much less likely to be profitable that we have reluctantly determined that rather than continue work at increased cost, we will discontinue operations.

"6. That no greater evil can befall us than the beginning of labor troubles, from which we have hitherto been free, and that the example of New Zealand as showing the disastrous effects of strikes in making it impossible to induce capitalists to supply funds for the development of a country, should be a warning that shoud be heeded.

"7. That some of us have already by fair trial, proven that the cost of working per foot, with three shifts of eight hours, is considerably greater than with two shafts of ten hours each, at the same rate of wage per shift; and that, although it might be possible that during a month of trial, the men might be over-exert themselves to prove that this would not be the case, in a short time the result of our experience would prove to be correct, and we consider that the situation would only be rendered more difficult, and no good end accomplished, by such an experiment.

"8. Some of us have recently returned from Europe, having succeeded ourselves, and being aware of the success of others, in arranging for a large amount of capital for the development of mines in this district during the coming season, and we feel in a position to state that, if the provisions of the section of the act to which we object, be enforced, very little, if any of the promised capital will be available.

"We have commissioned Captain Duncan, J. J. Campbell, and S. S. Fowler to present our request to you, and to provide you with such further information as to our views upon the subject as you may desire."

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The matter was brought to an issue by a telegram from Sandon on the 7th April, signed by F. A. Wood, and reading:

"Inspector is here to notify us of eight-hour law. What shall we do?"

Hon. Mr. Hume replied immediately to Mr. Wood:

"Ask McGregor to await telegram which is now at Nelson."

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Next in the long series of communications came a telegram from Montreal, from Clarence J. McCuaig, one of the directors of the Payne Mining company, dated the 8th April, and reading:

"Directors of the Payne Mining company informed that you intend to post notices eight-hour law in Slocan district. Owners principal mines have agreed to shut down if law inforced unless men will accept $3 for eight-hours' work. We must necessarily follow suit. Ground being easy to work men prefer ten hours; seven-tenths Payne owners here. Majority of money for development British Columbia comes from Montreal. Any serious trouble will destroy confidence and seriously hinder development. Earnestly request your grave consideration and postponement of action for present. A reply willbe appreciated."

The reply, which Hon. Mr. Hume sent the same day, read thus:

"Until further notice and more information, eight-hour law will not be enforced in the Slocan district."

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Just one day later, J. J. Campbell, one of the Slocan mine owners' delegates referred to in a previously considered petition, addressed the Minister of Mines from Victoria as follows:

"In order to avoid any possibility of inaccuracy in reporting to the mine owners whose petition I handed to you, the decision of the government, I will be greatly obliged if you will kindly write to me upon the subject, in order that I may transmit copies of your letter to the different mine owners interested.

"Pending the receipt of this, I will inform those who I have an opportunity of seeing, that in view of the representations made by them and others, the government, through the Minister of Mines and yourself, has promised that until it is ascertained through the members for the Kootenays, the feelings of the electors in their various districts, you will instruct the Inspector of Mines not to prosecute for any infraction of section 13 of the Mines Inspection Act, and that you will refuse the necessary permission for any other person to prosecute, and that if you should decide that it is the wish of the electors in those districts that the provisions of the amendment referred to should be enforced, notice of one month or six weeks will be given before any prosecution will be permitted, and that no permission would thereafter be given for prosecution for any infraction of the act prior to the date stated in such notice."

To this the Hon. Mr. Hume replied the following day:

"I am in receipt of yours of the 7th inst., and beg to say in reply that the government have instructed the Inspector of Mines by wire as follows:

"Withhold enforcement of section 4, Inspection of Metalliferous Mines Act, as amended last session until further instructions."

"The government has taken this step pending the receipt of reports from the representatives of the districts affected by the eight-hour law.

"If after receiving this information it is deemed in the public interest to enforce the act, 30 days' notice will be given by advertising in the Gazette."

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Two days subsequently, on the 10th of April, Grant Cox, the financial secretary of the miners union at Sandon, wired the minister:

"We request that the mining inspector now here enforce the eight-hour law at once."

On the same day the minister replied by telegram:

"Upon representations by mine owners of Slocan and others, the inspector has been instructed not to enforce the eight-hour law until further advised. The government is giving it careful consideration."

This message was acknowledged by the union on the 13th April, over the signature of its president, Jos. Stockham, who wrote:

"Your telegram was somewhat of a surprise to the miners up the Slocan country, as they knew it was a just law, and had all confidence in the government to enforce it. Now if the mine owners and their hirelings are going to defeat the wishes of the miners, notwithstanding the facts, it is time the government was paying some little attention to the miners—those who pay their just proportion of the taxes who go to support the government. Now I will say without fear of contradiction, that miners outside of the union have asked the miners' union to use their best efforts to have the eight-hour law enforced at once."

Presumably the appended remarks were addressed by Hon. Mr. Hume in reply to this, for on the 17th April, the Minister of Mines wrote:

"I beg to say in reply that the following representations have been made by the mine owners of Kootenay to the government:

"1. That the mine owners could not consent to pay the same rate of wages for eight hours as they have been paying for ten hours.

"2. That the miners themselves are satisfied with the old working day of ten hours.

"3. That they, the miners, did not ask the government for the reduction of hours.

"4. And that they would prefer the ten hours to a reduction of wages.

"5. And the mine owners state that rather than pay $3.50 for eight hours, they would close down.

"The government have carefully considered the whole matter, and will leave it for the miners themselves to decide whether it is to their interest or no to enforce the act, the government in the meanwhile withholding their consent to any prosecutions or enforcement of the act until the general feeling among the miners has been more clearly ascertained, and they have laid their case before the government. At the same time I can assure you that if it is shown to be in the interest of the miners and the general prosperity of the country to enforce this act, the government will not hesitate to do so."

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Writing from Rossland on the 12th April, to Hon. Mr. Hume, W. A. Carlyle, as mining engineer in charge of the works of the British America Corporation, was next heard from as follows:

"With respect to the eight-hour law, it is reported here that the inspector of mines has been instructed not to enforce it for the time being. I would be very glad if you would let me know whether any such step has been taken? I would like to say that this new regulation compelling us to adopt the eight-hour law, was totally unknown to the mining men here, and we could scarcely believe that it had been passed. Prior to that time there had been no dissatisfaction among the men, and no complaints had arisen whatever. Yet, without giving the mining men any opportunity whatever to discuss this proposed change, it was made law. When we got notice from the inspector of mines, we at once adopted it, without changing the rate of wages for the time being, in order that we might learn what difference it made in the cost of working. I might say that we are doing everything to prevent any conflict with labor, as such would be a severe blow to the province and very bad on the mining companies. The miners' union is becoming more and more aggressive, and the fact that two or three of their members were able to secure the passage of this bill bodes ill for the mining industry. In reference to this eight hour law, it was not in vogue in Rossland, as has frequently been stated, except in two or three working places in the War Eagle. We already find, in the Le Roi, that our costs for the same production per day have been materially increased by the passage of this act, compelling us to work thus. The result may be that we shall have to reduce wages, which may lead to a disagreement between ourselves and our men, when hitherto there was complete accord. I am sure that in this matter we have your sympathy, as you will fully understand the conditions that exist in Kootenay, but as I know you were standing for re-election at the time this law was passed, you were unable to give us your support. The mining men of Rossland had not as yet presented a memorial to you asking relief in this law, but they have by no means accepted it without thought of doing so, and I sincerely hope that until the mining men have an opportunity of presenting their side of the question, we may get relief. I have acquainted our directors in London with the particulars of the case, and we are now prepared to resent very strongly labor interference, although in the meantime we will do all we can in justice to the men; we will pay the best wages, and do everything to maintain harmony, and if we are led into a disastrous struggle with labor, it will not be hard on us and the men alone, but it may lead to trouble all over the province, and nothing will be so damaging to our mining industry abroad as the fact that we are having serious labor troubles here. I may shortly be in Victoria when I hope to have the pleasure of a talk with you upon this subject. If you have decided to withhold this measure for the time being, I will be very pleased to be so informed."

The acknowledgment of this included a statement of the conditions of the withholding of the act in operation, coupled with an expression of satisfaction that the British America Corporation was doing all possible to avoid a conflict with the labor interest.

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On April 15, the section of the British Columbia board of trade, Victoria, transmitted copies of the resolutions passed at the quarterly meeting of that body, urging as the unanimous opinion of the board that time should be given both mine owners and miners to fully present their respective cases, the act being allowed to remain inoperative in the meanwhile.

Hon. Mr. Hume replied to this communication that the government had already instructed the inspector of mines to take no action toward the enforcement of the act until further advised, and added:

"The government are taking such steps as the case demands, to have the opinions of the mine owners and the miners upon this subject. After both sides of the case have been laid before the government, and if in their opinion the act should be enforced, thirty days' notice will be given through the B.C. Gazette. I should like to have copies of any objections why your board may have received from mine owners, etc."

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Another extended communication written by A. G. Fraser at Kuskanook, on the 15th April, and acknowledged by Hon. Mr. Hume on the 18th, confained the following:

"The subject (of the eight-hour law) has been pretty thoroughly discussed here by the railway laborers. There are no mines in operation in this section, but quite a number of prospectors and miners have been at work during the winter on the N. & B. railway, the majority of them being from the Slocan. They are without exception in favor of the eight-hour day; they claim that a greater number of men would obtain work; and that more and better work would be done working eight hours than working ten hours. Instead of working ten hours owners would work two shifts, thus giving employment to miners who are now compelled to seek other employment. The fact of the bluff made by the mine owners is simply laughed at; the men here say the owners are here to develop their properties and make money, and the matter of indifference to mine owners who they pay wages to, provided the work is done. The fact that organized labor has been fighting for years in all civilized countries for 'eight hours' work, eight hours' play and eight hours' sleep,' and that the greater number of working men in this country are asking for the eight hours should be sufficient to convince the government that the legislation as carried will work mutual benefit. Where it has been tried heretofore, in factories, buildings, etc., the workmen have had better health, one master better work, and the merchants increased business. For the country at large it is much better to have two men earning $5 per day than one man earning $3.50. If these same miners can work in Rossland, Nelson and other points on shorter time, why not in the Slocan? If they are forced, or part of them are forced, to leave the Slocan, and work on the railways for $2.25 for ten hours' work, can they not work at a profit at $2.80 for eight hours? The question is simply one of avarice. The fortunate ones who get $3.50 don't want to divide with their less fortunate brothers. The mine owners will not reduce wages, nor will they close their properties. They will pay the same rate per hour, and other districts will follow, because labor will not be so plentiful. They will employ more men, produce more ore, pay a bigger aggregate wage, and everyone will be benefited. This opinion is the result of interviewing over fifty workingmen, with whom I have talked since the eight-hour law was passed."

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Wm. Delahay was again heard from in a letter dated at Ymir on the 13th April, in which he says:

"I have complied with your wishes in making inquiries from the voters, residents and business men of Ymir, also from persons who are more or less interested in mining properties in this locality; and I have not met with one who is opposed to it. The mines working here are the Tamarac and Ymir, which when notified complied with the order immediately.

"In voicing the sentiments of Ymir, the government should most certainly enforce the law to the very letter, notwithstanding the Nelson delegation to the contrary, who, by the way, only represent a few disgruntled mine owners of the Slocan who are ready to reduce wages, even when working the ten hours, and I am sure that the action of the government in enforcing the law will be endorsed by a great majority of the people. During my visit to Rossland a few days since I made it my business to make inquiries from a reliable source whether there was any dissatisfaction among the mine owners, and I found that everything seemed to be working very satisfactorily indeed. In conclusion I hope the government will not weaken in enforcing the eight-hour law."

The same Wm. Delahay on the 18th April wrote again to Hon. Mr. Hume, as chairman of a mass meeting of miners and others held at Ymir on the evening of the 17th April, stating that James Graham, J. J. Roots, Wm. Delahay and A. L. Knox had been appointed to draft resolutions protesting against the suspension of the eight-hour clause, and forward them to the Minister of Mines and the Ymir Miner, for publication. These resolution, subsequently presented read:

"1. That the eight-hour law passed by the Legislature of British Columbia was highly satisfactory to the miners of Ymir district.

"2. That the action of the government is now suspending the operation of the said law is highly detrimental to the interests of the miners of this district.

"3. That the Minister of Mines be requested to immediately enforce the operation of the eight-hour law in the district of Ymir.

"4. That the assurance that one month's notice be given to the mine owners be immediately rescinded, as such notice was never contemplated in the law.

"5. That the statement made by the deputation of mine owners to the effect that the law was obnoxious to the mine owners, is entirely incorrect."

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A more moderate tone prevades a communciation from B. R. Atkins to the Minister of Mines, addressed from Vancouver on the 26th April, in which it is said:

"While in Victoria the matter of the eight-hour law in the mines was repeatedly brought to my notice, and my opinion asked concerning it. I believe the principle of the legislation in its application to deep mining to be correct and in line wth good precedents towards special classes of employment, but I think that there should be some qualifying amendment attached limiting its application to deep mining only.

"Regarding the enforcement of the act in this particular, the suggestion of its operation only in cases where the working may be properly called deep, might be entertained for the present, it being understood that such would become the statutory meaning at the legislature's next session. Of course this is merely my personal idea upon the subject, and given only in that sense."

Hon. Mr. Hume, replying to this letter said.

"Such expressions of opinion I am glad to receive, as they will be of great assistance to the government in arriving at a decision in the matter."

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Next in order of communications is a resolution adopted at a meeting of the mine owners of the Boundary Creek district, as follows:

"Whereas it has been enacted by the legislative assembly of the province of British Columbia that no person shall be employed underground in any metalliferous mine for more than 8 in every 24 hours;

"And whereas there are certain penalties for not complying with the said enactment;

"Now this body respectfully submits that the legislation in question will not only work great hardship upon the mine owners of this district but also upon the mines themselves, for the following reasons:

"1. The mines in the Boundary Creek district at the present time are entirely unproductive, owing to the lack of facilities for the reduction of ores, in consequence the expense of operating the said mines rests entirely upon the owners, and not upon the ore producers.

"2. The miners are entirely satisfied with the present hours of employment, and have manifested no desire for a change from the system now in vogue;

"3. That with the reduction in the hours of labor it will be necessary to reduce the wages per diem from a ten to an eight-hour basis, thereby working great hardship upon the men and the consequent disturbance of the condition of employer and laborer as at present harmoniously existing;

"Therefore the mine owners in the district respectfully beg that the aforementioned amendment may be held in abeyance, at least until such time as the mines are shipping and productive."

* * *

The mine owners of the Rossland camp also took occasion, on the 1st of May, to place on record their strong disapproval of the eight-hour clause, and respectfully to request that its enforcement be delayed until further representations could be made to the government on the subject and in reply the Minister of Mines wrote that the government did not propose to enforce the eight-hour clause until they had made full inquiries as to the views held by mine owners, mine managers, and the miners themselves, on the subject—thirty days' notice being given before the law should be carried in to effect.

* * *

William Delahay was again heard from on the 20th of April, when he wrote Hon. Mr. Hume that:

"The general opinion in this neighborhood (Ymir) is that the law ought to be enforced, notwithstanding whatever influence may be brought to bear to the contrary. It is also a well known fact that the majority of those who now oppose the present law were hostile to the present government, and used whatever means they had in their power to defeat them both at the general election and your own (Hon. Mr. Hume's) bye-election. Consequently I deem it nothing but right and in justice to yourselves and to your supporters that the law be strictly enforced."

* * *

On the 27th of April, L. A. Snyder, secretary of the Ymir miners' union, transmitted copies of resolutions endorsing those passed by the Rossland trades and labor council, asking that the eight-hour law be enforced. In addition the following was transmitted:

"Whereas at a special meeting held by the miners of Ymir, urging that the government enforce the eight-hour law throughout the province, and whereas the said law being in force throughout Trail Creek district has proved a success beyond any doubt whatever, and whereas a majority of the mine operators who now oppose the eight-hour law, were also opposed to our present government prior to the last election, be it resolved that we heartily endorse the resolutions passed by the trades and labor council of Rossland on April 25."

* * *

On the 2nd of May T. Mayne Daly confirmed by letter the telegram of the mine owners of Rossland, and stated that a memorial was being prepared for signature setting out the views of the mine owners of this camp, an dother parts of the Kootenay on the eight-hour clause. He added:

"I may say that the feeling amongst the mine owners is very strong on this subject, and it is hopéd that the government will refrain from enforcing this law, and that the whole matter will be held in abeyance until the next session of the legislature."

This was acknowledged by Hon. Mr. Semlin, as acting Minister of Mines, with the declaration that the government had already given the matter careful consideration, and had decided to enforce the clause, notice to that effect being published in the Gazette of the 11th of May.

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