

Thetford Mines Strike Over.

Work Resumed in all the Mines in the Thetford District.

(Special Staff Correspondence).

THETFORD MINES, QUEBEC, August 24th.

After being closed down for the last three weeks, all the mines here resumed operation this morning, as a result of the settlement arrived at yesterday, in a conference between Mr. C. A. E. Blanchet, Royal Commissioner appointed by the Governor-General in Council, Mr. J. A. Lane advocate from Quebec City representing the mine owners and two representatives from the employees of each of the following mines:

Asbestos Corporation of Canada, Limited.
Bells Asbestos Mines.
Jacob's Asbestos Manufacturing Company.
Johnston's Asbestos Company.
Martin-Bennett Asbestos Mines.

It is the general opinion here that the strike was a blunder from the start, as there appears to have been no dispute between the mine-owners and the main body of their employees on the question of wages, and the scale agreed upon in the conference yesterday was the same which the employees had offered before the trouble, and which was to have gone into force on August 2nd. The whole trouble had its origin in a somewhat bitter rivalry between the local unions and a branch of the Western Federation of Miners recently started here.

Previous to about a year ago the only labour organization in Thetford was a local one composed almost exclusively of French Catholics with the parish priest the Rev. Father Proulx as chaplain. Such a union could not very well include as members all the workers in the mines and an effort was made to organize those on the outside, with the result that a branch of the Western Federation of Miners was established.

Within a short time thereafter the mine-owners made some adjustment in the rates paid to cobbers resulting in an increase in the wages of the female workers. The new branch of the International Union took to themselves the whole of the credit for this increase and used it for all it was worth to increase their membership. Early in 1916 the local French Catholic union asked for an increase in the wages of all the miners, which request was readily granted by the mine-owners, and the new scale went into effect on the first of last April. This gave the local union a prestige superior to that created by the claims of the International and the latter, not to be outdone, demanded a further advance of fifty cents a day and a recognition of their union by the mine-owners. The owners ignored these demands, but arranged to put into force on August 2nd a new scale of wages, comprehending a further increase of twenty-five cents a day, which was accepted by the French Catholic union.

On August 2nd the members of the International struck and to avoid trouble which might result in injury to life and property, the members of the local union were advised to quit until the matter was settled and the mines and mills were consequently closed down.

The strikers at once appealed to the Labour Department at Ottawa; but were advised that under section 56 of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act it was illegal for any employee to go on strike "prior to or during a reference to a Board of Conciliation and Investigation", and that if they desired a recourse to this legislation they would have to go back to work and make application in the regular manner. It was further pointed out to them that their strike was illegal, as section 58 to 61 of the above mentioned Act provided that

"Any employee who goes on strike contrary to the provisions of this Act shall be liable to a fine of not less than ten dollars nor more than fifty dollars, for each day or part of a day that such employee is on strike" and that

"Any person who incites, encourages or aids in any manner any employee to go or continue on strike contrary to the provisions of the act, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not less than fifty dollars nor more than one thousand dollars," and that "The procedure for enforcing these penalties imposed or authorized to be imposed by this act shall be that prescribed by Part XV. of The Criminal Code relating to summary convictions."

From all accounts this was not the only obstacle the strikers encountered as a result of their hasty action. Their rank and file had been advised that they would not suffer during the strike as they would receive a substantial weekly allowance from the head office of their union as strike pay. But instead

of a remittance they were told that they were not entitled to and would not receive such assistance since they did not first obtain the consent of the strike committee of their union.

They were thus in a hopeless position. They could not go back to work and apply for a Board of Conciliation and Investigation under the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. They were not receiving strike pay and, every day they remained on strike, they were liable to a heavy fine. As a result, many of their members left Thetford and sought work elsewhere.

The leaders were very much chagrined and disappointed, and to prevent violence, restore peace and bring about a settlement the Governor-General in Council, under the provisions of the Inquiries Act R. S. C. Chapter 104 and Amendment 2 George V. chapter 28, appointed a Royal Commission in the person of C. E. A. Blanchet, barrister of Ottawa. Much credit is due to this gentleman whose wisdom, good judgment and tact maintained the peace, secured the co-operation of all interested parties and brought about a satisfactory settlement without a single act of violence being committed, or a dollar worth of property destroyed. It is a splendid example of how much of the efficiency of any of our laws lies in the tactful administration of them.

The lessons to be learned from this trouble are obvious and may be put down as follows:

First.—Where a local union is formed its requirements for membership should be broad enough to include all the intelligent and well meaning workers, irrespective of their religion or nationality.

Second.—In the event of a strike being necessary, the striking parties should first inform themselves thoroughly as regards the justice and rights of their contentions, and also as regards the proper procedure to be taken, so as to keep themselves within the law.

There is always a limit to the amount of wages which any industry will stand. When an increase in wages forces the price of the product beyond what the market will readily pay, less is consumed and consequently less must be manufactured, which results in less employment. On the other hand, when a product is offered at a price that encourages consumption, and increases employment. Labour should therefore constantly keep in mind that a maximum production at a fair wage is always better than a minimum product at a maximum wage.

Asbestos is a low priced material, on the average, a hundred tons of rock requires to be hauled for about five tons of the marketable asbestos, average price is less than \$30 a ton or less than \$1.50 per ton of rock handled. The proportion of the selling price of the product which labour receives in wages is higher than in any other branch of the mining industry except in the case of quarrying stone for building on paving purposes, where the tools and machinery required are small and inexpensive in comparison to that operated in connection with the quarrying and milling of asbestos rock. In the year 1913 according to the government return, the total number of people employed in the asbestos industry was 2,909 and the total value of the product mined in the same year was \$3,830,504. The wages that are now being paid in the mines and mills here are much higher than the industry can stand in ordinary times.

Third.—The local union is invariably composed of the most reasonable, and responsible men—men who have a stake in the community. They realize that their interests, so long as they have their home in the community are linked up with the industries of the community. When the industries are in full operation the community is prosperous, and they are more prone to co-operate with the owners, to keep them going. An instance which demonstrates this point occurred in a town in the United States during the autumn of 1913. Orders for the building of machinery, which was the principal industry in this town, were very scarce and the shops were about to be on short time and with a much reduced force. Tenders were out for about one hundred thousand dollars worth of new machines required by a new pulp and paper mill in Canada. Under current cost conditions there was little likelihood of the order going to this U. S. town so the owners of one of its machine shops suggested to their employees a cut in the wages which would enable them to put in a bid of \$90,000 at which price the order could be secured. This was agreed to, the order was secured,

the town had this additional sum to spend and the shop kept its organization together. The order was filled without stinting either material as workmanship and on erection gave perfect satisfaction and several other orders have since gone to this shop as a result. Had an international union been sufficiently strong in this town to prevent a cut below their minimum wage, the orders would have gone elsewhere, many would have been thrown out of work and hardship in the community augmented. Moreover these shops would have been less able, as a result of the disorganization, to fill orders when times improved. If the owners had secured the order at a price below their costs and endeavoured to get even by the use of inferior material and a minimum of workmanship an irreparable injury would have been done to the shop.

Fourth.—In the event of a strike the members of a local union invariably act with greater responsibility. They realize that the civic treasury, to which they are taxpayers, must make good any damage caused to property.

ORGANIZATION OF WAR CHARITIES.

(Concluded from page 5).

It cannot for a moment be supposed that anything but a small proportion of the £45,000,000 is affected by these provisions. I am convinced from a close study of the matter during the past twenty-four months that the proportion of fraud and ill-management is very small indeed. Take, for example, the fact that at least £20,000,000 has been given by the public to relieve distress consequent to the war. Six millions of this has been paid in direct to the Prince of Wales' Fund; three millions has been raised and retained locally for similar objects; the amount subscribed by wage-earners supplemented by grants from employers and votes by shareholders for the dependents of men who have gone to the war from office and workshop is over ten millions, and the balance is made up by the sums received by important, long-experienced and well-controlled organizations for the families of men and officers who fall. The administration of some of these funds is sometimes criticized—in a healthy state of public opinion nothing less could be expected,—but the administration is on the whole beyond reproach and the portion of the twenty millions, wasted by bad management and overlapping is infinitesimal.

Where Millions Have Been Spent.

One may speak of the funds raised for the sick and wounded soldiers and sailors in much the same terms. These amount to over six million sterling. The value of the two years outlay on "comforts" (in which are included tobacco, clothing, food and hospital requirements) is about the same. At this last figure one may only make a well-informed guess. So many things in the nature of comforts have been sent to the men privately that there is no possibility of obtaining exact figures. Approved organizations are permitted to send tobacco, for example, direct from bond, that is, without payment of duty, and the quantity so delivered from bond "for the use of His Majesty Naval and Military forces abroad" was in the last financial year nearly 6½ million pounds weight, or more than ten times as much as in the year before the war. One tobacco firm in London alone has sent 250 tons of tobacco and many millions of cigarettes at the request of its customers. Almost every conceivable article from mouth-organs to motor-ambulances has been sent over the sea to add to the comfort of the men; and one organization alone has sent out more than six million books and magazines.

I estimate that a good deal more than one Million pounds, of which the Y.M.C.A. alone has collected over £600,000, has been subscribed for the entertainment of the men. For our Allies something over ten millions sterling has been subscribed, of which not less than eight millions has gone to Belgium. If we add to these figures, private expenditure on motor-cars used in connection with the various emergency organizations; the value of the professional work done by the paid-staffs of bankers, accountants, auctioneers and solicitors; and the personal outlay of special constables and voluntary workers of all kinds, we reach the grand total of forty-five millions sterling without taking into the account a single penny for the value of the voluntary services which non-combatants have so cheerfully rendered for two long and anxious years.

Even this cursory review indicates how little of all this money could fall within the scope of such restrictive legislation as is now contemplated; and probably now that legislation is to become compulsory the proportion will rapidly dwindle to nothing.