Co-operative Mining.

IN my last I spoke of the application in some of the details of the general principle of co-operation to mining. Regarding the practicability of the system in such a district as the Slocan, which has been described as a "poor man's camp," because of the ease with which development may take place through labour alone, there is not any doubt, not only in the opinion of the miners themselves, but its success on a large scale has been amply demonstrated. I do not mean to say that co-operative mining has been carried into effect on the exact lines advocated in previous articles, but mines have been and are being developed by individual efforts without the aid of outside capital, which is practically all that is necessary to prove.

To come to Trail Creek district, where the conditions are not so favourable to development there has been striking evidence furnished by one of the Rosland papers of the practicability of co-operation. In an editorial, not, however, dealing with this aspect of the question, but with the present obvious tendency to over-capitalization of mining companies, it was stated that between $25,000 and $30,000 in cash had been found ample and was all that was necessary in the majority of cases to prove the value of the mines in the vicinity of Rossland, after which pay ore is struck sufficient, under competent management, to carry on operations. That statement is significant as coming from the very centre of the greatest mining activity and has not, so far as I have seen, been contradicted or disputed. Anything more fatal to the contention of those who advocate the introduction of outside capital in large sums for the development of our mines could hardly be imagined. It is entirely in accord, too, with the methods of mining companies, stocked from $250,000 to $1,000,000, the treasury stock of which is sold from five cents to twenty-five cents per dollar share to acquire only working capital and realizes anything from $10,000 to $50,000 (not $500,000 stated in last issue).

It is, therefore both practicable and possible even in Trail Creek district for a number of working miners and a few skilled assistants, with limited means at their disposal, to take any of the ordinary prospects now figuring in the numerous mining prospectuses of companies already floated or being floated, and by their unaided efforts, or largely so, to change them into paying mines of which they would be shareholders, directors and managers and profit sharers. Not more than one working miner for each person that subscribes for shares in these companies at present would be necessary, and in numerous instances not so many. With an engineer and a skilled mine manager associated with them they could tunnel, timber the mines, build trails, ore bins, etc., etc., the same as they do when their labour is paid for by others. The incentive to do earnest, honest and intelligent work, when each was, so to speak, coining out his own fortune, would not, to say the least, be less than where his only interest in the work was the daily wage.

It will be readily admitted that labour is not the only requisite, but it is nevertheless undeniable that labour is the most important factor, and is usually in the ratio, to be safe, of two-thirds to one-third, and this time particularly in the development stages. There are besides labour, the food, clothing and housing of the workmen, the cost of implements and explosives, timber, lumber, hardware, freightage and whatnot to consider. I hope in a future issue to go into these things in detail and show their actual relative cost in developing the average mine as compared with the cost of labour, but for the present I desire to show how by carrying out legitimately the ideas of co-operation a few of the many methods by which the accessories referred to, which require cash, may be obtained independent of the usual capitalistic methods.

Co-operation as intended to be applied in these articles does not refer solely to the co-operation of labour or labouring men, but where necessary the co-operation of labour and capital in due proportions, and it is by the latter method that these two, usually regarded as distinct, and too often as antagonistic factors, may be brought into perfect harmony.

For the purpose of working out the problem many working miners may be regarded to some extent as capitalists as well as labourers, because it would not be difficult to find in any mining camp from thirty to fifty miners who possess from $100 to $200 apiece averaging up their "piles," and that as a nucleus, say $150 each for forty men or $6,000, would be an ample cash capital for development work. In such an instance the co-operation would be complete and the problem easy of solution, provided always, of course, they could be induced to pool their labour and their resources.

But granting the risk as too great for labouring men, even if the other conditions were right, there are several other methods in which labour alone would be paid into the mine on the part of miners.

Many of our best business men in this province "dabble" in mines, and have one to half a dozen or more of claims upon which they do assessment and some development work, representing in the aggregate a tidy little sum per annum. Many of them have spent thousands in this way. They do not go into it seriously, but for the speculation that is in it. It is their little "gamble" as they term it. In the interior, merchants, nearly all of them, in addition to this "grub stake" prospectors for an interest in claims or take interests in claims for goods advanced. More or less they all do it. It is, I have said, a form of speculation. If the particular district or group of claims of which it forms a part pans out well they stand to make; if not, well, it is a "gamble" anyway, and like the throw of the dice, the next man may be more lucky. "Grub-staking" is the traditional and popular form of co-operation in mining districts. Logically, however, there is no reason why co-operation should stop there. Having secured a good claim in which the indications are favourable, why not extend the principle of co-operation to the development? Why not "grub-stake" the miners as well? If one did not feel equal to the strain, two, three or half a dozen merchants could combine, and, if successful, and the prospects would be ten to one in favour of co-operating with the miner, the profits of