Safety ignored

Since the explosion last month that killed eleven Cape Breton miners, and severely injured five more, job safety has been paramount in the minds of Cape Breton coal miners.

While officials from the United Mine Workers of America, inspectors from the federal labour department and British experts were brought in by the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) to examine the disaster site, miners returned to their jobs with their own suspicions about what happened in Number 26 colliery on February 24.

It is now commonly assumed that the explosion was caused by a build-up of methane gas—something that warning systems should have detected. But something prevented the warning system from operating.

Many think that the "incentive-bonus" system of payment is at the root of the problem. Workers are paid cash bonuses for exceeding production quotas. To qualify for these bonuses the workers can't afford to have the mine shut down to clear out any build-up of methane gas, so it seems that sometimes workers sabotage the very equipment that is there to protect them. They gamble that they'll make it through their shift alive and with a bit more money. DEVCO turns a blind eye because only through the workers gambling with their lives can the company meet their "quotas" and balance the books.

Two weeks before the disaster, workers at a union meeting complained about the ventilation and warning systems. And, they complained about the pressure they were under in the "incentive-bonus" system. The DEVCO official called their concerns "rubbish".

That's also how DEVCO, a federal Crown corporation, responded to the federal inquiry into job safety in 1974. The recommendations of the inquiry were all but ignored.

Last fall, though, the labour department took DEVCO to court charging two dozen violations of the job safety code. The charges were eventually dropped because of problems within the laws themselves, but none of this has been forgotten in the job safety controversy raging in Glace Bay.

Now the United Mine Workers, the Glace Bay workers' union, is calling for an end to the bonus systems. Will DEVCO respond any more favourably to this than they did to the federal inquiry's recommendations?

In the last issue of **Atlantic Issues** we saw the ALCAN company moving out of St. Lawrence, Newfoundland because they didn't want to meet minimum safety standards in flourspar mining. They now import their flourspar from Mexico where they do not have to meet any safety standards: and they make more money. And more money is what is stopping DEVCO from living up to its responsibilities in the realm of job safety. Meeting federal standards will cost them money and it won't necessarily increase profits.

As long as DEVCO—and other companies like them—can get away with these kinds of attitudes and practices they will. But the Glace Bay workers can stand firm against DEVCO on the question of job safety in their next round of contract negotiations. And, they can win.

Atlantic Issues

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Michelin trade-off

by Michael Donovan

In France, the "Michelin Guide" is highly regarded by tourists because of its accuracy and research. Restaurants, historic sites, museums and even cities are given ratings of one-to-four stars.

Although Michelin has not officially rated countries or provinces on the basis of generosity to multinational, there is little doubt that, if they did, Nova Scotia would receive an unqualified four-star rating.

In order to create the approximately 3,800 jobs in Nova Scotia, Michelin has received:

- a three-year duty-free concession on Michelin Tires imported into Canada (the normal tariff is 17½ per cent; and there is a rumour that the tariff exemption is still in effect);
- direct grants of 12.6 million dollars from DREE;
- accelerated depreciation of land and buildings against Income Tax;
- importation of machinery duty free;
- a $500 million loan at 3½ per cent below the prime lending rate arranged by I.E.L. (it has been estimated that this Industrial Estates Limited "loan" will **cost** Nova Scotia $30 million during its life);
- I.E.L. grants of $7.6 million;
- a $60,000 cash grant from the Nova Scotia Power Corporation;
- taxes reduced to 1 per cent for 10 years by the municipalities of Pictou and Bridgewater; and
- the Bridgewater forty acre site donated free.

In return Nova Scotia has received:

- wages which are well below the North American tire-making industry average;
- no committment on the part of Michelin to stay in Nova Scotia;
- no contracts of employment between Michelin and the Nova Scotian employees;
- a campaign of intimidation against pro-union employees at Michelin;
- the alteration of certain Nova Scotian law regulations to suit Michelin's anti-union campaign;
- the creation of an industry which is of no benefit to the region other than the creation of extremely low-skill jobs; and
- essentially an industry over which the government and the workers have virtually no control.

The question is: has Nova Scotia made a good bargain? Would it not have been better to invest the approximately $20,000 per job to create indigenous industries which are owned and controlled by Nova Scotians for the benefit of Nova Scotia—industries which are ultimately responsible to the people of Nova Scotia.

Multi-nationals may provide short term jobs but, in the end, they leave Nova Scotians dangerously dependent upon the vicissitudes of international finance.

For example, in the Fall 1978 edition of **Atlantic Issues** it was reported that ALCAN had closed down Canada's only flourspar mine in St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, throwing 400 people out of work. The workers had won concessions in the area of safety and health, although previously, 117 of them had died from cancer as a result of radon in the mines. But ALCAN decided it was cheaper to buy flourspar on the world market and now Mexico is one of the countries from which ALCAN imports flourspar.

In this issue of **Atlantic Issues** (see pages 4 and 5) we see Noranda phasing out its operations in northern New Brunswick, while it increases its operations in Chile.

Nova Scotia must, in the future, use its capital to build industries **controlled** by the people so the capital is reinvested to build this province, it must not use its own capital to allow foreign corporations to export the capital which represents the fruits of their labour to other areas in accordance with the forces of the "free" market.

Letters

Job safety an issue

To the Editors:

I have just read the spring/summer 1978 issue of your paper which documents the victorious struggle waged by the workers and residents of Baie Verte against Advocate Mines Ltd. By forcing the company to incorporate clauses on occupational health and safety into their collective agreement, the workers of Baie Verte have won an important victory.

Workers are refusing to see themselves and their workmates appearing with increased frequency as notations on injury, morbidity and mortality graphs and tables. Forced to choose between a more healthful and safe working environment and increased profits, management has invariably chosen the latter. In response to the occupational health and safety crisis, local unions across the country are now viewing progressive clauses on health and safety as an integral part of a good collective agreement. Documenting positive collective bargaining precedents is an important aspect of this campaign. Your contribution is appreciated.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees has just published an inventory which documents the health and safety hazards associated with public sector work. I have enclosed a copy of this study. I hope you find it useful.

Larry Katz
Senior Research Officer