

13651

CHAS. A. STUART                      ALBERTA.

November 25, 1909.

DEAR SIR:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your favour of November 18th instant in which you ask me to give you my views in regard to the working of the Canadian Law for the investigation of industrial disputes.

My experience has been somewhat limited, being confined to two Conciliation Boards of which I was appointed chairman by the Minister of Labour in regard to two disputes between coal operators at Taber, near Lethbridge, Alberta, and their employees. In each of these cases a satisfactory agreement was arrived at without the necessity of the Board hearing formal evidence and making a formal decision.

In my view of the working of the Act, the best work can be done by a Conciliation Board in the way of informal negotiations by bringing the parties face to face and talking the trouble over in a conciliatory way. I found that men who had been standing at arms length and writing letters to each other and serving notices on each other in a very hostile frame of mind apparently would act and talk much more reasonably when they met each other personally in the presence of the Board. Indeed in the two instances in which I acted it was not long before we had the antagonists calling each other by their first names in an exceedingly friendly fashion apparently.

I have had no experience in regard to the enforcement of the penalties which the law provides where a strike or lock-out is begun before a Board is asked for contrary to the provisions of the Act.

One case occurred here recently with which I was not personally connected in any way where the coal miners in the Crows Nest Pass country went out on strike, apparently at any rate, in disregard of and in violation of the Act. No action was taken against them for doing so, the mine operators claiming that it lay with the Attorney General's Department to initiate such proceedings and so refusing to lay any information before a magistrate themselves, while the Attorney General's Department was, I think I may go so far as to say, somewhat influenced by political considerations in not intervening and instituting proceedings against a large number of miners who had votes. This latter remark of mine is of course private and confidential.

W. L. Mackenzie King Papers

Volume 14