

a more recent strike, we were told that they had broken contracts. They maintain that according to a decision of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia given a year ago they were free to cease from their work.

That brings me to a question that has been of very great interest to the workers of Canada from coast to coast, namely, the arrest and conviction of J. B. McLachlan, the secretary of the miners. I am very glad indeed to give credit to the government in that within the last two or three days an order has been issued for the release of J. B. McLachlan on parole. It has not been generally known that the other six men who were arrested and convicted at the same time were released some time ago. I understand that Mr. McLachlan is still in Dorchester penitentiary. Whether or not he will accept his release on ticket-of-leave, I do not know, but although his release may be a certain kindness to him and to his family, it by no means goes far enough, because he still stands as a criminal. For what was he arrested? Because he wrote a circular letter which he sent out to the different unions, protesting against the brutal action of the provincial police of Nova Scotia. He stated how this force of provincial policemen had ridden down men, women and children who were going peaceably about their business. I have here—I will not take the trouble to read them to the House—statutory declarations which were presented to the commission which recently reported, substantially corroborating the statements which Mr. McLachlan had made. He was charged with spreading a false tale, and also with sedition. He was taken to Halifax, and the charge of spreading a false tale was dropped; it was found that his tale was all too true. The authorities then proceeded with the second charge, that of seditious libel. I am not going to weary the House by going into the history of the law of sedition. It is an obsolete law; it was not used in England, or very rarely used, for nearly one hundred years. The safeguards which have existed in this law up to 1919 were removed by a bit of vicious legislation which was rushed through this House at that time. Essentially sedition, although not defined in the code, consists in the criticizing of public authorities. I submit that if half as serious charges had been made by the right hon. leader of the opposition (Mr. Meighen) out in the open as he made on the floor of the House yesterday, he could be charged under this law of sedition, and for the life of me I do not see that anything could save him. But surely we have got beyond the time when authorities are immune from criticism. We

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

are surely supposed to be living in a day of democratic institutions, and if authorities are not doing the right thing they ought to be criticized. There have always existed men of heroic mould who are willing to stand up and claim their rights, and Mr. J. B. McLachlan, I believe, is one of these. It is ninety years since in Nova Scotia a man was haled for sedition. Then a man was haled before the courts and accused of being "a wicked seditious and ill-disposed person, a person of most wicked and malicious temper and disposition." That man is now regarded as one of Canada's greatest sons, Joseph Howe. But he was able to say at that time, in connection with his trial:

And here I may be permitted to thank heaven and our ancestors, that I do not stand before a corrupt and venal court and a packed and predetermined jury.

Was J. B. McLachlan able to say that? He had been taken from his own home county and sent off to be tried in Halifax, a city which through the papers and through false representation had been poisoned against the miners through a period of many months, if not years. Further than that, his case was dealt with by judges many of whom up to the time of their elevation to the bench had been very closely connected with the coal companies. I am not for one moment accusing these judges of wilfully prostituting their office, but I say that men who for many, many years have been financially interested in certain concerns might find it very, very hard to dissociate themselves from certain points of view which they would almost inevitably have acquired. I asked, when in Nova Scotia, concerning the judges of the supreme court, and I was told that the corporation influence on the bench was so strong that the court is looked upon by labour as a company department. At least four judges were very closely connected with the companies in New Glasgow before their appointment to the bench.

Chief Justice the Hon. Robert E. Harris was president of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company shortly before his appointment. Mr. Justice Mellish, the trial judge in the McLachlan case, received his appointment in a manner which makes him an outstanding corporationist on the bench. His appointment was made shortly before the criminal trial of the Dominion Coal Company officials for causing the New Waterford explosion. The New Waterford explosion took place at New Waterford, C.B., N.S., on July 25, 1917; some 65 or 70 men losing their lives by it. The men contended the explosion was caused through negligence of the corporation and its officials, and an information was laid. The