

CAUSES OF THE DISCONTENT OF N. S. MINERS

Legacy of Distrust and Mutual Lack of Confidence

Living Conditions Also, and Need of Improving Mining Facilities Chief Factors - Cost of Coal at Mine and to Consumer.

(Staff Cor. Halifax Chronicle.)
Sydney, Oct. 26.—It costs the Dominion Coal Company \$4.35 to produce a ton of coal from the mines. That ton is sold to the dealers in Halifax at an average of \$7 a ton, and finally reaches the coal bin of the consumer at Halifax when he puts down \$13.75, according to present prices. In 1914 the price to the consumer averaged around \$7.50 a ton in Halifax. To the consumer in Gloucester Bay, who is not an employee of the Dominion Coal Company, coal is \$7 a ton. That is the average price to the citizen of Sydney, unless he happens to be an employee of the Dominion Coal Company, when he pays only \$3 a ton exclusive of cartage. The employees of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company at Sydney Mines pay only \$1 a ton for their coal exclusive of haulage in both cases. These figures have no direct bearing upon the immediate subject of this article, but the article itself has special bearing upon the price of coal, as in it we deal with primary factors in the present cost of fuel in this country.

Deep-Seated Unrest.
There is deep-seated unrest throughout the coal fields of Nova Scotia centered in Cape Breton. It is not an unrest that will be permanently satisfied by the increase of wages. That will not be the remedy to change the situation from the present uncertain conditions to a permanent satisfactory basis. There are many causes behind it. The men to-day at the head of the coal and steel companies have inherited a legacy of distrust on the part of the men and this distrust is breeding a very deep bitterness. At the time of writing the odds are in favor of a prevention of a strike at present—but what of the future? Is this unrest to be continually threatening the progress of development of this country, and forcing upon the consumer the ultimate burden of increased cost of fuel, directly and indirectly? From my observations during two weeks, including interviews with representatives of all parties to the dispute, and of many

factors in the community's life, I made certain deductions. These deductions I presented to the men who, by virtue of their position in the life of the community and their relationship to the industrial factors in the dispute, were best qualified to judge of them. After conference with them, these are the deductions:

- Some of the Factors.
- First: Lack of confidence between men and company.
 - Second: Need of thorough overhauling of company's equipment and power plants. The company proposes large expenditure for this improvement.
 - Third: Living conditions are bad, in many places deplorable, and are a source of trouble difficult to estimate.
 - Fourth: Leaders are in some cases not safe in their public utterances and teaching. They are suspected of making political capital out of the wage increase question rather than a genuine effort to permanently improve the living conditions of their men.
 - Fifth: Need of education in economic and the labor problems along lines moderate and thoroughly Canadian.

Mutual Lack of Confidence.
Analyzing the first of these, lack of confidence, what do we find. It is due, so the miners assert, to conditions existing for the last twenty years. During that time there have been many changes of management, policies of improvement have been adopted, but not carried through, promises have been made but not fulfilled, the conditions remained the same, and confidence in the company weakened. On the other hand the company says that under the present spirit they cannot depend upon the men, through their union, maintaining contracts, and point to the McKinnon award, which provided a contract for one year from January 1, 1920 to December 30, 1920, to be terminated only on thirty days notice being given. It provided both sides with the opportunity to revise the contract at the end of each four months, but the miners did not avail themselves of that clause, making new demands while the contract was in force. Talking to a group of men of moderate views, men who it was quite evident, were hard industrious workers, I asked, that if the company's intentions were now to improve conditions, would the miners be satisfied. These miners smiled skeptically and said "We want no promises, we shall believe it when we see the new conditions."

Better Facilities Required.
As the chief factor in the present dispute is the sliding wage scale, based on production, I gave much time to inquiry along my second deduction. I found the company officials exceptional, frank and satisfactory. They admitted that working conditions as regards machinery, power, etc., were not as they wanted them, but large expenditures were undertaken. After talking with the men I was compelled to come to the conclusion that there was considerable in their contention that they required better facilities, such as more power, more equipment, and better machinery to produce the amount of coal required under the sliding schedule. At the same time I am bound to say that I am convinced the company are not sparing any money to correct this condition. I have before me three pay checks for the earnings of three men. In each instance there is a deficiency of pay due, I was told, to loss of hours in the mines through no fault of the miners. One complained of lack of power, the other shortage of boxes to carry away the coal, another of some break in the machinery. At the same time, the average of these men was only \$3.50 a day, when the average for men in similar occupation in the mine was \$6.50, it seemed to me the element of personal industry may have entered into the question of this man's pay check.

The Living Conditions.
My third deduction was with regard to the living conditions. These are of such a nature that I am reserving much of my material for an article specially devoted to that phase. It is enough for me to say here that they are exceedingly bad, in many places deplorable, and until they are remedied, neither the companies nor the country can hold themselves non-responsible for the conditions now existing throughout the coal fields of Cape Breton. It is here that the Dominion Coal Company is promising to put forward strong efforts in the interests of their men, but it is also here that that company is inheriting a legacy left them by the lack of progressive policies in the past. As an instance New Waterford was laid out about the time of the conclusion of the 1910-20

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strike. It is evident that few lessons had been learned by that upheaval, for the new mining town was laid out regardless of modern living conditions, and is today a place of eight thousand people, most of whom live in company houses without sewerage or water—the lack of proper sanitation being a most serious menace to the health of the place. There too one will find the most bitter unrest, and conditions that cannot do other than reduce production and retard development.

My fourth deduction was lack of education among the miners in the best solution of labor and economic problems. It seems a strange fact that not one of the members of the executive of the United Mine Workers is a native born Canadian. In reply to my query as to why that was, miners said to me, "These chaps," referring to the present executive, "like to talk, they like to be on the platform, they work hard, and we let them hold the job." Other men said: "Although we do not approve of some of the wild utterances of these leaders, yet they are able men and from the miners' standpoint very efficient in our union work." One prominent mine official said that he had found these leaders good reasoners and moderate when in conference, but

too much of the "platform artist in public" and unfortunately did much harm among a certain younger element of the labor organizations. There was need, however, for education in sound economic solutions. "In this, the leaders," he said, "are not genuinely interested, neither were they interested in helping to produce such permanent improvement in the relations between men and company as will tend toward permanent contentment."

The Individual Factors.
"How far," I asked of this man, "do you bring in the individual as a factor in this condition?" I was answered by two illustrations:
One man earned \$6.50 a day or \$37.50 a week working eight hours a day. He had a wife and five children, making a family of seven. They lived in a company house for which they paid a monthly rent of \$3.50. They bought their coal for \$1.00 per ton. They purchased their necessities at the co-operative store in which the miner owned shares, and received on his purchases a yearly dividend of twelve per cent. He had no water or light taxes, as neither of those conveniences were in the house which he occupied. He did not drink and was

PRIME MINISTER IN VICTORIA

(Canadian Press Despatch.)
Victoria, B. C., Oct. 31.—Two meetings were addressed in Victoria on Saturday night by Premier Meighen and Hon. J. A. Calder. In the main, the premier dwelt on charges made against the government by Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King when he spoke here. He spoke at length on the tariff, the soldiers' settlement schedule, soldiers' civil re-establishment, the national home building programme and the sugar question.
Major D. L. Redman, of Calgary, spoke on soldier's problems.
Both meetings were crowded and the doors had to be closed on hundreds who stood in line, and who consequently were unable to gain admittance. There were numerous interruptions, questions and comments being shouted at the speakers at various times. Major Redman had an especially hard time to make himself heard, but he persevered good humoredly. But so serious became the disturbance when Mr. Calder was speaking that he said he would ask the chairman, Mayor H. J. Porter, to close the meeting if it were continued. "Do you want it to be said that some thirty persons so conducted themselves as to stop this meeting?" he asked. The heckling thereafter was of a minor nature.

not extravagant about his habits. This man applied for increased pay, saying he could not live on the amount he was earning. As there were many men earning even less and meeting heavier expenses, inquiries were made in this particular case. It was found that his wife knew practically nothing about house-keeping. For this reason his wages were being dissipated to a very great extent by waste and ignorance. This was true in many cases where men had married women who had no experience in cooking and keeping house.
Another case was a man earning \$7.50



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CUSTOMS RECEIPTS.
Ottawa, Oct. 31.—An increase of \$22,721,904 in the customs receipts for the seven months of the fiscal year ending yesterday as compared with the same period last year is shown in the monthly statement of the department of customs. The total customs receipts were \$121,209,796, last year they were \$98,487,872. Customs receipts for the month of October alone, however, are \$1,084,112 less than in October, 1919. During the present month, the receipts totalled \$15,816,218,680, in October, 1919, they were \$16,218,680.

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