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TORONTO TELEPHONE COMMISSION

'OPERATORS' HOURS AND SALARIES.

'TORONTO, January 28, 1907.

'THE BELL TELEPHONE CO.,
'C. F. SISE, Esq., Jr.,
'General Superintendent,
'Montreal.

'DEAR SIR,—I have always held serious misgivings as to what would happen when the change from 5 to 8 hours became effective. A year ago I did not think it could be made without grave consequences. Fortunately the opinion of the operators themselves has gradually become more favourable until to-day I am convinced that the majority welcome the new scale of hours and wages. While this is so *no one expected the change could be made without disturbance*, and undoubtedly a section of the staff are excited and antagonistic. I inclose an exaggerated article from this morning's *World*. The facts are that 6 or 8 agitators have prevailed on about 150 out of the 600 to sign a petition against an increase in hours. Mr. J. W. Curry, a lawyer, has telephoned asking whether I would see him on behalf of the petitioners, stating that they have placed their case in his hands. I replied in the negative, at the same time explaining briefly for his information why the change was advisable in the interests of the service and the operators themselves. I anticipate that he will draw up a more formal petition and that the agitators will endeavour to secure more signatures. It is well that the trouble comes in the winter, not in the summer. We are as well able to face it now, as we would be at any future period. It is the inevitable result of giving a great deal and then trying to take something back. *I understand the operators claim that as their hours are being increased by three-fifths, their salaries should be raised proportionately.*

'There is no trouble at the North or Park, everything is well in hand. Agitation is confined to the Main. While reserving absolute firmness, every effort will be made through the chief operators and their assistants to persuade the dissatisfied element that both hours and salaries are reasonable.

'Yours truly,

'(Signed) K. J. DUNSTAN,
'Local Manager.'

The notices appear to have been posted some time on the afternoon of Friday, January 25, and were read by a number of the operators who were employed at that time and during the evening. The majority of the operators, however, did not see the notice until the following (Saturday) morning.

It will be observed that the notices as posted contained a mention of the hours and wages merely. They contained no intimation that with the increase in hours of work there would be any lessening of the pressure under which the operators would be obliged to work during the hours of their employment, nor any adequate measure of relief afforded. Mr. Dunstan contended before the Commission that notwithstanding the statement contained in his letter of January 16, to the general manager, it was the intention of the company both to lessen the pressure of work and to afford considerable relief, and that he had taken steps to see that the operators were made aware of this intention. The operators on the other hand denied they had any grounds for believing that the company had any such intentions, and asserted that from their knowledge of the extent of the equipment in the Main exchange they had very strong reasons for believing that even were such the intentions of the company it would have been impossible for these intentions to have been successfully carried out.

To what degree the contentions of the respective parties were well founded may

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be judged in part from the communications already set forth and will appear more fully when the nature of the evidence on these points is given. There can be little doubt but that the situation as it appeared to the operators on Saturday after the posting of the notices, whether rightly or wrongly so viewed, was that in less than a week's time they would be obliged to accept a change of conditions which, so far as they could see, meant a considerable increase in the amount of work which they would be required to perform, and this at a considerably less than proportionate increase in the amount of remuneration; also that this change was going into effect notwithstanding it was generally admitted that work as it had been carried on under the five-hour schedule had already proved too great a strain and in some instances a positive injury.

On Sunday an informal meeting of the supervisors and some of the operators was held at the residence of one of their number, at which consideration was given to the method of dealing with the situation and approaching the company. The meeting decided that the best course to adopt was to consult a solicitor and have him assist in framing a petition which would be presented to the company. It was agreed to consult Mr. J. Walter Curry, K.C., and members of the meeting were deputed to arrange an appointment with Mr. Curry for the following day. On Monday afternoon, while the Committee was in his office, Mr. Curry communicated with Mr. Dunstan by telephone, asking if he would receive a petition from his employees or would see him, Mr. Curry, on their behalf. The reply received was to the effect that the company had made up its mind and that no possibility of a change would be considered. Mr. Dunstan refused absolutely to see Mr. Curry on behalf of the employees and in fact appeared to resent their action in having consulted a solicitor, alleging that it was a matter between the company and its own employees, and not one in which a third party should interfere. Some of the operators, it would seem, advocated later a committee of the employees waiting upon the management, but they were not agreed upon this, the general feeling among the operators being that as Mr. Dunstan had stated that the company had made up its mind and had refused to consider a petition from its employees little or nothing could be gained by a personal interview. It was after receiving the answer given by Mr. Dunstan to Mr. Curry that a number of the operators decided that rather than accept the new conditions of employment they would cease work and it became generally known that a strike would take place on February 1, unless some change or agreement were reached in the interval. On Wednesday, January 30, notwithstanding the decision reached, a committee of the long distance operators waited upon the local manager, but were unable to effect any change.

Intervention of Department of Labour.

On January 30, a committee of the employees waited upon Mr. Emerson Coatsworth, the Mayor of the city, and requested his intervention. Mr. Coatsworth communicated with Mr. Dunstan by letter, and at the same time sent the following wire to the Department of Labour, at Ottawa:

'TORONTO, ONT., January 29, 1907.

'MR. W. L. MACKENZIE KING,
'Deputy Minister of Labour,
'Ottawa, Ont.

'A strike of telephone operators is very imminent here and likely to occur on Friday. The time of the operators is to be lengthened from five to eight hours. They

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