

MOB VIOLENCE AT VANCOUVER ISLAND COAL MINES

Mob rule prevailed for two or three days about the middle of August in Nanaimo coal mining district, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, but the prompt action of the Provincial Government in despatching the militia forces in sufficiently large numbers to enforce the law and keep order, resulted in a speedy termination to the violence and excesses of the brief period during which the local and special police were powerless to prevent the outrages that occurred.

The history of the trouble goes back to the declaration of a strike of the miners then employed at the several coal mines at the Comox (Cumberland) and Extension collieries of the Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Limited, owning and operating the mines acquired about two years ago from the Dunsmuir interests. After the strike was carried out, the company was unable for more than six months to operate its Extension colliery mines, which are situated a dozen or fifteen miles south-west of Nanaimo, and which have their shipping bunkers near Ladysmith, the residence town of most of the Extension miners. Efforts were concentrated during those months on the operation of the Cumberland mines, and gradually a non-union force was obtained, until latterly the mines were being worked at about three-fourths their normal productive capacity, and coal was being sent out accordingly. Having got things going at Cumberland, the company two or three months ago turned its attention to Extension mines, where, despite the boast of local strikers that work would not be resumed until after an agreement with them, it became apparent that the working force there also was gradually being increased and production of coal resumed. Meanwhile efforts had been made, but without success, to induce the men employed at the Western Fuel Company's mines, in the immediate vicinity of Nanaimo, to join in a sympathetic strike. Incidentally, it may be mentioned, that the agreement between the Western Fuel Company and its miners had still several months to run—until September—it has been stated in district newspapers. Other collieries being operated near Nanaimo were those of the Pacific Coast Coal Mines, Ltd., and the Vancouver-Nanaimo Coal Mining Company Ltd., but both these were producing on a much smaller scale than the two larger companies previously mentioned.

At the end of last April a man named Farrington, of Seattle, Washington, prominent in the activities in the North-west of the United Mine Workers of America, instructed the president of the local union at Nanaimo to call a strike at all coal mines on Vancouver Island. Notwithstanding that the U. M. W. of A. did not at that time have on its membership list one-tenth of the men concerned—*island newspapers published the statement that its local membership was then only about 200—nearly 2,000 miners and other coal mine employees ceased work, many of them acknowledging that while they wished to keep faith with the company and carry out their agreement, they could not afford to be branded as "scabs," as the U. M. W. of A. was reported to have announced its determination to brand them in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain if they continued at work. A vote was ordered as to whether or not they would return to work, but heeding the warning of the U. M. W. of A. not to vote, approximately three-fourths of those affected abstained from voting. The great majority of those who did*

vote, however, were favourable to keeping their agreement and working until it should expire. No united action was taken, though, so the production of coal was not resumed.

A short time ago an effort was made by the Western Fuel Company and its two neighbouring companies to start work with a few men, and it was generally understood that a beginning had actually been made. This seems to have so exasperated the strikers that many of them became very violent, ordering non-union workers to leave the district, and even threatening them with death if they did not go. Finding that the law was being broken, and that the few local police were powerless to prevent disorder, the Provincial Government had a number of men sworn in as special constables and sent to Nanaimo, which action so angered the lawless strikers that they hustled the specials back on the train and steamer, and bade them depart or pay the penalty of staying with their lives. Then the gathering mob abandoned all restraint, and a reign of terror was quickly inaugurated. At Nanaimo mines little damage was done by the mob, but at the Pacific Coast Coal Mines Company's South Wellington colliery, five miles away, non-union men were violently assaulted, their lives threatened, buildings were wrecked, and even the police sent from Nanaimo were assaulted and turned back. Then the mob proceeded to Extension, where the working miners were fired on, and compelled to take refuge in the mine entry, their women and children so terrified that they fled into the surrounding bush without clothing other than what they wore, and without food, and some of them had to remain there for 36 hours. When they did return they found their homes torn down or burned, all their belongings either stolen or destroyed, and mine buildings and plant effaced by fire. In the town of Ladysmith, eight or ten miles away, police were of no avail, and strikers were so threatening in their attitude that many residents, whites as well as Chinese, got away by train as soon as possible, and left their homes and belongings to the will of the unruly crowd.

Not long, though, did mob rule prevail, for before the law-breakers knew that the Provincial Government intended sending troops, there were hundreds of militia-men in Nanaimo, having been sent up at night by steamer from Victoria, and more followed from Victoria and Vancouver during the next two days. Now disorder has been effectually checked, and the ringleaders of the mob are trying to evade arrest. Col. Hall, in charge of the militia, and police officials having obtained the names of more than a hundred of those stated to have been active in citing the mob and in taking part in its excesses. There will, doubtless, be stern measures taken to punish the leaders of the mob and all others known to have been largely responsible for the disorder and crime of the few days when the mob ran amuck.

One fatality occurred—a man was shot at the Extension mines, but whether by a striker or a non-union miner has not yet been determined, for he was in the line of fire between the attacked miners and their assailants. A particularly dastardly outrage is charged against strikers at Ladysmith, who are stated to have thrown dynamite, with a short-lighted fuse attached, into a room where several children were in