

# The aftermath Settlement Reached in Construction Strike

by Barry Horne

A settlement of sorts was finally reached Jan. 11 in the Cape Breton labor dispute centred around the Island's construction industry.

Under the terms of the agreement, Craig Dobbin, President of the blacklisted G & D Construction Company will take no legal action against any of the unions involved in the original eight-day wildcat strike which involved some 4,000 workers.

The dispute began early in December as a disagreement between Cape Breton tradesmen and G & D over the use of non-union, non-Cape Breton workers on the company's site in east-end Sydney. As efforts to have the company unionize all workers proved fruitless, the Cape Breton Construction and Building Trades Council voted in favor of a general walkout to include all members of the Island construction industry.

Antagonisms mounted during the course of the eight-day wildcat and violence erupted on several occasions. A car on the G & D site bearing Newfoundland license

plates was heavily damaged by the angry strikers and the driver pelted with stones. Following a later gathering near the site, a fire broke out in one of the company's buildings causing in excess of \$50,000 damage. Threats were made that unless something was done fast, the K-Mart shopping plaza would be destroyed. An anonymous caller to CHER Radio in Sydney stated that "The Molotov Cocktail will soon make itself known in Cape Breton."

All this was finally enough to awake the sleeping government in Halifax and Labor Minister T. J. McKeough was rushed to Sydney to enter the dispute, which was just about beyond the point of mediation.

Dr. McKeough repeatedly backed down from the union position and finally had company president Dobbin agree to halt all work until an Industrial Inquiry Commission could look into the situation.

Then Dobbin backed out of the agreement and announced his intention to re-open the Sydney site. The Building Trades Council answered by threatening a re-

sumption of the walkout, but didn't muster the support needed for a repeat of the strike.

After the appointment of McGill University Dean of Arts and science, Dr. H. D. Woods, as one man inquiry commission, Dobbin again halted work on the G&D project. The next two weeks of meetings led to the settlement reached last Sunday.

## All Involved Come Out Losers

The one thing that makes this dispute unique is the fact that regardless of the solution arrived at, all parties involved came out losers.

Cape Breton labor comes out a loser even though they forced the great Craig Dobbin to back down — their tactics in achieving this end lost them public support. Their eight-day horror show, staged largely for the benefit of the outside world, kept a large segment of the Island population in constant fear for their property and personal well-being. In the latter stages of the wildcat, some members of the striking unions themselves expressed a desire to drop the whole affair.

Craig Dobbin, President of G&D, loses after setting himself up as a hard line type only to back down continually. He also bred a great deal of personal contempt in Cape Breton since he was responsible for the whole fiasco. One would think that a man in his position would know better than to use non-union labor in the cradle of Canadian trade unionism... but not Craig. Not only were they not unionized but they were outsiders as well.

The provincial Labor Dept. comes out badly. When the original strike was losing momentum, they tried to hold the line for an immediate settlement only to have the Minister accede to union demands in Sydney's Isle Royal Hotel. Dr. T. J. McKeough is a loser in that he has consequently lost the confidence of his department.

And last but not least, the Cape Breton people themselves take the greatest loss. In so poor an area, which right now relies heavily on the investment of outside industry for jobs, the wildcat action by construction tradesmen can only serve to deter new industry from establishing in Cape Breton.



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