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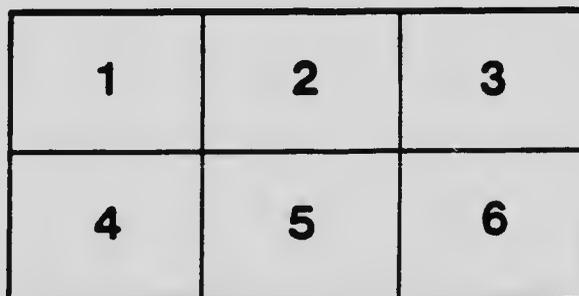
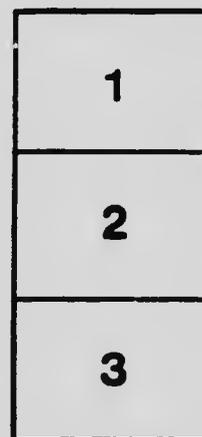
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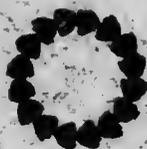
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# The Labor Trouble —IN— Nanaimo District

An Address Given Be-  
fore *the* Brotherhood  
of Haliburton Street  
**METHODIST  
CHURCH**



1913

By Rev. JOHN N. HEDLEY  
M.A., B.D.

NANAIMO, B. C.

# The Labor Trouble in Nanaimo District

An Address Given Be-  
fore *the* Brotherhood  
of Haliburton Street  
Methodist Church



BY  
REV. JOHN HEDLEY  
M.A., B.D.

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# The Labor Trouble

—IN—

## Nanaimo District

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In the following article an endeavor will be made to give as accurate an account as possible of the labor trouble in Nanaimo and vicinity. So many conflicting reports have been in circulation regarding industrial conditions here that it becomes an imperative duty to correct as far as possible any misleading stories and relate the facts as they have actually occurred.

For over fifty years coal mining has been carried on in Vancouver Island. At first the product was very limited but the industry has developed until at present four different companies are operating the mines of the Island—The Canadian Collieries Co., at Extension and Cumberland; the Pacific Coast Coal Co., at South Wellington; the Vancouver and Nanaimo Coal Co., at East Wellington, and the Western Fuel Co., at Nanaimo. Previous to the strike these mines employed upwards of 3,500 men, mostly English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh miners, with a few Italians and Finns and about 800 Orientals.

This industry has not been carried on without great loss of life. In 1834 at Wellington 23 men were killed. In 1887 at Nanaimo 180 men, in 1888 at Wellington 50 men, in 1904 at Extension 17 men and in 1909 at Extension 33 men. Serious accidents have also occurred at Cumberland. As Government statistics have only recently been available,

these figures are only careful approximations. These awful disasters were all due to explosion of gas. Besides these, every year there are a number of men killed or injured in various minor accidents, the number of which it is impossible to determine. The Government estimate makes the number at three deaths per year for every 1,000 men.

Laws have been passed at various times to compel the operators to provide safe working conditions. The last in 1911, known as the Amendment to the Coal Mines Regulation Act, is very comprehensive and thorough and meets with general approval.

However, there are a great many features of industrial life for which there is no provision made. Coal companies, because of carelessness or greed, break the law. Individual workmen may also be careless. Favoritism becomes rife. Discrimination or victimizing comes to be practiced. The individual employee may have to endure unspeakable working conditions due to tyrannical bosses with no means of redress. Consequently some form of unionism on the part of the employees becomes an absolute necessity. The employee then secures the co-operation of his fellow-workmen, the right of collective bargaining and protection from unjust and unfair treatment. Unionism enables the workmen largely to solve their own problems, makes for industrial stability and awakens in them a keener interest in the welfare of the industry.

The first union to be established was a local union known as the Mine and Mine Laborers' Protective Association, recognized by the New Vancouver Coal Company's predecessors to the Western Fuel Co., for a period of eighteen years. The results were good. During this interval various attempts were made to organize other mines, but these attempts were always

defeated by the Dunsmuir Co. Then an effort was made by the Western Federation of Miners to organize the men. The Mine and Mine Laborers' Protective Association affiliated with this organization. This effort to organize the Island led to the victimization of the leaders and the effort failed through lack of proper support. The majority of the men then withdrew from this organization and invited the United Mine Workers of America to organize locals. This was done and for a time there were two unions. The Western Fuel Co. recognized the Western Federation of Miners and the result was the breaking up of both organizations. An effort was then made to organize a Canadian union. Locals were formed at Extension, South Wellington and Nanaimo. This Canadian organization was bitterly opposed by the various mining companies. Realizing that they would never be strong enough to be of any value as an organization they invited the U. M. W. of A. to come and organize among them. This union demanded evidence of readiness for organization before they would come. At Cumberland 300 men gave in their names as willing to join, 400 at Ladysmith and 170 at South Wellington. At Nanaimo, in the Opera House, a unanimous vote was taken in favor of the U. M. W. of A. It was therefore only after repeated requests that the International officials of the present union came and effected organization. Four locals were formed, at Cumberland, Extension, South Wellington and Nanaimo. The three first mentioned locals grew strong but at Nanaimo, owing to the known opposition of the operators, the membership grew slowly. The coal companies refused to recognize this union.

It might be here stated that the U. M. W. of A. is an international organization, with headquarters in

Indianapolis. It is one out of 99 other organizations having locals in Canada. Eighty-eight per cent of the workmen of Canada who are members of a union belong to a union that is international. The United Mine Workers is one of the strongest of these, having a membership of over 400,000 men. The remarkable growth of this organization is due solely to its excellence as a union. Each Local practically controls its own local affairs. No strike can be declared without the consent of the local involved, nor can a local union declare a strike without the sanction of the executive except by forfeiting its right to assistance. The object of the union is to avoid strikes and maintain its agreements inviolate. The other union mentioned—the Western Federation of Miners—exists solely at present among the metalliferous mines.

According to a provision laid down in the Coal Mines Regulation Act the miners employed at Extension in June, 1912, elected a Gas Committee to examine the mine for gas. This committee forms the miners own guarantee of safe working conditions. The Government have their Inspector of Mines, the companies have their fire-bosses, the men have their gas committee, elected by them and paid by them. These two men, in June, reported gas in dangerous quantity. This report was corroborated by the mining inspector. (See Inspector's report.) One of these men shortly afterwards was dismissed by the company, and on going to Cumberland got work only to find later he was black-listed. In the opinion of the miners he was discriminated against because of this report. The union protested through a committee but the manager refused to see them. On the following day, September 16th, the men took a holiday partially in protest, chiefly to collectively consider the matter. As the

men were working on their different shifts of 8 hours each this was only possible by taking a holiday. During the day a committee went to see the general manager. He replied "that he did not know any of them and would not meet them." On the following day a notice was posted telling every man to take his tools and before re-employment must sign a contract under the old conditions for two years. This the men refused to do. On the 18th the men at Extension took a holiday to protest against the action of the same company at Cumberland, and on the following day a similar notice was posted for them. This started the "lock-out" at Cumberland and Extension that has gone on ever since. Communications were sent by the unions at these places regarding a proposed agreement but all were ignored. Later the Orientals who had stood loyally by their fellow workmen, it is stated and generally believed, were intimidated to return to work.

Since then the mines at Cumberland have been employing Chinese, Japanese, Negroes and a few white miners. Here practically everything is owned by the company, especially around Bevan—land, coal, houses, store, hotel, even the road leading to the mine. The strikers, numbering 500 men, have had to endure every insult and privation. They have seen their city invaded by a Government force of 20 or 30 mounted police, 100 or more special police. By 350 soldiers with arms and a field gun. They have had to endure a raid by the strike-breakers. They have seen their leader unjustly arrested and imprisoned. They have been maligned by the Press, yet through it all and up to the present, according to the statement of the Mayor, they have conducted themselves as respectable law-abiding citizens.

Inasmuch as nothing apparently was being done by

the Government to bring the labor trouble at Cumberland and Extension to an end, the officials of the union determined to call a general strike of the coalminers of the Island. The locals had previously voted for a strike but had to wait for official consent. This was given and a strike declared on May 1st. It would doubtless have been better had a ballot been taken, as less than two-thirds of the miners were then members of the union. Within a week, however, 95 per cent. of the men had joined the union. These men, citizens of Nanaimo, are almost all of them from the Northern Counties of England, from Scotland, Ireland and Wales, consequently they thoroughly believe in Trades Unionism. Most of them have their union cards and on their arrival in this city were surprised to find there was no recognized union. They soon learned, however, that the spy system around Nanaimo was so perfect that it was not safe to mention unionism, therefore the local union grew slowly. However, they believe they have the same right to a union as any other body of workmen or professional men and that unionism is a benefit to both masters and men. They ask for the recognition of their union as the basis of settlement. The operators object to the U. M. W. of A., calling it a foreign organization. while the men contend that an organization of less strength would be useless.

It is true that a two years' agreement drawn up by the company existed between the Western Fuel Co., and their employees, but this was never considered satisfactory by the men who, in the absence of a union, felt obliged to accept it.

During the long weeks of enforced idleness and privation since the strike was declared, the strikers conducted themselves in an exemplary way. The city

was as orderly and as peaceable as any community could be. A few pickets were placed on the streets leading to the mine, the fire-bosses were allowed to go to their work as usual. Some irritation was felt, however, because of unfair articles appearing in the columns of one of the local newspapers. At South Wellington and Extension there was more irritation caused by a few strike-breakers brought in by the companies operating the mines at these places. No trouble, however, occurred.

On the 11th August, the Western Fuel Co., owning the mines at Nanaimo, endeavored to introduce strike-breakers into the mine and resume operations. For several days the under bosses had been soliciting workmen from among the members of the union and from the few men who had not joined the union to return to work. The company hoped in this way to defeat the object of the union and break up the strike. At this time some 1,200 men were members of the organization which included all but a few of the company's employees. This change of affairs naturally created excitement among the men. Heretofore they had been picketing on a small scale but on the morning of the 11th a vast number of men turned out to endeavor by every lawful means to defeat the attempt of the company to break up their union and eventually bring them into subjection. Picketing was considered legal both by the authorities and by the men at this time. The strikers arranged themselves along the streets leading to the mine to endeavor to persuade their fellow workmen from going to work. In a few minutes eleven men appeared escorted by the bosses who had persuaded them to return to work. Some of the men had been told that at least 200 men would go to work

that morning. These eleven men refused to listen to persuasion and went to work.

At the close of the shift the strikers again assembled. Several women were also present and quite a number of the sympathizing public. General condemnation of the tactics of the company could be heard on every hand. When the strike-breakers reappeared and saw the evident disapproval of their conduct by their fellow workmen the majority resolved to work under such conditions no longer.

Four members of one family were taken to their home in automobile guarded by the police. A crowd soon gathered to endeavor to persuade them from further work. Thinking perhaps that something serious would happen one member of the house appeared with a gun in his hand. He was forced back in the house by some members of the family who seemed determined to prevent a possible shooting through the window into the crowd of men, women and children assembled in front of the house. When the gun appeared a few stones were thrown by some party, resulting in one or two being hit and eight window panes being broken. This was the only destruction of property in Nanaimo. Upon the family promising not to return to work the crowd soon dispersed and all was quiet. This was the only exciting incident of the day.

On the following morning, the 12th of August, the strikers were again out in force doing picket duty. Only the fire-bosses appeared on their way to work. The strikers had now determined that owing to the company's action in using the fire-bosses to break the strike, they must endeavor to persuade them also to stop work. Heretofore they had been unmolested in their work of keeping the mine in repair. All, however, went to work. The strikers re-assembled at the

close of the shift immediately in front of the company's office. A few fire-bosses at once declared their intention of quitting work for the present, the rest remained behind to discuss what was best to be done. In a short time Mr. Stockett, manager of the Western Fuel Co., came out and addressed the men. He referred to the possible destruction of a part of the mine through fire unless he had workers to deal with the trouble. The men replied that their houses were in Nanaimo, that all they had was at stake, that they did not want any part of the property destroyed, that if he would recognize the union 50 men would go down the mine at once, or any number of men, and work until the fire was extinguished. His reply was that he was willing to meet a committee of his men who had been employed in the mine on April 30th. A committee was chosen at the next meeting of the union and arrangements were made for the committee, together with Mr. Farrington—International organizer of the union—to meet Mr. Stockett at 3 o'clock on the following day. Mr. Stockett, according to the committee, consented to this, but when the committee went to see him, he refused to meet them. The remaining fire-bosses on returning from the mine declared their intention of quitting work.

At South Wellington, a mining camp about four miles south of Nanaimo, ten strike-breakers had been brought in by the company operating there and set to work. They were housed on the company's property, in what was called the "Bull-pen." Much annoyance was caused by their presence. A number of union men in the evening of the 12th, determined to have them quit work. They approached the camp, explained their errand and asked them to stop work. Some resistance was offered. One strike-breaker who

challenged the men to fight, with axe in hand, was slightly hurt. Some glass was broken and furniture overturned in the pen. Having persuaded the strike-breakers to quit, the men returned home.

On Wednesday, the 13th inst., it was learned that twenty-three or more special police would arrive by boat from Vancouver at noon. This again created excitement among the miners. No antipathy whatever was felt towards the city police, but it was felt that specials had no business whatever in the city. As these special police attempted to land they were escorted one by one back to the boat. One man, on drawing his revolver, was roughly handled, and one policeman was accidentally, yet not seriously hurt. Had the gun not been shown no injuries would have been received.

In the afternoon of the same day word was brought to the city that six men had been shot by the strike-breakers at Extension. At once the union men of the district and their friends hastened towards that camp, six miles distant, to assist their fellow-workmen. For some days previously the feeling had grown intense between the union men and the strike-breakers. These latter were composed largely of Southern Italians, who had been particularly annoying to the strikers and their wives, even treating the latter to personal indignities. Having no protection, the strikers had to bear these insults as best they could. On the evening of the 12th, the company gathered all their men on their property beside the Italian "bull-pen." The union men believed that a united effort was to be made to drive them out of the camp. A searchlight erected by the company played all night on the quarters where they resided. It was known that the strike-breakers had many guns and

much ammunition in their possession, some say furnished by the company. As the union men drew near the camp they met a few of the strike-breakers' wives and children. The remainder had taken to the bush surrounding the mine. Those that could be found were offered protection and an escort to the city. Some of the union men went in search of others who were known and brought them to places of safety. As the men drew near the mine they met a fusilade of bullets from a point near the mouth of the mine. This drove the men to shelter some distance away. Later on a spectator passing near and away from the entrance of the mine was wounded by a shot fired from the mine. The question is often asked, why has the man who fired the shot not been arrested, but no answer has been received. Some flames appeared and before long eleven houses, cabins and shacks were on fire, including the Italian "bull-pen." Whether these buildings were fired by the strikers or strike-breakers has not been determined. It is supposed that many of them contained quantities of ammunition. Towards midnight the crowd dispersed and went home. With one exception no one had been hurt and he only slightly wounded. The reports of damage done to property at this camp have been greatly exaggerated, and in some cases absolutely false.

On the morning of August 14th, a detachment of militia consisting of 300 soldiers landed at Departure Bay, some two miles north of Nanaimo. They marched into the city and took up their quarters near the post office. Later on in the day a detachment went out to Extension and with the assistance of union men took the strike-breakers out of the mine and rescued the remaining women and children. The

strike-breakers were sent to Victoria and comfortably quartered in hotels; later some went to Cumberland, and later still it is learned a few have returned to Extension.

Meantime soldiers and special police continued to pour into the city equipped with tents, horses, arms and machine guns. Travellers coming to or leaving the city had to pass through the lines. Military rule was apparently established. Who sent for the militia and why they remain are questions as yet unanswered. With the exception of the work of the first day there has been nothing whatever for them to do. The union miners having taken the men out of the mine, there was no further cause for disturbance.

On the 15th, Mr. Farrington was to address an open air meeting on the waterfront, but was called off by the colonel in command.

On Monday, August 18th, a meeting of the miners was held in the Athletic Club to discuss a proposed agreement between the Vancouver and Nanaimo Coal Co. and the union. About 1,200 men were present. The meeting began at 7:30 and at 8:00 it was announced that soldiers were surrounding the building. At 9:00 the colonel in command asked for the chairman. Upon going outside he was shown the soldiers on every side of the building and a machine gun in the rear. On his return he informed the men that they had been commanded to begin leaving the hall in two minutes in single file, and any man running would be instantly shot or bayoneted. This arbitrary command issued when the men were in the midst of important business was most exasperating, yet there was no panic. The men proceeded to close the meeting and carry out the command. Then the colonel gave further orders that

he would allow them an hour to complete their business. Then he sent word he wanted to address the meeting. On being received he told them he would give them all the time they wanted, but that he was tired and would go to bed. When the meeting was over at 11:00 and it had been decided to accept the agreement, the men were marched out in single file in groups of ten through soldiers with fixed bayonets by special police to the court house. The name of each man was taken, his clothes searched, and those whom the authorities desired were retained in the building. Some forty-three were detained; the rest were kept outside surrounded by a guard of soldiers until 2:00 o'clock before they were allowed to return to their homes. This may be termed the all-night inquisition.

A search for fire arms was then made. It was begun on the evening of the 18th in the hall, and was continued for several days. Portions of the floor of the Athletic Hall were torn up and the whole building thoroughly searched. Other places were also searched, but not a trace of gun or other weapon has been found. The miners of Nanaimo believe that their cause is so just that there is no reason for resort to arms, and consequently have never deemed it necessary to have any in their possession for this purpose.

The men who were apprehended in such numbers were flung into the Nanaimo jail. Although innocent until proven guilty—many have since been discharged—they were treated as criminals. Given no opportunity for bail except in case of sickness, confined three in a cell 6x9 feet, the only sanitary arrangement a bucket placed in the cell and emptied once a day, dysentery rife, yet no trace of disinfectants;

food meagre and poor; brought to and fro from the jail to the court house by armed soldiers and special police; manacled by handcuffs when brought to and fro from Victoria; confined eight or nine weeks before trial, such is the treatment accorded them by British Columbia justice. Contrast this with the treatment given by the Government to the strike-breakers. They have had full liberty, properly housed and fed and cared for in every way. These are the transients of many nations, while the strikers are citizens of the city and district.

Since then the authorities have manifested a mania for making arrests. Men have been arrested on the most doubtful and trivial charges of intimidation and picketing. Many of these charges have not been sustained, yet the victims of this tyranny must go to jail whether innocent or guilty. The result is a general breakdown of all regard for British law or justice. As far as the miner can see the law and the administration of law exists solely for the protection and help of the mining companies. All loyalty to the state must vanish when it is recognized that the state does not stand for justice or fair play.

It is apparent that the authorities are more concerned for the welfare of the coal companies than they are for the welfare of the miner. If unionism is a good thing for the professional men, business men, clerks and the more skilled artisans, why is it not a good thing for the miner? His occupation is one of the most dangerous and arduous in existence. Covered with grime he must work 600 or 700 feet underground, in some cases far out under the sea, in semi-darkness, in extreme humidity, breathing coal dust and smoke, in constant danger, yet his product is one of the great necessities of civilization. Therefore

should receive every protection and help that a Government can give.

Why should not the Government lend its aid in helping him effect an agreement or establish trades unionism? It is quite willing to protect the companies that they may operate the mines with the strike-breakers of every nation. If their plea of loyalty to the Empire were genuine they would see to it that British subjects—men from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales—whom they have persuaded to come to this country by means of literature lectures were given the best possible working conditions in a new land, and thus consistently do their part in building up the nation with English speaking people.

One word should be said in regard to the press. Some newspapers have endeavored to state the facts in connection with this labor trouble clearly and accurately. Others have been guilty of gross misrepresentation and unfairness. They would lead the reader to believe that the miner is an outlaw or desperado. It is true he has his faults like the rest of us, and yet from the miners have come men of sterling character, national benefactors. Therefore there is no reason whatever why he should be maligned by the press. If all news is as colored as has been the news concerning the Nanaimo strike it becomes a matter of serious moment what we are to believe. An unreliable newspaper is a menace to any nation.

The great problem, however, is: How can greater industrial stability be assured? The answer is evidently only when there is greater community of interest in the industry. Workmen who furnish the labor ought to be as deeply interested in the welfare of an industry as the men who furnish the capital. This is only possible where mutual confidence exists. When

there is a suspicion that strikes are being manipulated that dividends may be paid, or that any other practices are followed that will not bear investigation, then community of interest is practically impossible. If our present industrial system will not stand the closest scrutiny then it must give way to another.

When trades unionism is established it ought to be the object of every member of the union to maintain as high a standard of reliability, honor and integrity as possible in order to promote the good name of the union. Every workman should give his best service for all the time for which he receives pay. The union should do its part in securing for its employers good, skilled, trustworthy workmen.

Up to the time of writing the strike still goes on. The Vancouver and Nanaimo Coal Co., or the Jingle Pot Mine, having recognized the union, operations have been resumed in this mine to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. An attempt is being made under military and police protection to operate the other mines. This only means that the bitterness that has already been engendered will be deepened. It is hard to understand how men can be found to work in these mines when by such work the privation and suffering of their fellow workmen is intensified and prolonged. It is harder still to understand the indifference and callousness of the Government. The British Government did not hesitate to take action during the last great coal strike. When the Pennsylvania coal strike occurred a few years ago the Government of the United States, in the person of its President, appointed a commission to investigate the trouble. When the appalling facts were brought to light the strike was soon settled. It would be so here. The burden of responsibility rests with the Govern-

ment. A Government of the people, for the people, by the people, would soon effect such an understanding and settlement as would promote the interests and well-being of all.

