

KESEVAN STRIKE.

Prepared -  
Oct. 28, 1931.

Short Chronological Review of the Labour Dispute -

Saskatchewan Lignite Coal Fields - September - October  
1931.

August 27, 1931.

The Secretary-Treasurer of the Village of Sienfuit notified the Department that some six hundred men had joined the Miners' Union, that the Union would undoubtedly demand a very considerable improvement in the wages and working conditions of the miners and that there was a grave possibility of a difference of opinion arising as between the mine operators and the men with a consequent strike and labour trouble.

September 3rd.

I went to Kesavan and attended a meeting of the Miners' Union, which was presided over by James Sloan. At this meeting Mr. Sloan refused to inform me concerning the grievances of the men or impart any other information that was necessary before any attempt might be made to negotiate a settlement between the operators and the men.

Asked as to whether or not the Union which he had organized was affiliated, either directly or indirectly, with the Red Internationals of the Trade Unions, Mr. Sloan denied any such affiliation, claiming that the Kesavan Union was not a "Red" organization.

September 4th.

I attended a meeting of the operators held in the Village of Sienfuit, at which practically all the operators of the larger mines were present, and at which meeting I suggested the possibility of a conference between the operators and the men.

The operators at this meeting agreed to send a committee of the men provided the committee was composed of men employed in the mines in the Saskatchewan lignite field.

At two o'clock in the afternoon I conferred with Messrs. Sloan, Forbin and one or two members of the miners' executive in the dining-room of the house in which Mr. Sloan was living. I submitted to Mr. Sloan the proposition of the operators to meet a committee of the men employed in the field. Mr. Sloan replied that the question was one for the miners themselves to decide and that he would submit the proposition to a meeting of the men to be held that evening in Sienfuit.

Mr. Forbin, who was <sup>present</sup> president, intimated that the men should not accept the proposal of the operators, giving as a reason that Mr. Sloan and himself should be present at all negotiations in order that any agreement reached should be as uniform as possible with the Alberta miners' agreement, and that as Mr. Sloan was familiar with the terms of the Alberta agreement he should be present when any agreement was drafted respecting the Kesavan field.

I again requested to be informed as to the terms or conditions which the men were submitting to the operators as an adjustment of the dispute, and was again informed that the information would be divulged only at a meeting at which all operators were present and at which the operators would first agree to recognize the Union.

September 5th.

A meeting of the operators again convened at the offices of the Trunk Tracer Company. The decisions of the men's meeting at Hienfeld, which had been communicated to me only by persons who were present, indicated that while Sloan had informed the meeting of the conditions under which the operators would meet the men, he nevertheless advised the men against any such meeting and at the same time informed the men that as a representative of the Government I had endorsed their Union and wished them every success in their dispute with the operators.

The operators again stated they were still prepared to meet a committee of the men employed in the field but that they would not recognize any union or other organization which was in any way affiliated with the Red International of Labour Unions.

On September 5th Hon. Jas. F. Bryant, Minister of Public Works and Hon. John A. Werkley, Minister of Railways, Labour and Industries, Saskatchewan Government, arrived in Estevan and conferred with the operators. The operators again repeated their willingness to meet the men providing the committee to meet them was made up of men employed at the local field. The ministers endeavored to get in touch with the representatives of the Miners' Union, but were informed that the executive would not consult with them without the presence of Mr. Sloan, their president. Mr. Sloan at that time being in Arcadia. At the request of the ministers Mr. Sloan was communicated with by telephone, and after some hesitation he agreed to return to Estevan the following day and to interview the ministers. Hon. Messrs. Bryant and Werkley remained in Estevan for the balance of that day and all day Sunday, but were unable to get into communication with Sloan. Sloan apparently did not return to Estevan until after the Ministers had departed for home late Sunday night, September 5th.

September 7th.

The Miners' Union ordered a strike of all miners in the Saskatchewan lignite field, to become effective on the morning of September 8th.

On being advised of the decision to strike and being aware of the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Investigation and Conciliation Act which makes it illegal for employees of certain industries to go on strike or for employers to declare a lock-out before submitting the questions in dispute to a Board of Conciliation; and being anxious that the men should have the full benefit of the provisions of the Act, I wired Sloan at Estevan on September 7th as follows;

"Am informed operators refusing to meet your Union tonight and strike to take place tomorrow STOP Would strongly urge you advise men to observe the law in such matters and that you apply immediately for board under Industrial Disputes Act."

-4-

Act for thorough investigation working conditions and that men remain at work pending investigation."

No reply was received from Sloan and the order to strike was issued for the following day, September 8th.

September 8th.

The strike having been definitely started contrary to the Industrial Disputes Act, and as certain provisions of that Act were drafted to cover such cases, the Saskatchewan Government immediately communicated with the Department of Labour at Ottawa and the federal authorities directed their Chief Conciliation Officer to go to Estevan.

September 15th.

Pending the arrival of the Federal Government's Conciliation Officer the Attorney General of Saskatchewan made several attempts to have the questions in dispute referred to a voluntary board of conciliation composed of a representative of the miners, a representative of the operators, these two appointees to name a third man for chairman, or failing to agree the Government would appoint the chairman. The operators agreed to this proposal and nominated their representative in the person of Mr. Freeman, but Mr. Sloan on behalf of the men refused absolutely to appoint a man or to have anything to do with such a group or conciliation board.

September 18th.

By Joint Order in Council of both the Federal and Provincial governments His Honour Judge Sully was issued a commission to investigate the working conditions of the mines and miners in the lignite field.

September 21st.

Chief Conciliation Officer Campbell of the Federal Department of Labour arrived in Estevan and began an effort to effect a conciliation as between the operators and the men. It was apparently Mr. Campbell's intention to have the men return to work in order to place the dispute in order for investigation under the Industrial Disputes Act which Act can function only whilst the men are actually employed. In order to accomplish this end as an inducement for the men to resume work he secured some concessions from the operators including an undertaking to re-engage all men on strike without discrimination. During these negotiations which were for the purpose of legalizing the whole situation and permitting the proper operation of the Industrial Disputes Act, arrangements were made to hold in abeyance the enquiry of the Royal Commission. The leaders of the men, however, refused to participate in any way in the negotiations or to return to work on the concessions granted by the operators, with the result that the negotiations completely broke down on September 25th.

September 25th.

The negotiations of Conciliation Officer Campbell having failed, Judge Wylie immediately made arrangements for his commission to begin its enquiry and announced the first sitting for Monday September 26th.

September 26th.

Royal Commission ready to proceed.

September 26th.

Town Council of Estevan refused an application for a parade of the strikers through the streets of Estevan and communicated their decision to Mr. Sloan. The parade was held however in defiance of the orders of the town council and a riot developed.

October 5th.

I went to Stenfelt, where I spoke to a meeting of returned men in that district, informing them that since my last visit to the Estevan area and despite the statements made by Mr. Sloan, <sup>the mine workers' Union</sup> the mine workers' Union of Canada was affiliated with the Red Internationals of Trade Unions and that its affiliation was through the Workers' Unity League of Canada; that this League was organized according to its official organ "The Worker" in June 1930 and that its constitution provided as follows:-

**NAME.** - This organization shall be the Workers' Unity League of Canada; the Canadian Section of the Red Internationals of Labour Unions.

**PURPOSE.** - To organize the Canadian workers into powerful revolutionary Industrial Unions, created on the basis of the widest rank and file control; to fight for the defense and improvement of the conditions of the working class, mobilizing and organizing the Canadian workers for the final overthrow of capitalism and for the establishment of a Revolutionary Workers Government.

I explained further that as an organization which was pledged to revolution and the overthrow of our present system of government, it was impossible for the Saskatchewan Government or the Federal Government to recognize such an organization or to negotiate with it in any way.

The vast majority of the men present at the meeting denied any knowledge of the fact that their Union was affiliated with the Workers' Unity League of Canada and through that affiliation was a branch of the Red Internationals of Trade Unions, which is one of the departments of the Communist Internationals of Moscow.

October 6th.

On October 6th there was convened at the Court House at Estevan a conference attended by the operators and a delegation representing the miners. This conference continued in session until 3.30 o'clock in the afternoon, when the following agreement was reached:-

We, the Mine operators and employees in conference at the Court House, Estevan this 6th day of October, 1931, hereby agree that the mines be opened immediately and the men return to work on the following conditions, viz:-

(1) That this be considered a temporary arrangement pending the findings of the Wylie Royal Commission and the possible drafting of a working agreement between the operators and the men.

(2) That Pit Committees for each mine be a recognized organization in each mine.

(3) That the provisions of the Mines Act be observed in relation to check weighers.

(4) That all water in the roadways and working face be removed by the Company and that such places be kept as dry as possible.

(5) That the terms of any schedule or agreement finally reached between operators and men be made retroactive to the date of the re-commencement of work by the men.

(6) That there shall be no victimization or discrimination against men on account of the strike, particularly in reference to men on the payroll as at September 7th last.

(7) That contract men be employed on an 8-hour basis, face to face, and the Company men work nine hours a day.

(8) That because of working conditions in the various mines, the removal of slack and questions of overweight be left to negotiations between the operators and the men's committees.

October 7th.

The above findings were submitted to a mass meeting of the miners in Bienfait and approved of by a vote of 130 to 40 against.

October 19th.

Reports having reached the department that the operators and men were experiencing some difficulty in reaching final settlement as proposed in the agreement reached at the conference on the 6th, I again went to Bienfait where I interviewed a number of men on Monday evening.

October 20th.

I attended a meeting at the Court House assisting in various ways at the conference between the men and the operators when some twenty-seven (27) items on a schedule of working conditions were agreed to.

October 31st.

I visited practically all the deep seam mines in the area, conferring with the men on such questions as inspection of scales, enforcement of the provisions of the Mines Act and health regulations, and answered a number of questions apparently satisfactorily to the men.

October 29nd.

A vote of all the miners employed in the district was taken on the proposals agreed to between the men's committees and the operators, and resulted in 221 voting to accept the agreement, 88 voting to continue the strike or in opposition to the agreement and 8 spoiled ballots.

*Thos. M. W. W. W.*

# OPEN LETTER

## TO THE MINERS OF THE SASK. COALFIELDS

### FELLOW WORKERS!

The heroic month-long struggle of the Estevan-Bienfait miners is in danger of meeting complete defeat. The strikers resumed work on October 8th without anything more tangible than a promise of negotiations with the operators on the conclusion of the Royal Commission Enquiry, which is promised on October 18th. To gain their point the operators temporarily granted several concessions (recognition of the Pit Committee, granting right of check-weighmen, etc.), but the miners returned to work under their old unbearable conditions, particularly regarding wages, which are to remain meanwhile on the old level. It is clear that the operators made this manouvre in order to get the men back to work, disrupt their union and then attempt to completely break down the demands of the miners. There is no guarantee that even the temporary concessions gained by the miners will be lived up to by the operators.

The operators were able to gain this temporary victory over the miners by employing all the means of terrorism and treacherous betrayal at their disposal. The City and Provincial Police, also the R.C.M.P. were called in and used to arrest the strike leaders and intimidate the men. The operators' agent, Deputy Minister of Labor Malloy, an A.F. of L. faker, was brought down to persuade the strikers to resume work pending the fake investigation of the Royal Commission and to break faith with their union. It is also evident that agents of the operators were working within the Strike Committee and were instrumental in getting the strikers back to work and betraying the miners' heroic battle.

It must be noted that the official representatives of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada Executive resisted the decision to end the strike at the meeting of the Pit Committees, and were to openly state their position at the mass meeting of the strikers on October 7th, when one of them was arrested and the other forced to leave town to avoid arrest by the police. The Strike Committee did not heed the advice of the M.W.U.C. representatives and the blame for the partial defeat of the strike rests with it.

### THE POSITION OF THE WORKERS' UNITY LEAGUE IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. The strikers should not have resumed work, but continued negotiations until a district agreement, meeting the requirements of the miners, was signed.
2. The Pit Committees should have consistently fought for the strikers' demands, instead of which some of them had secret meetings with the agents of the operators, without the knowledge of the men.
3. Some of the Pit Committees exposed their betrayal of the strikers themselves by urging the men in their mines to resume work immediately on Wednesday, before the strikers themselves had voted on the question.
4. Out of four hundred strikers only a minority of them was permitted to vote on the question, according to the fake lists supplied by the operators.

These points show clearly how the strike was betrayed and defeated.

The miners must not be further misled by the smooth promises of the Royal Commission and the faker Malloy. They must prepare their forces to resume their struggle with renewed vigour on October 19th and smash all manouvres of the operators and attempted betrayal on the part of the Pit Committees. Their immediate demands must be:

1. Oust all wavering and treacherous elements from the Pit Committees. Elect Militant workers who will put up a real fight for the miners' demands. Choose militant workers for check-weighmen.
2. That all demands of the miners be included in the District Agreement on October 19th.
3. Build up the Union, smash any attempt to sever the miners from the WUL, and prepare to strike on October 20th if the demands of the miners are not granted.

4. **DEMAND THE IMMEDIATE REMOVAL OF THE POLICE AND THE MILITIA, AND THE RELEASE OF ALL ARRESTED WORKERS!**

5. **DEMAND FULL COMPENSATION TO THE WIVES AND DEPENDANTS OF THE MURDERED AND WOUNDED STRIKERS!**

The Workers' Unity League pledges its **FULL SUPPORT** to the struggle of the Sask. miners. The conditions are favorable to win the demands of the miners if they put up a consistent struggle. **TURN THE TEMPORARY DEFEAT INTO A VICTORY FOR THE WORKERS AND SHOW THAT THE HEROIC STRUGGLE OF A MONTH'S DURATION, WHEREIN 3 WORKERS LOST THEIR LIVES AND MANY SUFFERED VERY GREATLY, WAS NOT FOUGHT IN VAIN!**

Saskatchewan-Manitoba District Council  
of the Workers' Unity League.

*Exhibit attached*

# Eastern Collieries of Bienfait, Ltd.

MINERS AND SHIPPERS OF  
High Grade Lignite Coal

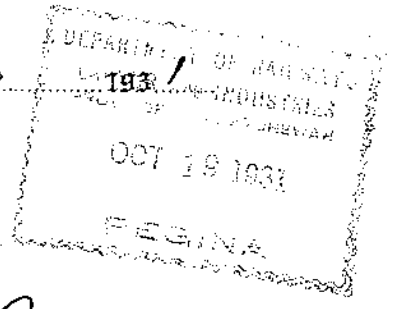
*Noted*

DIRECTORS

H. WALLACE, PRES. & M'G'N DIRECTOR  
D. CHAPMAN, VICE-PRES.  
J. M. WALLACE, SEC'Y-TREAS.  
R. J. GRAHAM  
G. H. CLIFF

*Box 143*

HEAD OFFICE: *Oct 16*  
Estevan, Sask.



Mine at Bienfait

*M. Malloy Esq  
Deputy Minister of Labour  
Regina Sask.*

*Dear Sir:*

*I am enclosing a leaflet  
that is being broadcast around  
here by the thousand. I thought  
you might be interested in seeing  
it*

*Yours truly  
Edw. Luce Jr*



# Protest Against Brutal Murder of Miners in Estevan!

**Demand Immediate Withdrawal of Armed Government Forces  
from Strike Area and Punishment of Murderers!**

**HELP THE STRIKERS IN THEIR HARD STRUGGLE!**

Workers and Farmers! Sympathizers of the struggles of toiling masses against their exploiters and oppressors! Raise your mighty protest against this latest brutal and murderous attack of the armed forces of capitalism against the working class of Canada. Following all kinds of terrorizing measures against the impoverished and starving masses of workers and farmers, and the attack upon their rights and free speech, press and organization, the capitalists of Canada are now using their armed forces for massacring the unarmed workers peacefully demonstrating for the purpose of gaining sympathy for their demands.

On Tuesday, September 29th, several hundred miners of Bienfait, Sask., who are on strike, went on trucks and cars to the nearby city of Estevan, for the purpose of advertising a meeting that was to take place in the Estevan Town Hall in the evening to win the sympathy of Estevan workers for the Bienfait strikers. They carried some banners upon which the demands of the strikers were inscribed, but no fire-arms or any weapons whatsoever. All they intended to do was to hold a peaceful demonstration. Their wives and children were also with them. As soon as they reached Estevan, their trucks and cars, some of them decorated with Union Jacks, were attacked by the Mounted and local police.

The police attempted to stop the parade and arrest Martin Day, on the advice of Chief McCutcheon of Estevan, having previously incensed the miners by trying to break the windows of the cars with their loaded sticks. The miners defended their comrade and Chief McCutcheon, without any warning, started to shoot, followed by the Mounties. Men leaving Estevan to return to Bienfait were fired at and wounded when they attempted to climb on the trucks. People at the windows of nearby houses were shot at. The only weapons used by the strikers in self-defense, were stones and pieces of iron picked up from the streets. This is the toll of this bloody massacre: three dead, eighteen wounded (some of them not expected to live) and twenty-three arrested. Wounded miners were not admitted to the local hospital.

The 100% strike of the coal-miners of Bienfait was called about three weeks ago. Following are the unbearable conditions the miners are fighting against: Average wages amount to 25c per ton of coal; miners have to buy their own powder and pay rent for tools, boots and slickers. They work fourteen to sixteen hours a day and yet practically nothing is left of wages after deductions are made for different charges by the company. The miners are cheated on the weight of the coal dug. They have to buy food and clothing from the Company-owned stores and pay from 100% to 300% higher prices than in private stores. They have to live in company houses and pay exorbitant rentals. The houses are unrepaired. Bunk houses for single men are not fit for human beings to live in. Over and above prices for board, miners are compelled to pay 5c per day for the rent of dishes. They have to pay for the use of water. With one exception, there are no wash houses. Provisions of the Health and Mines Act are not adhered to by the Company. There are no first aid stations, etc., etc.

In order to change these conditions, the miners of Bienfait, for the first time, have successfully organized themselves into the Mine Workers Union of Canada, and put forward the following main demands:

(1) Recognition of the elected pit committees composed of miners working in the mines. (2) The eight hour day. (3) The right to appoint their own check weighman in order to see that they are not cheated on the weight of the coal dug. (4) Right to purchase goods where they please. (5) A minimum wage of \$4.00 for underground workers, \$3.50 for workers above ground and \$2.75 for young workers. (6) Proper housing, fair rents, free tools and powder to be supplied at cost. (7) Pure drinking water to be supplied free. (8) Wash houses to be provided in all camps at fair charge to the miners, etc.

The operators have employed all means in their power to crush the heroic struggle of the miners. They called on the police and militia to terrorize the strikers and arrest their leaders. They are responsible for the attack on the peaceful strikers' demonstration. They have enlisted the aid of the Government in setting up the Royal Commission presumably to enquire into the miners' grievances, but in reality to lull the fighting spirit of the strikers by placing their hope in the "justice" of the Commission's findings. They have enlisted the aid of the Deputy Minister of Labor, Malloy, an A F of L faker, to get the strikers back to work under vague promises of a satisfactory settlement later on. They have temporarily succeeded in getting the men back to work with the aid of the police and troops on the one hand and treacherous manoeuvres of Malloy and part of the strike committee on the other. Some of the demands of the miners were temporarily agreed to; the negotiations to be continued after the findings of the Royal Commission. A dastardly betrayal of the strike is being prepared and the miners are getting ready to continue their struggle in the near future.

This in brief is the situation which demands an immediate action on the part of every thinking worker and poor farmer. The bloody massacre must be answered by the toiling masses with a thunderous protest to the Saskatchewan and Federal Governments, and with assistance greater than ever to the struggling miners of Bienfait.

**RAISE YOUR MIGHTY PROTEST AGAINST THE ESTEVAN MASSACRE!  
STOP THE BLOODY HANDS OF THE MURDERERS OF WORKERS!  
DEMAND THE IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ARMED FORCES  
FROM THE STRIKE AREA AND THE PUNISHMENT OF MURDERERS!  
DEMAND THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THE ARRESTED WORKING  
CLASS FIGHTERS!**

**ORGANIZE A UNITED MASS DEFENSE FRONT OF WORKERS AND  
FARMERS!**

**RAISE AND SEND DEFENSE FUNDS TO:**

**CANADIAN LABOR DEFENSE LEAGUE,**

Room 308, 331 Bay St., Toronto 2, Ont.

**ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
CANADIAN LABOR DEFENSE LEAGUE.**

*Estevan Strike file*

1050

Farmer's Building,  
Regina, Oct., 17, 1931.

Dear Sir;-

Complying with the request which you made over long distance telephone this morning that I communicate with you indicating whether or not the Miners' Union in its affiliation with the Third International may be regarded as a communistic organization or not.

The Red International of Labour Unions was organized as an outcome of a conference of Russian trade union officers and members of the Third Communist Internationale held in Moscow July 15, 1920. The following are among the aims and objects of the Red Internationale of Labour Unions;-

1. to organize the large working mass in the whole world for the overthrow of capitalism;
2. to carry on a widespread agitation and propaganda of the principles of revolutionary class struggle, social revolution and revolutionary mass action for the purpose of overthrowing the capitalist system;
3. to co-ordinate and regulate the struggle of the working class in all countries and organise Internationale demonstrations each time when the situation demands them.

Membership in the Red International of Labour Unions is open to any revolutionary economic class organization provided it recognises the aims and objects of the Red Internationale as set out in its constitution, some of which are quoted above.

In order to provide an organization on the

American continent for carrying on the propaganda and principles of the Red Internationale there was organized on August 1, 1929, the Trade Union Unity League of the United States of America. The promoter was W. Z. Foster who spent several months in Moscow in consultation with some of the chiefs of the communist Internationale. This Trade Union Unity League carried on the work of the Red Internationale in Canada as well as in the United States up until June 28, 1930 when the Worker's Unity League of Canada was organized as the counterpart in Canada of the Trade Union Unity League of the United States.

In publishing its constitution the Worker's Unity League of Canada states that this organization shall be the Worker's Unity League of Canada, the Canadian section of the Red Internationale of Labour Unions.

Its purpose is to organize the Canadian workers into powerful revolutionary industrial unions created on the axis of the widest rank and file control to fight for the defence and improvement of the conditions of the working class, mobilizing and organizing the Canadian workers for the final overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a revolutionary workers government.

It would seem to me therefore, that any organization affiliated with the Worker's Unity League of Canada must subscribe to the constitution of the League and in subscribing to the constitution of the League the local union becomes affiliated with the Red Internationale of Trade Unions and is pledged to a programme and policy of revolution and the setting up of a new system of government along the lines laid down in the constitution of the parent body.

I trust that the foregoing information may be of some service to you in deciding the question of whether or not the Red Internationale of Trade Unions is a revolutionary organization.

Faithfully yours,

  
Deputy Minister.

Chas. Wm. Locke, Esq.,  
President, B. E. S. L.,  
Bienfait, Sask.

Estevan, October 6th 1931.

We, the Mine operators and employees in conference at the Court House, Estevan this 6th day of October, 1931 hereby agree that the mines be opened immediately and the men return to work on the following conditions, viz:

(1) That this be considered a temporary arrangement pending the findings of the Wylie Royal Commission and the possible drafting of a working agreement between the operators and the men.

(2) That Pit Committees for each mine be a recognized organization in each mine.

(3) That the provisions of the Mines Act be observed in relation to check weighers.

(4) That all water in the roadways and working face be removed by the Company and that such places be kept as dry as possible.

(5) That the terms of any schedule or agreement finally reached between operators and men be made retroactive to the date of the re-commencement of work by themen.

(6) That there shall be no victimization or discrimination against men on account of the strike, particularly in reference to men <sup>on the payroll as at</sup> ~~employed on or before~~ September 7th, last.

(7) That contract men be employed on an 8 hour basis, face to face, and the Company men work 9 hours a day.

(8) That because of working conditions in the various mines, the removal of slack and questions of over-weight be left to negotiations between the operators and the ~~men~~ <sup>pit</sup> ~~Committees~~ <sup>men's</sup>

Signed by  
E. C. Goulet  
in behalf Coal Operators

D. Moran  
President Miners  
Union



*L. Harrison*  
*St. John*

306 Royal Trust Bldg.,  
Vancouver, B. C.,  
September 28th, 1931.

RECEIVED  
PROV. OF SASKATCHEWAN

OCT 1 1931

REGINA

My dear Tom:

Many thanks for your favour of the 11th instant which was forwarded from the Palisades Hotel to me at the above address.

I observe that you have the same opinion of Sloan as I have myself. I have known him for about 12 years and he has always been a trouble maker. I see by the Press reports that the Government is to have an investigation under the Inquiries Act. Probably that will clear the atmosphere.

Sorry that you were unable to come out to Vancouver to the Trades & Labour Congress Convention. It was very successful and there were nearly two hundred delegates present.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,

*F. E. Harrison*

F. E. Harrison,  
Western Representative, Department of Labour.

T. M. Melloy, Esq.,  
Deputy Minister of Railways, Labour & Industries,  
Province of Saskatchewan,  
Farmers Bldg.,  
Regina, Sask.

Farmers' Building,  
Regina, Saskatchewan,  
September 22nd, 1931.

Dear Sir,-

Your communication of the 18th instant respecting the labour organization among your employees reached me on Saturday but owing to pressure of business and absence from the office on Monday, I was unable to reply sooner. I see by the Press, however, that you have arranged a temporary agreement with your employees; consequently, I do not know that the information I can supply you will now be of any value to you.

From what I can gather, however, the Lumber and Agricultural Industries Union has undoubtedly affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League. The full title of this League is "The Trade Union Unity League of United States of America" and was organized on March 31, 1929, as a continuation expansion and reorganization of the Trade Union Educational League which was formed in November, 1920.

The promoter of the League was William Z. Foster, who spent several months in Moscow where it was reported he, in consultation with some of the chief communists, arranged a new plan of labour organization for the North American continent.

The scheme differs from the ordinary Trade Union in that they endeavour to form industrial groups. The organization provides that no dues were to be collected from individual workers, the revenues of the League were to be provided through voluntary donations, meetings, entertainments, sale of literature, etc. After complete organization, there was to be introduced a National Uniform Dues Paying System on a basis of 25¢ per member per month.

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The organization is aggressively revolutionary and provides in its constitution that the League shall be affiliated with the world leader of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement - The Red International of Labour Unions. This affiliation with the Red International brings the organization into the group which boasts as one of its objects " the organization of the working class for the overthrow of capitalism, the destruction of the Bourgeois State and setting up of the dictatorship of the proletariat and International which will cease all the means of production and establish communist commonwealth. "

Whilst men frequently join organizations of this type, they are not always familiar with the basic principles on which the organization is founded and even though they may be members of a Union affiliated with the Red International, they sometimes have no sympathy whatever with the principles of the parent organization.

The activities and attitude of the local Union would be determined entirely by the type of leaders whom they select for officers. The organization, however, is undoubtedly a dangerous combination of men - especially when led by a group of officers who are entirely unsympathetic to our present form of society and its inherent institutions.

As above noted, however, you have already bridged your difficulties and I trust that by the time you are prepared to re-open in the Spring, you will have adjusted a lot of the difficulties you are now experiencing.

If there is any further information of historical or other character respecting your particular organization which you desire, I would be glad to furnish it to you and I would also highly appreciate any information you may be able to give me from time to time as to who the prime movers are in your organization, as well as any policies which they propose to adopt in order that I may have my records up to date.

Faithfully yours,

  
Deputy Minister.

G.A. Calvert, Esq.,  
Managing Director,  
International Clay Products, Ltd.,  
Estevan, Sask.

# INTERNATIONAL CLAY PRODUCTS, LTD.

G. A. CALVERT  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Manufacturers of



Fine Clay Products

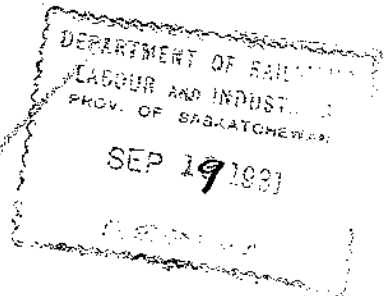
REGINA OFFICE  
402 LEADER BUILDING

HEAD OFFICE

ESTEVAN, SASK.

Sept. 18th, 1931.

T. M. Molloy, Esq.,  
Deputy Minister,  
Department of Railways, Labour & Industry,  
Regina, Sask.



Dear Sir:

As you have doubtless learned from press reports our company has been involved in the labour troubles now prevalent in this district. The accounts in the newspapers have been fairly accurate, so that it is hardly necessary to trouble you with the details at this time.

The points in dispute were not originally of very great moment, and could no doubt have been settled by negotiation had the opportunity of doing so been afforded us. The men, however, appeared to have lacked intelligent leadership, and precipitated the strike without warning.

We have reason to believe that there is a very general feeling among them now that the walk-out was ill-advised under the circumstances, and if some means could be devised whereby the self-respect of both sides could be saved, it is highly probable that the men would return to work. Unfortunately, however, since the strike, and not before, the question of recognition of the union has been interjected into the dispute, and so far as the men are concerned, this appears to overshadow the main points at issue.

Our company is not hostile to organized labour, but it has had no previous dealings with this particular union, and has been afforded no opportunity of learning what it stands for and what recognition of it involves. The men, rather unfairly, we think, refuse to discuss this point, but insist upon recognition first, and discussion afterwards. We have a suspicion that recognition will involve the dismissal of those men who have remained faithful to us during this crisis, and this, of course, the company cannot under any circumstances entertain.

It might be possible, however, that in the interests of peace the men who have remained with us might be induced to



# INTERNATIONAL CLAY PRODUCTS, LTD.

G. A. CALVERT  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Manufacturers of



Fine Clay Products

REGINA OFFICE  
402 LEADER BUILDING

HEAD OFFICE

ESTEVAN, SASK.

T. M. Molloy

2.

join the union, providing that it was an organization that self-respecting British subjects could affiliate themselves with. This, however, there seems to be strong reason to doubt, and as we are unable to learn anything about the union from the men, we would be obliged if you could give us any information regarding it.

The name of the union is the Lumber and Agricultural Industries Union. We believe it to be affiliated with the Mine Workers Union, and we presume with the Red Internationale. This is all the information we have concerning it. We do not know who its officers are, and in fact the one representative with whom we had a few minutes conversation disclaimed any responsibility for calling the strike. The union, however, appears to insist upon having a say in settling it.

You will understand, of course, that this particular strike has no direct bearing upon the mine strike, although doubtless the latter tends to aggravate our own situation. You are probably also aware that we are just about at the end of our season, and have only a very short period of employment to offer. With this in mind, therefore, it seems to us that it would be a reasonable solution to the present deadlock for the men to return to work for this short period, finish up what we have to do, and close up the plant for the season, leaving the points in dispute to be settled before the plant re-opens next spring. All this could be without prejudice to either side. Such a solution, however, would have to be arrived at very quickly, as the season is getting far advanced.

We would appreciate any comments you might have to make on this situation, and particularly any information you can give us regarding this union. Of course, this is entirely in confidence, and you may depend upon our not quoting you. Similarly the above statements are for your own information only.

Yours very truly,



G. A. Calvert  
Managing Director.

C-0

Regina, Sept. 9, 1931.

Re:- Estevan Coal Strike.

On Thursday September 3 at 8.00 p.m., I attended a meeting of the Miners' Union, held in the City Hall, with a view to ascertaining the nature of the complaints which the union had against the operators.

Immediately upon entering the meeting the Chairman demanded an explanation of my presence which I explained as a right as representing the public.

There were four or five of the smaller operators present at the meeting;- i.e. Banks, Parkinson, Jenish and one or two others. The men did not acquaint me with the details of their grievances nor the nature of the demands upon the employers but from the general discussion it would seem that short weights, weighing after screening, company store practices and violations of the provisions of the Mines Act are the principal difficulties.

There were about 65 present at the meeting, only two of those who spoke seemed to hold communistic ideas. Both these men were British.

On Thursday September 3 at 10 p.m. I interviewed C. C. Morfit, President of the Coal Operator's Association who flatly refused to see any men representing the union and said his association were unanimously of the same opinion. His only reason for his attitude was that the union was a communistic organization and as such would not be recognised by his association. He agreed however, to have a meeting of the operators that I might attend.

On Friday September 4th at 10.00 a.m. I met the operators at Mr. Freeman's office in Bienfait. Those present, Messrs. E. C. Garner, W. Hamilton, H. Wallace, C. C. Morfit, Alex Wilson and J. Petersen. After discussing the situation from ten o'clock until 12.30 the operators agreed to meet a committee of the men provided the committee was composed entirely of men actually employed in the mining fields of the Estevan or Bienfait district.

Friday at 2.00 p.m. I interviewed Sgt. Mulhall, R.C.M.P., D. Bannatyne, Mayor, also Perkins, McLeod, M.L.A., *W. Whittier* and Calvert, and other citizens all of whom seemed to have considerable sympathy with the men although all were opposed to the organization of any group affiliated with the international revolutionary party.

Friday at 3.00 p.m. I interviewed Jas. Sloan, President, M. J. Forkin, secretary, as well as well as several other members of the Miner's Union in Sloan's office, presented the resolution of the operators which Sloan promised me would receive careful consideration by his executive that afternoon and would also be discussed at a public meeting of the miners to be held that evening in Bienfait.

Saturday, September 5th at 9.00 a.m. I went to Bienfait and interviewed Mr. Freeman, also spent the forenoon and up to 3.00 p.m. interviewing individual operators. I convened another meeting of their association to be held in the office of the Truax Traer Company at 3.00 p.m. Saturday. At the conclusion of this meeting it was announced that the operators had decided to stand pat and not meet the members of the union.

NOTE. Mayor Bannatyne called me on the phone Monday afternoon to consider the advisability of two or three individual operators attending the meeting of the men called for that evening. I suggested that it would be good policy to attend the meeting and I understand that Messrs. Garner and Freeman did go to the meeting but were refused any information as to the nature of the demands of the men.

T. Malloy

COPY OF TELEGRAM SENT TO HON. G. D. ROBERTSON; Ottawa.

Regina, September 9, 1931.

Hon. Senator Robertson,  
Minister of Labour,  
Ottawa.

Re Estevan strike James Sloan later of Calgary and Alberta coal fields together with M. J. Forkin of Winnipeg organized branch of Mine Workers of Canada at Estevan two weeks ago STOP My deputy interviewed men who undoubtedly have number of grievances both real and inaginary but their leaders Sloan and Forkin will not reveal men's demands STOP Operators at first refused to meet union representatives because of admitted affiliation with third internationals STOP Eventually two leading operators met union delegation and offered to negotiate but union refused to reveal its demands unless all operators present hence in absence of some operators union called strike for Tuesday morning last STOP Six hundred men are out and roads to all mines picketed all quiet however and unless union prepared to negotiate with fair operators feel strike will fail because of demands of unemployed for chance to work prompted by feeling that union not acting properly in refusing to state its demands and negotiate with those operators who desire to be fair to workmen STOP One large mine proposes operate next day or two when real test of situation may be revealed STOP Advised Sloan Monday to apply for board of conciliation before going on strike but advice ignored.

John A. Merkley.

## CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY'S TELEGRAPH



## DAY LETTER

CABLE CONNECTIONS TO ALL THE WORLD

TIME FILED

CHECK

J. McMILLAN, General Manager of Telegraphs, Montreal.

Send the following Day Letter, subject to the terms printed on the back hereof which are hereby agreed to.

Regina, Sask.,  
September 7th, 1951.Jas Sloan,  
President Miners Union,  
Estevan Sask.

*Estevan*  
*Strike*

An informed operators refusing to meet your union tonight and strike to take place tomorrow STOP Would strongly urge you advise men to observe the law in such matters and that you apply immediately for board under Industrial Disputes Act for thorough investigation working conditions and that men remain at work pending investigation.

THOS H. MOLLOY

Deputy Minister of Labour

ONES 2605 - 2606

Estevan Strike

Free Press, Oct 1/31

### Estevan's Black Day

~~Free Press~~ Oct. 1/31

After three dragging weeks of dissension in the Estevan coal-field two men have been killed and many injured in a pitched battle in the streets. Somebody has a lot to answer for. All over the world the development of coal fields has been accompanied by bloodshed and violence, and there will be many who think that it would be better to close up the Estevan field than to add still more loss of life to that staggering total.

The story as we have it is as old as the history of the industry. The workers claimed grievances, and miserable working conditions. The mine owners denied that there is ground for these complaints and refused to meet the union formed by the strikers, claiming they were agitator-led and had Communist affiliations. The dispute dragged on, and even the appearance of a Dominion conciliator and the appointment of a Commission to investigate conditions had no result. Then the men decided to hold a parade through the town of Estevan. A permit was refused. The parade took place in spite of the refusal, and contact between police and strikers touched off the explosion.

It is fairly certain that, had the parade permit been granted, no loss of life would have resulted. This has been the usual experience in the past. Surely a parade is an absurd issue on which to stake life and death. The whole issue should have been grappled with many days ago. The Royal Commission had been appointed for some days. Why had its inquiry not been begun before? Now the investigation must be held under the shadow of Tuesday's tragedy, making the whole problem a more complicated one to handle.

As for the larger issues involved, the men's grievances, collective bargaining and the allegations of extremism against the strike leaders, these are issues on which judgment must be deferred until such time as the Commission has made its report. Too much time has been lost. It must be hoped a speedy conclusion will be reached.

Star - Phoenix

Oct. 1/31

### The Estevan Fray

A royal commission is investigating the strike in the Estevan coal field and no doubt that inquiry will bring to light all the causes underlying the trouble. Pending the report of the commission and in view of the obscurity which surrounds the dispute and the unsuccessful negotiations preceding the unfortunate climax, it is useless to speculate on the grievances of the men or on the attitude of the operators towards the strike leaders and officials of the recently formed branch of a somewhat nebulous union. The parade in Estevan which led to the fatal clash with the police, is, however, a different matter. It was the outcome of feelings inflamed by professional agitators and responsibility rests directly on the shoulders of the strike leaders from outside the district who took charge of the miners' activities. The methods adopted were typical of agitators of the class to which they belong and the outcome was one which too often follows that kind of leadership. The parade in Estevan was not, so far as can be seen, necessary, nor could it have contributed anything to their argument even had it been held with the approval of the civic officials. But when forbidden by the mayor of the town, who had ample authority and police officers to enforce his authority, the strike leaders must have known almost exactly what would happen and what did happen. In the face of that they persisted and so fairly and squarely on them must rest responsibility for the conflict. It is to be noted that, so far as reports from Estevan state none of these leaders and organizers were in the front rank of the attacking mob. Prominent in the district for the past three weeks, they disappeared immediately after the battle and have not been seen since while officers scour the countryside with warrants for their arrest.

The official inquiry into the strike under Judge Wylie acting as commissioner, began yesterday and, after organization, adjourned until Monday. Judge Wylie was appointed commissioner on September 22, one week before the strike reached its climax, but the appointment was not confirmed by Ottawa until the day of the disturbance. Whether or not the starting of the inquiry at an earlier date would have prevented the occurrence, the people of Saskatchewan will want to know why it was delayed.

Free Press,

Calvin strikes  
Oct. 1/31

# SLOAN IS BLAMED FOR ESTEVAN TROUBLE

*Free Press*  
Sen. Robertson Says Calgary  
Mine Workers' President  
Fed Men With Discontent.  
*Oct. 1/31*

Both Governments Receive  
Censure from U.F.M. in Sas-  
katoon for Delaying Action

(Canadian Press Despatch.)

Regina, Sept. 30.—Direct blame for much of the trouble in the Estevan coal fields leading up to the present strike and culminating in Tuesday's tragic riots, is laid by Senator G. D. Robertson, federal minister of labor, on James Sloan, of Calgary, president of the Mine Workers' union, and his associates, including a woman, Mrs. Alex. Boruk.

Replying to criticisms of his government for not taking action earlier, the senator, in an interview here today, said the striking miners themselves precluded the possibility of such action by breaking the law in quitting work without first asking for a board of conciliation.

After questioning the authenticity of many reports concerning the origin and history of the strike, Senator Robertson said that some months ago the Mine Workers' organizer, who had been active in Alberta, came to Saskatchewan to form a branch of the union here. He fed the flames of discontent and made statements, not yet authenticated, as to the men's grievances. The present strike followed.

"The fact is," said the minister of labor, "the action of the men in going on strike without first asking for a board of conciliation, was illegal. The department of labor at once offered its services through a conciliation officer in an effort to bring the parties together."

No further action could be taken, continued the senator, until the men returned to work and came within the law once more. As a result the department's chief conciliation officer, M. S. Campbell, was sent to Estevan to reason with the miners and for a few days met with apparent success. No further progress was met with, however, owing to the attitude of the strike leaders, and it was decided to appoint Judge Wylie, of Estevan, as a commissioner under the Industrial Trades Disputes Inquiry act, in the hope that his position and influence would alter the situation.

On Monday, said the minister, he interviewed Judge Wylie, giving him a free hand and appointing W. Perkins, of Estevan, as counsel to bring out the facts.

"It is my view," Senator Robertson stated, "that the men probably have some grievances, but they should have submitted them in a legal way so that a proper inquiry could be made. I believe, however, that the men as individuals are not at all unruly or unfair, but that they are very badly advised by their leaders, Sloan, Scarlett and the woman Boruk, whose activities were very undesirable and of no advantage to the men."

"I notice, too, that on the whole the leaders responsible for the unrest have a way of finding safety in absence when real trouble starts."

"It is to be hoped," he concluded "that as a result of the inquiry now under way the men will return to work pending a permanent settlement and restore the status quo."



Leader Post,

Sept. 30/31

# Twelve Injured Seriously When Police and Miners Wage Battle In Street

*Leader Post*  
Sept. 30/31  
**R.C.M.P. Officers, Backed Against  
Wall by Mob, Bruised, Wounded  
When Hit by Missiles Thrown  
By Attackers**

**TWO BYSTANDERS ARE HIT BY  
BULLETS DURING STREET FIGHT**

**Miners, Roused to Fighting Pitch, Driven  
From Estevan Only When Police Fire  
Upon Them; 600 in Motor Caval-  
cade From Bienfait**

(By Staff Reporter)

ESTEVAN, Sask., Sept. 29.—Following a day when the streets of this little south Saskatchewan town were turned into a battlefield Estevan Tuesday night counted the toll of casualties resulting from the hand-to-hand combat waged when 400 striking miners clashed with R.C.M.P. officers:

Two dead, 12 seriously injured and in hospital, and many others suffering from minor injuries, was the grim toll of the battle which raged in Estevan streets for three quarters of an hour Tuesday afternoon.

Two of the wounded strikers, Mike Kyatick and Louis Revay, may die. A bullet wound passed through Kyatick's body close to the heart, and Revay was shot in the chest and thigh.

Two Mounted Police officers, constables Palmer and Sutherland, were badly hurt in the fracas. Palmer has a fractured arm, while Sutherland's skull was fractured and his spine injured.

Five bystanders were injured by bullets, one of them, a woman, being hit in the shoulder by a bullet while watching the battle from a window.

A list of the dead and injured follows:

The dead:

Nick Narwan, Taylorton.  
Julian Fryshko, 26, Bienfait.

The injured:

John Forberg, Roche, Percee, striker;  
Louis Revay, striker, Crescent Collieries; Fred Konopocki, Bienfait, striker; Tony Stankewich, Bienfait, striker; Mike Kyatick, Crescent Collieries; Tony Marten, Estevan, bystander; Miss L. King, Nelson, England, bystander.

Clive Butterworth, Estevan, music teacher; Staff Sergt. Mortimer, R.C.M.P., badly bruised shoulder; Sergeant J. Molyneux, R.C.M.P., left ear torn; Chief of Police A. McCutcheon, head wound; Constable Sutherland, R.C.M.P., fractured skull; Constable Robertson, R.C.M.P., scalp wound; Constable Palmer, R.C.M.P., bullet wound in left arm.

Four other police officers, who refused to be treated in view of the hospitals being crowded, were also slightly injured.

## Send Reinforcements

Tuesday night a detachment of Mounted Police left Regina by special train for Estevan. They will reinforce the men who stood off the rioters Tuesday. Hon. M. A. MacPherson, K.C., attorney-general of Saskatchewan, has indicated to the authorities at Estevan that preparations for any eventuality, even to the declaration of martial law if necessary, had been made. He was assured by Mayor D. Bannatyne that the situation was well in hand at Estevan, and there would be no necessity of declaring martial law for the present.

The striking miners massed early Tuesday forenoon at Bienfait, then proceeded in lorries and cars to Taylorton, where they picked up an additional number of strikers, and went to the Crescent Collieries, one mile east of Estevan. From the collieries the strikers started for Estevan. On arriving in the town they were met by a cordon of police, but some of them managed to circle around and reach the town hall, where two of their number fell later from bullet wounds, dying on the hospital steps.

## Throw Missiles at Police

As the men from the first lorry jumped from their conveyance they began to hurl bricks, cast-iron pipe, stones and other missiles at the police, who were gradually driven back against the town hall wall. Striking miners appeared from every part of the town, and in a few minutes about 400, some women and a few children, were milling in the first miners' riot in Saskatchewan. Within a few minutes the fire brigade was called out. No sooner had the firemen started to play the hose on the strikers, than some of them manned the engine and put it out of commission. The firemen fled from the scene. Policemen continued to shoot their revolvers in the air but this did not intimidate the strikers. Police reinforcements, men who had been called to patrol duty at the mines, rushed in and, with levelled rifles, began to scatter bullets into the crowd of strikers. The miners, intimidated, left the scene of battle, running down various alleys and streets, and converged to a point outside the town limits, later driving off towards Bienfait and Taylorton.

In the meantime hundreds of windows had been smashed, street lights destroyed and the streets were littered with missiles used by the miners.

In the hospital were a number of nurses working over the injured miners, and two bodies had been taken away to the morgue.

## Restore Authority

By 4:15 o'clock actual fighting had ceased, police were scouring the town for strikers who had taken part in the riot, and were restoring order out of chaos. Authority again restored, officials communicated with the provincial

government requesting reinforcements for the police, and this, they were assured, would reach Estevan Tuesday night.

During the night, police patrolled the town of Estevan, and continued to search for strikers who took part in the rioting during Tuesday afternoon. The authorities expressed the belief that there would be no more outbreaks.

Judge E. R. Wylie, appointed commissioner to investigate the trouble in the mining field, will start his work Wednesday, it was stated.

Leader - Post,

Sept. 26/31

*Estevan*

## Judge Wylie Delays Probe Of Estevan Strike Tangle; Awaits Word From Ottawa

(By Staff Reporter)

ESTEVAN, Sept. 25.—Judge E. R. Wylie, of the district court, Estevan, has delayed his investigation into the strike situation in this area, pending word from Ottawa.

His honor was appointed Tuesday as a commissioner under the Enquiries act to investigate all aspects of the 18-day strike which has crippled industry in the Estevan and Bienfait districts. The strike sector was quiet all day Friday, the warring bodies apparently each waiting for a move on the part of the other. R.C.M.P. officers are keeping a vigilant watch on the mine fields, and while all is peaceful on the sector, this is being regarded as the calm which precedes the storm.

While Judge Wylie is delaying his investigations into the strike situation, the rumor grows in persistency that, in view of the collapse of negotiations between the miners and the Dominion conciliation officer, who left Estevan Thursday night, the commission may be cancelled. Judge Wylie had planned to start his investigations within two days of his appointment as commissioner.

An organization convention of the United Farmers of Canada was held in Estevan Friday afternoon

and while no stand was taken by the body on the issues of the strike, Mrs. A. Eddy, president of the M. & S. mine auxiliary of the Miners' Union, outlined the conditions which exist among the miners and their families and appealed to the farmers to support them with food and relief. Gordon Galloway was chairman of the meeting, which was attended by about 100 persons, and which was addressed by J. F. Herman and A. J. McAuley.

No further attempt has yet been made by the strikers to prevent work at the Truax-Traer mine, the only large mine operating in the field and over which between two and three hundred miners swarmed on Thursday morning. Officials of the miners' union maintain silence as to what they intend to do in this regard. Developments, however, are expected at any time. The detachment of R.C.M.P. officers in the district is being increased, and the district waits in grave anticipation for the next move in the complex situation.

Rumor was current Friday night that a number of the small operators in the field, who early in the week agreed to recognize the miners' union, are seeking to withdraw.

Estevan Strike

Regina Star, Sept. 24/31

## Operators Ask for Police Protection; Will Use Any Labor

Star Sept. 24/31  
Unrest Marks Village of Bienfait as Strikers Gather on  
Street Corners Discussing Situation;  
May Call Meeting

ESTEVAN, Sept. 24.—Complete collapse of mediation between striking miners and mine operators emphasized by a threatened attack upon the Truax-Traer Company's holdings. Thursday morning shrouded the strike area in a sinister cloak today.

Unrest marked the mining village of Bienfait as strikers gathered on corners and in public halls waiting further negotiations with government officials and representatives of the operators. A conference with officials of the Truax-Traer Company was also waited.

Reports indicated that complete reversal of a second miners' committee upon the proposed agreement of the first committee, Wednesday night, had again brought the strike to a deadlock.

### COMMITTEE REJECTS ORIGINAL AGREEMENT

Hopes that strikers would be back at work Friday morning were dashed to the ground when a second committee representing the miners refused to meet the agreement made by the original committee. This agreement which had been proclaimed satisfactory to all had been negotiated according to information available by M. S. Campbell, chief conciliation officer of the Dominion. Mr. Campbell it is expected, unless definite assurance of a return to the original agreement is experienced, will leave for Ottawa Friday morning.

The answer of the striking miners to the failure of the two groups to come to terms was seen in the arrival at the Truax-Traer holdings, early Thursday morning, of about 200 men. These men sought to negotiate with workmen on the premises, ostensibly to solicit their support to the union, but would not be heard. Threats previously made to destroy the machinery of the Truax-Traer Company, which is the only major mine at present operating, were kept in mind and police protection immediately arrived.

### MEETS OFFICIALS OF MINE COMPANY

Dan Moar, president of the striking miners' executive committee, met officials of the company in the absence of E. W. Garner, manager, and a meeting was arranged for 6 o'clock, Thursday evening.

Operators are seeking additional police protection, indicating their preparedness to commence operations in all mines. Wires have been despatched to Ottawa and to the provincial attorney-general seeking this additional protection.

With the collapse of attempts to conciliate, the mediator, Judge Wylie, of Estevan, is expected immediately to call a meeting of the representatives of the striking miners and the operators to air their grievances.

Estevan Strike

Leader - Post, Sept. 17/31

### **Mineworkers Union Scores Efforts To Break Coal Strike**

*Leader Post, Sept. 17/31*  
(By Canadian Press)

CALGARY, Alta., Sept. 16.—Condemnation of the Canadian Defenders' decision to attempt "breaking" the coal miners' strike at Estevan, Sask., was contained in a resolution brought down at the annual meeting of the Mine Workers' union of Canada today.

James Sloan, president of the mine workers, criticized the action of the Defenders' league, which proposes to recruit 600 men and send them to Estevan to work the mines left idle by the miners' strike a week ago. Lewis Macdonald, president of the Defenders' league, organized to stem the tide of Communism and protect British subjects, is forming the battalion of 600 which he hopes to land at Estevan Saturday.

#### **All British Subjects**

The men will be gathered from Calgary and district and their work will be to carry on the mine operations until the strike is ended. Mr. Macdonald said the men would be cared for by his organization when their work was completed at Estevan, but he hoped that a number of them would remain in the coal fields. Mr. Macdonald emphasized that the men destined for Estevan were all British subjects. He reiterated his organization did not aim at lowering wages or instigating "scabbing," but only wished to end the onward march of the communism which was causing discontent among workers.

Members of the Mine Workers' union, however, greatly resent the Defenders' league action. The union has been supporting the striking miners, but the mine operators refuse to recognize the body or discuss conciliation efforts with it. Mr. Sloan has maintained that the strike would not end until the operators were willing to join in a round table conference with union officials and miners.

#### **MINE STRIKERS AT WAYNE ASK AID**

(By Canadian Press)  
CALGARY, Alta., Sept. 16.—Coal miners at Wayne, Alta., on strike for several weeks, have appealed to the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, in convention here, for assistance. The striking miners seek wages allegedly in arrears. They pleaded for aid and the union decided to despatch a man to the scene to investigate conditions.

Regina Star, *Estevan Strike*  
Sept. 15/31

## RECRUIT 600 MEN TO STOP SASK. STRIKE

*Sept. 15/31*  
Canadian (Defense League)  
Goes Into Action at Cal-  
gary; Will Come Here

Canadian Press

CALGARY, Alta., Sept. 15.—  
Strike-breakers will be recruited  
in Calgary and district and sent  
to the mining field of Estevan,  
Sask., in an attempt to end the  
strike in progress there. About  
600 men will be gathered here  
and sent to the mines with the  
object of "breaking the miners'  
strike," declared Lewis MacDon-  
ald, president of the Canadian  
Defence League, today.

"Our idea is not to reduce wages,  
nor encourage any form of 'scab-  
bery' but mainly to break that  
strike," Mr. MacDonald said. "This  
is the first official strike of the  
Red International Labor Unionists,  
and the Canadian defenders feel  
that if they are allowed to get a  
hold on other coalfields, similar  
strikes will be inevitable."

Mr. MacDonald declared that his  
organization was organizing a  
group of British subjects, "negotia-  
tions are under way to have these  
men transported to the fields. The  
recruiting office will be the Cana-  
dian Defenders' headquarters and  
it will be open in about two days,"  
he added. It was hoped that the  
600 men would be available within  
a week for their work in the Este-  
van fields.

He said that the men from Cal-  
gary would be looked after by the  
Defenders' League when their  
services were ended in Estevan.  
But, he concluded, it was hoped to  
have these men remain at work in  
Estevan.

*Estevan  
at file*

1090

*Reader Post.  
noon edition*

*Sept. 8/31.*

# SOUTH MINE AREA WORKERS STAGE STRIKE

**ANNOUNCEMENT MADE  
BY UNION PRESIDENT  
AFTER MEETING**

**Provincial Officials Fail to  
Bring Both Sides  
Together**

(Special Despatch)

ESTEVAN, Sask., Sept. 8.—A general strike, completely tying up the lignite mines of the Estevan-Bienfait area, takes effect Wednesday morning. More than 600 men, members of the newly organized local branch of the Miners' Workers' Union of Canada, will be out of work this morning and 20 mines will be shut down. This was the announcement made at midnight by James Sloan of Calgary, Dominion president of the union, following a four-hour session with the local executive committee. Maintenance men only will remain at their posts.

Groups of working men waited outside the town hall, Monday night, until the executive meeting of the union, held behind closed doors, announced that the strike would go into effect. It is the first time in the history of the field that there has been a walkout, and the field is alive with rumors. Besides alleged "victimization" of the miners, there are stories of possible acts of violence if any of the mines attempt to defy the strike. At one camp armed guards have been posted to protect valuable machinery in case of such a demonstration.

Coal operators of the district did not attend a conference called by Sloan last Thursday night for consideration of grievances held by the miners, and for the purpose of reaching an agreement on hours, contract and day wage rates, and housing and working conditions in and around the mines. The attitude of the operators to the conference was expressed by one as follows:

#### Operators' Statement

"We will not meet Sloan or any other organization such as his that by his own statement boasts a direct connection with the entire Workers' Unity League and the Red Internationale of Soviet Russia. We have at any and all times, been willing to meet the employees of our company to discuss any grievances or complaints. This policy we will continue to follow, and welcome discussing matters of mutual interest."

Considering the situation at a special meeting last Thursday afternoon, the provincial cabinet ordered T. Molloy, deputy minister of labor, to make a complete investigation and to effect an adjustment if possible. Mr. Molloy came to Estevan immediately but was unable to bring operators and union executives together. The former reiterated their willingness to confer with employees of their

own companies or to meet a committee representing all the employees, but definitely refused to have anything to do with the organization of which Sloan is president. The union executive, on the other hand, would accept no alternative to a conference as suggested by them in the first place.

#### Second Letter

Sloan then addressed a second letter to the operators, calling another conference for last evening, and issuing a warning that unless the operators attended, their employees would cease work this morning. There was no reply, and the walkout has been ordered.

Discussing working conditions in the mines of the field, Sloan goes farther than blaming the operators, charging that the provincial government has been lax in its enforcement of the Mines act. He would not make public the detailed demands which the miners would submit to the operators, and members of the union executive are sworn to secrecy.

At public meetings he has branded conditions as "deplorable."

#### Makes Charges

"Miners were not getting credit for all the coal they dug; they were being cheated on the tally sheets; many were working 14 and 16 hours a day; they were forced to deal at mine company stores, where, Sloan charged, mistakes in addition of their accounts often cost them as much as \$10. Single men who lived in any place but the mine boarding house had to pay an overhead tax of \$1 a month. Steady workers were constantly in debt to the mining companies, and many of them had labored month in and month out without receiving any cash at all."

Regina Star

Sept. 8/31

## Alberta Agitators Cause of Troubles Officials Declare

400 Men Now Believed Idle as  
Eight Mines Idle Monday  
Morning

ESTEVAN, Sept. 8.—Although provincial government officials have suggested miners and operators make application to Ottawa for a board of conciliation under the Industrial Disputes Act, no action had been taken at noon, Tuesday.

Word to this effect was given The Star late Tuesday afternoon. Under the Industrial Disputes Act the provincial government is prevented from taking any active part in the strike arbitration, although officers of the provincial government have lent what assistance possible.

ESTEVAN, Sept. 8.—Negotiations between miners and operators reached a climax Tuesday morning when about 400 men in the southern Saskatchewan coal field walked out "on strike."

A final meeting between operators and miners was held Monday night. When operators failed to comply with the demands of the miners, the latter indicated that they would not appear at the mines in the morning. Tuesday morning found their threat made good. Threatened trouble which was exclusively forecast in The Star last week arose over dissatisfaction with company stores, housing and boarding house arrangements, weights on which the miners are paid and wages.

Communist workers from Alberta who have been in the field during the past week although not actively voicing their opinion during the meetings are alleged to have been working silently among the men. Government investigation of the sudden appearance in the Estevan coal area of communist propaganda, resulted in the discovery of many copies of the communist paper "The Worker."

Miners and operators have been negotiating since Thursday, and meetings have been held daily. About nine major mines are said to be affected. Thos. M. Molloy, deputy minister of railways, labor and industries, attended the meetings on behalf of the government during Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

In an interview with The Star, Tuesday, Hon. J. A. Merkley, minister of railways, labor and industries, indicated that the matter would now lie with the federal government under a federal statute dealing with wage earners and employees. He supposed that the operators would communicate with the federal government on the matter.

Dissatisfaction with the method of payment is one of the major matters upon which the miners and operators have arbitrated during the week-end. The question has arisen as to whether payment should be made on weights before or after screening.

Miners also allege that prices and charges in company stores, houses and boarding houses are too high. Efforts have been made by the men to have these prices brought down. The question of wages is also being considered.

Hon. M. A. MacPherson, K.C., attorney-general, declined to make any comment as to whether the government planned to investigate the movements of Communist workers in the coal area, when interviewed by The Star.

Dealing with the situation, Tuesday, Premier Anderson said:

"The provincial government has been in touch with the situation in the Estevan and Souris coal-fields and the industrial dispute existing there.

"Through the department of labor efforts were made to bring the conflicting interests together. The jurisdiction of the province in settling industrial disputes was restricted by legislation passed in Saskatchewan in 1926 whereby it was enacted that the Dominion Industrial Disputes Investigation Act should apply to every industrial dispute of the nature defined in the Dominion Act.

"We are hopeful that the situation will not prove serious in that we are advised that the operators are prepared to make concessions and we believe the great body of men employed in the mines will be reasonable in their attitude."

Canadian Press

OTTAWA, Sept. 8.—Until striking miners in the Estevan, Sask., district return to work the Industrial Disputes Act cannot be invoked to deal with the situation, department of labor officials explained here Tuesday. The statute empowers the minister of labor to set up a board of conciliation to deal with disputes between employers and employees, but does not cover a situation where a strike has already been precipitated.

In many cases, however, employees on strike have been induced to return to work pending a decision by a board of conciliation which can then be set up. No official notice of the Estevan strike had reached the department early Tuesday.

SASKATOON, Sask., Sept. 8.—An appeal for relief for the 500 miners on strike in the Estevan district was received today by the head office of the Farmers' Unity League in Saskatoon. The branches of this organization are requested to send foodstuffs or cash addressed to the Mine Workers' Union of Canada there.

Estevan Mercury

Sept. 3/31

## Molloy Will Study Situation In Mines

Sept. 3/31  
Commissioner of Labor  
Arriving This Evening  
to Attempt Adjust-  
ment.

In a statement over long-distance telephone at 3.00 o'clock this afternoon, Hon. M. A. MacPherson, attorney-general for the province, announced that Thos. M. Molloy, Commissioner of the Department of Labor, will make a complete investigation of the situation that has developed in the mines of this district.

This decision was reached at a special meeting of the Cabinet which went into session at 1.30 o'clock. Mr. Molloy was to leave immediately for Estevan, and will arrive this evening. He will study the differences which have arisen between the coal operators and the miners, and will, if possible, arrange an adjustment between them.

A conference between its representatives and the coal operators of the district has been called for this, Thursday, evening by the newly organized local branch of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, at which proposals for the improvement of wages and working conditions in the Coalfields will be submitted.

James Sloan of Calgary, Dominion president of the miners' union, has been the leading spirit in the formation of the local branch, which now boasts over 600 members. "There will be nothing unreasonable in our demands," he stated again in an interview on Tuesday, "but if we can't get them we may have to take united action." Over his signature the following letter has been sent by registered mail to each of the district's coal operators:

### 7.30 Tonight

"At a meeting held at Bienfait on August 30, 1931, comprised of committees representing the employees of all mines in this district, which have now formed themselves into the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, I was instructed to request you to be present at a joint conference of all operators and miners' representatives, for the purpose of reaching an agreement on hours, contract and day wage rates, and housing and working conditions in and around the mines in this district.

"The Conference will be held in the Town Hall at Estevan on Thursday, Sept. 3, at 7.30 o'clock. "You are urgently requested to attend."

It was learned by The Mercury this morning that the operators of the larger mines of the field, representing over 90% of the total output, would refuse to attend the conference and were notifying Sloan to that effect today. One of them expressed his attitude as follows: "We will not meet Sloan or any other representative of an organization such as his, that by his own statement boasts a direct connection with the 'entire workers' Unity League and the Red Internationale of Soviet Russia.' We have, at any and all times, been willing to meet the employees of our company to discuss any grievances or complaints. This policy we will continue to follow, and welcome discussing matters of mutual interest." This, it is found, is the attitude of the majority of the operators.

### Denies Red Connection

Sloan vigorously denies the "Red" connection attributed to his organization. The Mine Workers' Union of Canada, he says, is directly linked up with the Red Internationale of Labor Unions. This latter body, he declares, has no political affiliations, and is not a branch of the Communist party as has been stated. He claims to be interested solely in securing "their rights" for the miners of the district. In an address last week he branded working conditions here as "deplorable." Miners were not getting credit for all the coal they dug; they were being cheated on the tally sheets. Many were working fourteen and sixteen hours a day. They were forced to deal at mine company stores where, Sloan charged, mistakes in addition of their accounts often cost them as much as \$10.00. Single men who lived anyplace but in the mine boarding houses had to pay an overhead tax of \$1 a month. Steady workers were constantly in debt to the mining companies, and many of them had labored month in and month out without receiving any cash at all. These were some of the grievances held by the miners against the operators which will be covered in the proposals the Union will present tonight.



~~Estevan Strike~~

Regina Star, Oct 24/31

## COMPLAINTS OF MINERS HEARD

*Star Oct. 24/31.*  
Commission at Estevan Con-  
tinues Sessions

Exclusive to The Star

ESTEVAN, Oct. 24.—Bootlegging of groceries and other commodities encouraged in the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Mine due to rules forcing employees to deal with company stores, the latter charging in excess of the town stores' prices.

Evidence to this effect was adduced before the Royal Commission sitting here to enquire into conditions at the Estevan-Bienfait lignite field. The commission opened at 10 o'clock and adjourned for noon recess at 12:30 o'clock. Nine witnesses appeared before the commission.

Madeline Thompson, the wife of a miner, told the commission that she purchased meat outside and brought it into the mine at midnight to evade inspection. She complained that prices at company stores were higher than outside sources.

Mrs. Francis Gray stated that she had parcels from mail order stores sent to Taylorton post office to avoid suspicion. She also went at night to buy meat from farmers.

Mike Kresko complained that pay envelopes sent sealed from Winnipeg were opened when miners received them. Deductions were made in the office of all subs, loans and fines before men received the envelopes.

Leader Post,

Oct. 14/31

## COMPLAINTS OF BIENFAIT MINE WORKERS HEARD

*Leader Post*  
Wylie Royal Commission Com-  
pletes Hearing of Evidence  
of Bienfait Mines, Ltd.

*Oct. 14/31*  
EXPECT TO COMPLETE  
PROBE IN 30 DAYS

Mine Manager States He Had  
Never Been Asked to Black-  
list Any Miner

(Leader-Post Special Press Bureau)  
ESTEVAN, Oct. 13.—Concluding  
on Tuesday afternoon its hearing  
of complaints of employees at Bien-  
fait Mines Ltd. and the reply of  
the management, the Wylie Royal  
commission probe into the causes  
leading up to the 30-day strike will  
Wednesday morning turn its atten-  
tion to the Eastern Collieries Ltd.  
Each of the six deep seam mines in  
the field will be treated in the same  
manner, and indications are that  
the investigation will be wound up  
well within 30 days.

Jos. Bembridge, manager of the  
Bienfait mine, occupied the witness  
stand throughout Tuesday after-  
noon, answering charges already  
laid before the commission by the  
company employees of poor ventila-  
tion in the mine, "black-listing" of  
discharged employees, no remunera-  
tion for bailing water seepage, re-  
moving clay falls and timbering,  
and other grievances.

**Slack Dockage**  
Examined by W. W. Lynd, K.C.,  
he stated that when his men re-  
turned to work following the  
strike, the reduction for slack on  
the tippie was set at 850 pounds to  
each loaded car of coal. The  
strikers claimed they had previous-  
ly been docked 950 pounds on each  
car. He also announced that the  
limit of weight per car had been  
placed at 4,500 pounds. This,  
strikers declared in their evidence,  
had been set at 4,000 pounds previ-  
ously. The two changes in weight  
are regarded by the strikers as notable  
improvements. A further improve-  
ment was the decision of the man-  
agement to operate the mine venti-  
lating fan through noon hours,  
thus better clearing the air of  
"black" damp and gunpowder  
fumes, against which strong pro-  
test had been made by the strikers.

**Wet-Dry Entries**  
To questions put by W. J. Per-  
kins, commission counsel, Bem-  
bridge stated that he had never  
received any "kick" from the men  
regarding bailing out of water  
seepage from the rooms in which  
they were working. Men working  
in such wet entries, he said, had  
the advantage of cars to load as  
fast as they could fill them, and  
usually made more money than  
their fellow-workers in dry entries.  
The witness absolved the owners

of the mine from any blame be-  
cause the miners had claimed they  
were not paid for bailing and  
pumping. He himself made any  
extra allowances in pay for this  
work, and if there were any  
charges of underpay, he himself  
was to blame.

"No man can say that I ever  
fired a man for kicking about  
things like that," Bembridge de-  
clared. He had only discharged  
one man during the time he had  
occupied the managerial position,  
and that man had later come back  
and been reinstated. He had never  
been asked by the mine owners to  
"blacklist" a miner who had been  
discharged from the service of an-  
other mine in the field.

Leader Post,

Oct. 13/31

## TELLS PROBE MINERS' PAY IS NOT HIGH

*Leader Post*

Evidence at Estevan Shows  
Men Got Average of \$79.22

*Oct. 13/31*  
Per Month

ESTEVAN, Oct. 13.—During a four-year period from 1927 to 1931, miners in the southern Saskatchewan lignite field averaged \$79.22 per month. Day men during that period averaged \$95.86.

These figures were divulged before the commission enquiring into conditions in the Saskatchewan lignite field by Ken John, accountant at the Bienfait mine, Saturday. The accountant's figures indicated that during the period from October, 1930, to March, 1931, the company paid for 810 tons more screened coal than it sold.

Medical fees collected from the men at \$1.25 per month and turned over to an eastern firm of doctors since 1926, totalled \$5,548.05, according to figures produced at the request of W. J. Perkins, counsel for the commission. No commission went to the mine company for collecting these fees.

In engaging men at the time the seniority system prevailed, the accountant revealed, resident miners were favored at all times, and second consideration was given experienced miners. No system of blacklisting was admitted by the accountant.

The mine boarding house was operated by an individual with free rent and fuel. Men living in the boarding house paid five cents a day to the company to cover overhead and those living in private homes were charged \$1 a month by the mine company. Those charges were to encourage residence in the boarding house which found existence difficult and to discourage overcrowding of private homes.

Leader Post

Estevan

Strike

head

Oct. 9/31

# HEAD OF MINE TELLS OF DEEP SEAM PLIGHT

## J. R. Brodie Declares Men Getting Fair

### Living Wage

## VENTILATION OF MINE PROTESTED

## Oct. 9/31 Dissatisfaction Over Medical Service by Owners Aired

(Special Despatch)

ESTEVAN, Sask., Oct. 8.—With the coal strike settled, and all mines operating full blast Thursday morning, the royal commission inquiry into the causes of the 30-day deadlock was resumed before His Honor Judge E. R. Wylie at the court house.

### Deep Seam Plight Told

A picture of conditions facing the deep seam mines of the field was painted none too brightly by J. R. Brodie, of Winnipeg, vice-president of Bienfait Mines, Ltd., and a coal authority of note. Increasingly heavy competition threatened a complete extinction of the deep seam mines, he told the probe. As a possible salvation he advised heavier duties on American coal imports, a special tax on all strip mines to bring about an adjustment of selling prices and fairer consideration of lignite shippers by the federal authorities in respect to subventions.

### Claims Wages Fair

Replying to charges already laid before the commission, Mr. Brodie stated that miners of the Bienfait-Estevan coal fields had been receiving pay on a "screen coal basis," which was supposed to include remuneration for timbering, removal of water seepage, and clearing away of "clay falls." He contended that the men had been getting a fair living wage, and announced that figures would later be submitted to the commission in support of this claim. He exhibited a chartered accountant's statement to show that his company would face a loss of approximately \$8,000 this year and stated that most of the mines in the field would fare worse.

### Miners Testify

Five men in the employ of Bienfait Mines, Ltd., were heard during the day's session. Harry Hesketh, secretary of the Miners' Union, completed his evidence, and was followed by W. H. Muiarky, P. Marcellus, Wilfred Enmark and T. H. McWilliams. N. R. Craig, chairman of the Workmen's Compensation board, followed the proceedings closely. It is understood that, so far, no complaint has been registered with him by the miners. Further complaints were voiced regarding "black damp," a poisonous gas said by witnesses to be prevalent in the Bienfait mine. It generated in old workings, which should have been sealed off. It was injurious to the health of the miners, as were also the fumes of gunpowder charges which were not properly cleared from the air in the mine because the ventilating fan was not operated often enough.

Star-Phoenix,

Oct. 6/31

## Miners Describe Their Star-Phoenix Oct. 6/31 Grievances At Hearing

Canadian Press

ESTEVAN, Sask., Oct. 5.—When employees of the Bienfait mine protested against alleged bad working conditions, the invariable reply of the management was to the effect, "If you don't like it, pack your tools and get out," it was charged by witnesses before the royal commission investigating the Estevan-Bienfait strike situation here today.

The inquiry opened at the court house with His Honor Judge E. R. Wylie presiding. An order-in-council bearing the great seal of Canada and the signature of the Earl of Bessborough, governor-general, was read by W. H. S. Glew, announcing His Honor's appointment as a commissioner to fully investigate the causes and circumstances leading up to the strike, which is now 28 days old.

### TO LAST A MONTH

Two of the 20 employees of the Bienfait mine who will give testimony, were heard today. One of them had not completed his statement when His Honor called an adjournment late in the afternoon. Men from six deep seam mines of the field will appear during the hearing which, it was estimated tonight, will last about 30 days.

In another room at the court house Tuesday morning miners and operators will meet to draw up a temporary agreement by which the men will return to work pending the commission inquiry. The conference is slated for 10 o'clock, and there was every indication this evening that it would be successful.

The two witnesses who gave evidence were J. H. Harris and Harry Hesketh. The latter is secretary of the local branch of the Mine Workers Union of Canada. Harris and Hesketh both stated that, of each car of coal which passed over the tippie scales from the diggings, 950 pounds was deducted for slack. This was unfair, they claimed, because the coal was forked by the miners when it was loaded and the deduction was far in excess of the actual slack weight. They contended that wage scales should be on the basis of all coal loaded, regardless of slack. They also charged that, although cars were often loaded as heavily as three tons, the tippie records never credited them higher than two tons.

"No matter how we bank them up," Hesketh said, "they are still two tons."

"Black damp", a poisonous gas found in old workings at the mine, had been another grievance contributing to the strike, the witnesses claimed. Ventilating fans to clear the air in the mine were not properly located, and were not operated often enough, with the result that the men often had to leave their work for short intervals on account of the impure atmosphere.

The miners received no pay for bailing out water each morning from the "rooms" in which they worked. This often took from 30 minutes to an hour. Nor was any remuneration received for timbering the roof of the "room" or re-

moving "clay falls" from the tracks, it was claimed. These were injustices causing discontent among the men, witnesses stated. Men who had protested against conditions had been discharged and "blacklisted" among the operators of the field.

Owing to the fact that neither Harris nor Hesketh had completed their evidence when the commission rose, there was no cross examination by W. W. Lynd, K.C., representing the deep-seam operators. Presentation of evidence was conducted by W. J. Perkins, crown prosecutor and counsel for the commission. The provincial government has offered to provide counsel for the miners, but tonight they had not named an attorney.

### TROUBLE AT COAST?

REGINA, Oct. 5.—Thirty men of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who arrived in Estevan last Tuesday evening to reinforce the police contingent against further strike outbreaks will entrain Monday afternoon for Vancouver under command of Inspector Carnock, according to word received here today.

Rumors of rioting at Vancouver are said to be the cause of their departure. The exodus of these men will reduce the police strength at Estevan to 50.

**Saskatchewan Archives Board, Tape R-320  
Excerpts transcribed from interview with Harry Nicholson, Estevan City Council  
member at the time of riot. Interviewed 24 August 1973 in Estevan by Larry  
Johnston**

Nicholson:

City Council had a meeting when we were advised there was going to be a parade here. We had a special meeting and advised the man in charge at Bienfait by wire. Of course we don't know if he ever got it – it was badly handled in that way. Because they should have had somebody take it to him and sign for it, but they never did. Sloan was kinda the leader. They had other fellows here, but he was the backer. The wire was forbidding the parade. We had the meeting before noon and it was sent directly after that by the secretary under instructions from the council. I don't just remember the wording of the wire because the secretary sent it. But as I remember it said, "we were advised the union is organizing a parade to be marched on Estevan." And then they said that the city council at a meeting has voted to notify you that the parade is prohibited. I wouldn't say that that's just the exact words but that's the sens of it. No, there was one other thing – action will be taken to prohibit the parade. That's all – I don't believe it ever said police.

The council was not all unanimous on this. It was they were afraid that there would be trouble in the middle of the town and that the stores would likely be broken into and so on. This was the main reason for prohibiting the parade. There were other things said but this was the main thing and there were requests for some of the merchants to certain councilors and the Mayor especially....

Interviewer:

I'm told that these sorts of parades were sort of traditional in a lot of mining disputes. Was council aware of this? Or did they even think this was, in fact, true?

Nicholson:

No doubt, we knew about it. About parades in other places. There isn't any question about that.

Interviewer:

Had there been, to your knowledge, trouble of that sort in other parades?

Nicholson:

I don't think it was ever raised there. As a matter of fact, the matter of a parade anywhere else wasn't actually raised. But you can't say we didn't know about it, because we all read the newspapers, and knew about parades in other places. This may have had something to do with agitating some of the fellows too, I don't know....

Souris Avenue, this is where the trouble started, when the police cracked "Old Dan" (Dan Moore) over the head. They attempted to go and the police attempted to stop them. What first started the fighting was when Dan got rapped over the head. I don't know why he got rapped over the head.

Interviewer:

As the fighting progressed the RCMP and the town constables started to retreat a bit....

Nicholson:

They fired over the heads of the rioters, they parade, or whatever you want to call it. There were tow or three women there, very radical ones, with their hair flying and swearing....

**Saskatchewan Archives Board, Tape R-357  
Excerpts transcribed from interview with W.D. McKay, Estevan City Policeman  
involved in riot. Interviewed 2 September 1973 in Regina by Larry Johnston**

I maintained then, and I maintain to this day, that, having worked there, that the whole trouble with the mines was that they wanted a check-off man on the weigh scales to see that they were getting paid for what they dug. I have no idea how things were worked out in those days but I did say at that time when I worked in the mines – that was back in twenty-seven or twenty-eight – that the miners should be paid so that if the cost of living goes up, his wages should go up automatically. They held a Royal Commission on this thing for a whole winter after that, the winter of thirty-one I think it was. And they came up with the earth-shaking statement in the spring, after spending about – well I know that the people on the board would be getting about \$75.00 a day plus expenses, and they prolonged this thing all winter – and they came up with the earth shaking statement after about six months deliberations, that they should charge more for the coal. Well any two year old kid could have told them that before they started....

An entry driver, that's a miner who works in a room, he can branch off from that entry and open up a big room. It's a lot easier to mine coal in a big room.... You have to be a pretty precise miner to do this sort of thing, and those fellows were getting \$1.20 in 1927 for a ton.... He was able to get to keep body and soul and live pretty good. Those deep seam mines were not bad places to work. Then about 1927, 28, 29 they brought in boatloads of people from central Europe, and they were sent down to the mines, an awful lot of them, because they were miners. And they came in and down went the wages. They could get them so much cheaper, because they were desperate for jobs. Instead of the government seeing that they were getting paid at a decent fee, they were just left to the mercy of the mine owners. So they went and took anything they could. Consequently the wages went down to twenty-five cents a ton.... This is when the trouble started. As I say, I didn't know very much about mining coal or anything else in those days, but I thought that this was an awful way for prices to go like this, and the cost-of-living be such that they couldn't operate. And I think this holds true today, that everything should be based on the cost-of-living....

“Well the trouble started in the early summer, the Truax Traer Coal Company came in and they were setting up the big shovel strip mining operation, and the miners went out on strike, and the mine operators didn't really worry too much about it because not much coal was being mined anyway because it was summer.

But came fall, and that's usually when the busy season starts, and they didn't go back to work, and then there was a hassle over wages and the usual bickering back and forth, and the mine operators would offer a settlement, and they [the miners] wouldn't accept it, and eventually it began to look as like they wouldn't accept any kind of a settlement. If you want my own personal opinion, and I don't know whether you do or not, but this seems engineered by the money interests in the coal business, and that the deep seam mines were being wrecked by the strip operations. This is what I always figured was the trouble....”

“It bore it out, because later on prior to the riot, working nights on the police force, I would see heads of the strikers, Tom [Yuen], Scarlett, and Forkin and all those kind of characters coming out of the manager's house of the Truax Traer Coal Company, and 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, usually muled up and staggering out of there, and putting 2



and 2 together, I wondered often what they were doing there when they were supposed to be against these peoples. They never did do anything to the Truax Traer Coal Mine....”

The miners had paraded in Bienfait and all over the place prior to this. And the miner operators eventually had just about closed up the mines and said – that’s it, forget it, when you guys get ready to go to work we’ll open the mines. Now we’re all done, you see, what are you going to do now? So they paraded around Bienfait, and so what? It’s like parading out in that yard. If you want to parade there, alright, go ahead; and keep it going until you get tired. So in order to get recognition they had to get into a bigger center, which would be Estevan. And they got to cause some sort of trouble and get the thing known. This is usually what happens in riots and strikes of all descriptions. You got to recognize you’re going to have some sort of a furor some place. [If the police had not stopped them] they would have broken into every store. We knew they were going to break into the liquor store. The mere fact that they came after we had forbidden them to come was breaking the law. And they were armed for any trouble. They would have cleaned out every store in town I’m sure....

As far as the riot was concerned there was letters and telegrams went to the union people in Bienfait, where they had their headquarters, that they were forbidden to have a parade. We knew they were going to parade in Estevan and we had forbidden them to parade. And the Town Council passed an order and sent them telegrams to forbid them too. But they apparently never disclosed that to the miners....

The last union meeting was held by Annie Buller in Bienfait the Sunday before. She really flamed them up. They came in there, and we knew they had a bunch of shock troopers, about 50 shock troopers, who were fairly well boozed up on homebrew. We also knew they were to raid the liquor store.... They were to go and turn the contents of the liquor store over. They were the guys who seemed to be the spearhead of the whole thing.... They were really armed with all kinds of weapons, of course clubs and axes, and all sorts of things. And they practically overwhelmed us. There was only thirty odd policemen in the whole brigade to stop this mob. And consequently we had to start shooting. We started shooting into the ground to start with....

The parade came up there very slowly and vast hoards of cars and people and one thing and another, and women and children and everything else.... It was estimated at the time to be in the thousands, how many I wouldn’t say. But it was between two, three or five thousand.... They were a long time coming. But they got to the intersection of Souris Ave. and McCutcheon [Chief of Police] and I walked out there. We figured that the Mounted Police would come along with us, behind us. We walked from the Town Hall out to Souris Avenue.... We met the big parade right there and he ordered them to halt and disperse and go home. They became very angry and encircled us, and knocked him down....and I dragged him out of there. I never got hurt or hit. I didn’t know it anyway. I probably got hit and had some sore bumps later on. I don’t know when I got them or where I got them.

Then we found that the Mounted Police weren’t behind us, we were cut off, but I did get him back to the lines. Well he couldn’t walk, as they had hit him in the shoulder with a car axle, and knocked it out of joint. He suffered for months with that.... He got back up into the firing line, both of us did. They had brought with them rocks and they had these bridge washers about half a pound each of steel.... They got them from constructions

and one thing or another down around the mines.... We had just had a fellow by the name of Louis Logberg (sp?) just hours before the riot rake the stones off the intersection....with a garden rake. And just prior to the riot I went out and stopped him and said, "You better get out of here cause there's liable to be trouble." So Louis took off....

The strikers would run right up and pull their shirts open, shouting "Shoot me you son-of-a-bitch." And some of them got accommodated.... They were drunk.... They started throwing rocks the minute we got out of there and probably prior to that too....So they cut our lines and we couldn't get word out. We were outnumbered so bad we figured we were going to get snowed under. We eventually got a car loose and sent it out to bring these guys back in (referring to the RCMP posted at Truax-Traer mine.) They came in, this was under Inspector Moorehead out there, and he had a gang with rifles. And he came in round about town and lined up there here along with the rest of us, and he just knelt that gang down with the rifles. He wasn't actually a policeman, as such. He was an Inspector of Mounted Police but he was a soldier from India and he knew how to handle riots. And he just let fly with the rifles and consequently several people were shot, three of them killed outright.... We had been firing into the ground and these people wouldn't go back because they said it was all blanks.... The ones who got shot was when Moorhead came in with his gang of riflemen. He meant business....

[The fire engine was brought out] when I got McCutcheon back out of there and they went over there to hook it up. By the time they hooked it up I was over here on this side of the street, lined up here with the police.... There had been quite a bit of shooting.... When they were trying to hook this up it was terrible. Men were on top of that with axes trying to and then they did, bash that thing up.... I don't think they did get the hose hooked up. They were scare off and beaten up too....

You didn't even know there was anybody killed until the thing was over. That's pretty hard to determine.... We saw people that were hit in the foot or something like that, on account of these bullets ricocheting off the gravel stones and their partners dragging them away. We knew there was one or two like that. After one or two like that happened, well then the people started to disperse. In the meantime these bullets had sprayed out, and there was probably five or six hundred shells fired into the crowd and somebody was bound to get hit and they did get hit, from even a block away.... The inquest showed that they were all shot with forty-five slugs which could come from any Mounted Policeman's gun. We were not armed with that sort of weapon.... We had thirty-two automatics, that's all we had.... But when they got hit or how, I don't know.

**Saskatchewan Archives Board, Tape R-325  
Excerpts transcribed from interview with Peter Gembey, miner in Bienfait area at  
the time of riot, interviewed 18 July 1973 in Bienfait by Larry Johnston and Ron  
Adams.**

Interviewer:

Let's say you worked as many days as possible in the month; do you remember how many tons you could get – say, in a day?

Gembey:

Well, it depended on what shape you were in. They used to put two men together, and if they paried them up and they were both healthy gusy and they knew how to shoot that coal, they would put 3500 pounds in that car. They would load that in no time. They had guys with horses that would pull those cards out. Two guys who were healthy could load 14 or 15, even 18 or 20 tons a day; so they made a little. But if you were older, or you had an older partner, they would make only 12 or 13 of those cards; mind you, those cards were about a ton and a half.

Interviewer:

I guess the rates of pay varied, but they paid you about 45 cents a ton?

Gembey:

Yes, it was something like that, but it wasn't actually clear because we had to buy powder, paper to make those cartridges.

Interviewer:

What were squibs?

Gembey:

A squib is made to the same principle as a firecracker, only it was thin and about 6 inches long....When you light it, it give you time to run away from there. When the slow burn gets to the powder like a firecracker, it starts shooting ahead through the hole that leads into the black powder and ignites, and the explosion occurs. There was plenty of smoke.

Interviewer:

I see. And it was difficult to work after you had blown?

Gembey:

At that time they usually just blew at 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock at night. But when you blasted that coal at 12 o'clock, and took an hour for dinner, if there was good ventilation it cleared up pretty good. But in the rooms where the men worked, -- they were just like a tunnel – if the room was far from the head entry where the air was circulating, the smoke would just gradually leak out. The miners had to shovel to get the air moving.

Interviewer:

To circulate the air?

Gembey:

Yes, and then it clears out. But it usually stayed smoky till 2:30 or 3 o'clock.

Interviewer:

You couldn't work?

Gembey:

Well, you worked. You had to work. If you don't work, you don't get paid. Most of the time they had to feel where the coal was. When it was clear you could shovel right into the car; but after dinner you had to carry a shovelful and look for the car.

Interviewer:

You couldn't see where the car was?

Gembey:

That's right. You could load so much and then you would have to go to the main entry where the air was straight, and stay there a few minutes, and then go back again, because – you don't load, you don't get nothing. It used to be in the morning that the miners would make most because they should have blown at 6 o'clock the night before and during the night the smoke would all clear out. They came in the morning and if they could get wagons it would be their biggest half day. But there were other jobs too. If you came in the morning and there were cave-ins on the tracks, by the time you cleared them there would be two or three hours gone. For a while they used to give you an hour at 35 cents for cleaning that up, but later on, when they started getting tough – about 1927 – the miner had to do that for nothing. Form then on they were just pressing harder and harder. The miners had to do something. The only way they could improve themselves was by organizing. It took a long time ... a lot of talking among the miners before they realized they had to have help. Most of them, they were afraid to speak up, because in those years if you mentioned anything about the union, out you go....

Interviewer:

So, you were working on the cutting machine until the spring of 1931. Then you started organizing for the union?

Gembey:

No, we started organizing, like I said, when the bosses began putting pressure on the miners in 1927.

Interviewer:

That early?

Gembey:

Yes, up until then everybody seemed to be satisfied. They worked in the winter and saved up a little money; in the summertime they didn't work so steady, but the storekeepers would give you more than you earned in the summer because they knew you would stay in the winter. But in 1927, and after that, as I said, they started pressing the miners. If the miner came to a place that was caved in, they he cleaned it up for maybe two hours for nothing. Before they made something, but after that they refused to pay them. If miners were unlucky enough to get a workplace that was downhill there would be water there; they would have to carry that water in pails maybe 150 to 200 feet over the hill to dump it. That was for nothing. They didn't get paid for it. You came in the morning and worked for maybe an hour and half carrying that water before you could

start working. During the day the water would start accumulating, so you had to quit loading coal and take the water out.

Interviewer:

Why did they start refusing to pay for the water at that time?

Gembey:

Well, nobody knows. They just refused to pay. Those were just a couple of examples – working conditions – there were bad places where there was no air at all; the miners would complain. They just wouldn't do nothing. And they used to steal from the miners who were loading by ton. They used to steal them blind. One month, it was in October, usually the busiest season, well I was on a cutting machine. There were three cutting machines. Well, in 1928, in October we worked 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, and at the end of the month the company gave us a free dance and a bonus of 5 hours – that's 35 cents an hour – because they loaded the most ever: 39,000 tons. Myself and the other men who worked on the machines, we started comparing our tonnage. We got together, you know, and said: "How many tons did you have last month?" We figured it out and if we got paid for was a little over 18,000 tons. And here they gave us a free dance because they broke the record and loaded 39,000 tons! We didn't get paid for it as machine men; and also the miners. They stole actually half that coal. Everything started accumulating and the miners couldn't take it any more, so they just had to start getting organized. After 1928 the miners eyes were opened quite a bit, because the companies themselves spread the information. We didn't know ourselves how much ... but this month they were bragging that they broke the record. These little things down in the mine and everything like that, forced the miners to do something.

Interviewer:

They were short weighing you up on the scales?

Gembey:

Oh yes, they gave us whatever they felt like giving us, that's all.

Interviewer:

You didn't have a union checkweighman?

Gembey:

A company man. And in the fall of 1929 and the winter of 1930 they cut our wages! The guys that were getting 35 cents an hour, they cut them down to 33 and one third. The fellows that were paid by the ton, they cut them down 5 or 6 cents a ton. So all those things had to be stopped somehow. The only way they could be stopped was by getting a union.

Interviewer:

Now, you organized a union here yourselves around Bienfait, did you not, before the mineworkers union came in? Do you remember what happened to that union? It was very small.

Gembey:

That came after 1931. That was the Bienfait local.

Interviewer:

I was thinking of a little before that. I think it was John Loughran and Bernie Winn who started to organize in the summer of 1931.

Gembey:

That's something I don't know, because the first thing we thought, some of us guys, was how to get in touch with an organizer.....

Interviewer:

So you were looking for a Canadian union?

Gembey:

.... So finally they got in touch with the other one and they got Forkin and Sam Scarlett as organizers.

Interviewer:

Do you remember Joe Forkin at all? What he looked like?

Gembey:

Oh yes, but to describe him...

Interviewer:

It was so long ago.

Gembey:

I can almost see his picture. He was a powerful speaker, both him and Sam Scarlett were good speakers. I can't describe him. He was dark-haired and younger...

Interviewer:

He was about 30 or 31, I think, at the time.

Gembey:

Yes, something like that. So when they started to organize, right away they were called communists too! And troublemakers.

Interviewer:

They didn't admit that they were communists, did they?

Gembey:

They didn't but the mine operators called them that. The rumour spread all over that they were communists too.... To frighten the miners away from them, to intimidate them.... The miners knew that all that was propaganda against the union. So they worked harder amongst themselves, and finally they got organized....

Interviewer:

Do you remember how the strike came about? I know the wages were being cut. Do you remember how you decided to strike? Did you vote?

Gembey:

(Pause) Yes. You see it took us a long time – almost a year and a half before we could get the whole field organized. Actually it started in the fall of 1930, but it was a slow

process. Every miner was scared of losing their jobs, but when wages went down in the winter of 1930-31 the miners really started to take the union cards....

Finally when the miners were 100% organized and got their demands on paper, the bosses thought the whole field was "red" and "troublemakers." Not only a few of us....even the English, and some of them were First War veterans. They were called red too. Just because they were presenting demands to the company. The company refused to have anything to do with them and that's what brought about the strike.

Interviewer:

Charlie Morfit, the man who was the president of the Operators Association, refused to sit at the bargaining table with reds.

Gembey:

Well yes, that's it. That's right. And, as I say, a few of us were laid off in the print of '31 before the strike was called because we were talking openly about the union, and therefore we were red and troublemakers. Some of the rest of them were still working, but finally, when they got all the miners organized, and the committee went with their demands to the company, they were reds too, and troublemakers. Most of the guys on the committee were English speaking.

Interviewer:

On the strike committee? I thought so.

Gembey:

Yes, like Martin Day and the others. There were no ... they called us foreigners....

Interviewer:

...What about the Truax Traer [mine]? Did you unionize the Truax-Traer? Did you have miners down there?

Gembey:

There weren't many miners there; it was modern.

Interviewer:

That was the first strip mine?

Gembey:

There were a few miners, and some of them joined the union, not all of them. Especially the guys that were running the shovels. They were all Americans, anyway. They had a different system there than they have now. There were no trucks to haul the coal; they had cars.

Interviewer:

They laid down tracks?

Gembey:

Yes. So, they had men working there (in the union) but they didn't have them all.

Interviewer:

Do you remember when the Truax-Traer brought in the big power shovel? I think it was 12930. Were you afraid of the shovel?

Gembey:

Well, most miners for a while didn't think it would hurt. When they started producing coal it wasn't clean, and there were rumours that some cars were sent back to them; but when the jobs started to ease up, the miners were frightened.

Interviewer:

How about when the strike was on and Truax-Traer were still able to ship coal? They kept working, didn't they?

Gembey:

Yes, they kept working. They had their own boarding house, some of the men joined the union secretly, but they couldn't very well go out – say 15 men – while others were working; it was useless. They kept working. And when the strike started, that's when they brought a bunch of Mounties in, because they thought the strikers might do some damage to the [steam] shovel [used to strip mine coal at the Truax-Traer mine].

Interviewer:

Why would they think that?

Gembey:

That was beyond anybody's thought at the time. Well, the way they had it the miners were all reds, troublemakers, and liable to do something vicious. And even at the time the parade was to take place in Estevan, most of the businessmen had the idea that they were going to go there and start some kind of revolution. Truax-Traer had the same idea, I guess. They had those Mounties guarding it.



**Saskatchewan Archives Board, Tape R-326  
Excerpts transcribed from interview with Howard A. Babcock, local resident and  
mine cook in 1930s, interviewed 19 June 1973 in Regina by Larry Johnston.**

**The Conditions**

Well the conditions were very, very poor in the mines. The timbering was poor, there was a great lack of adequate timbering to timber the mines. The wages were bad. There were big coal cars, and a man dug out a ton and half or a ton and three-quarters in order to get credit for a ton -- to get paid for a ton. I don't remember the rate per ton, but it was very low.

And the conditions underground were very bad. There was a lot of water in some of the mines that the miners had to take out. And they weren't paid for removing the water. They were expected to put it into tanks, and there were few pumps in those days, and it was hauled out on the same track as the coal cars and dumped when it got to the top. They had a slack pit that they dumped it into. And the miners were very hard done by. They dug more coal than they got paid for and they were expected to lay the track into their rooms. And if the turn at the edge of their room and the meeting of the entry broke down then the miner just wouldn't get his coal out 'til he repaired it. They'd say, "Oh, the company man is coming, the company man is coming," but he never seemed to get there. In order to get the coal out, get credit for digging any coal, why they had to repair the track.

And the living was very poor. A good miner would make a little bit, but for the most part, the average miner, it depended on how many coal orders there were and such like this. The demand for coal and this. There was many people, by the time they paid the store bill, the store bill was taken off their pay, they were supposed to get, and by the time they bought their squibs, the black powder that was used for blasting, the carbide that was used in the miners lamps, by the time they bought all this, there was usually no take home pay. It was just an existence, they could exist. Usually this is true like the old song -- "You owed your soul to the company store."

The most of the mines were a company town, you lived on company property. If you were fortunate enough to get into a company house you paid so much rent for the company house, which was quite nominal actually. Included in this, if you were on company property, you were expected to buy at the company store. Their prices was higher, and if you had a few eggs to sell or a little butter to sell to the company store or trade for groceries you got a very poor price for this. There didn't seem to be any too much limit to credit except to a miner that they thought they weren't going to get the coal back out of. I can remember my sister-in-law and my mother-in-law going into Estevan. They'd get a chance for a ride to Estevan, quite often in a farm wagon of one of their relatives or one of the ethnic group in the area who were farmers, and they were scared to death to come back from town with the groceries they'd purchased more cheaply. So the women, in their billowing skirts of that day, and petticoats, they'd hang this all up around their waists with strings, they'd tie it all up underneath their skirts and walk into their camp. They'd be about thirty pounds heavier. And this was quite necessary because if anyone of the company stools, or employers' stool-pigeons, seen them bring it in, they would be reported and they would be let know about it and maybe even fired. And the mail-orders, they weren't allowed to put out too much mail-orders. If they could

buy clothing at the local store, they weren't allowed to buy shoes outside or anything like that. They had to get them out of the company store at the higher price.

And the health of the people was very poor. The women were run down from too much child-bearing and the youngsters were born under the most adverse of conditions -- usually with just a mid-wife or one of the neighbours in. There was no such thing as calling a doctor in those days. If you did call him you wouldn't probably get him anyway. Dr. Creighton was away in Estevan, and he didn't make very many house calls, except to the hierarchy and the employer types. They tried to keep a doctor in the hospital in Bienfait, but this was quite hard to do. Nobody liked the job, and nobody had paid, and nobody could pay the doctor. Sometimes they were paid off over a matter of years in things such as eggs and butter and things like this. Those that could scare up a little bit to pay.

I was mentioning about the poor health of the infants and the mothers. The mortality rate was awfully high among the young mothers -- in childbirth without adequate medical care; and the youngsters -- the lack of nourishment. If the mothers couldn't breast-feed them, I would say there was about one out of four reached the age of six. They usually died in childhood of childhood diseases. About three was the average life span of the babies. If they reached three they were fortunate and would probably make it on.

The living conditions were very poor, the houses were drafty, and they were just more or less tarpaper shacks. Take in the valley, there at Taylorton mine. They were down in the coulee to try and get a little break from the wind and the snow drifted over the surface and into the coulee, and it became enormously deep in the winter time. It did help insulate their barns and their houses, which was pretty well all one building. Most of the time they had a cow or a few chickens, and the women used to go out and sweep grain out of the empty grain cars that come in. And this was cooked up as a rule to feed the pigs or the cow or whatever they had. The chickens, or course, would eat it raw. And it was a very disturbing kind of life, a very low class kind of life, if you like.

My mother-in-law's house, for instance, there was a big family in there and two or three boarders. She made home-brew to try and keep things going. It was cold and drafty and they couldn't get much coal. They were charged a certain amount for the coal they got from the mines, what they couldn't steal. They used to steal the spills from the cars, and that, and tried to take this home, but this didn't make for too good burning. Often they'd change the baby's diaper, and it'd be frozen on the foot of the bed in the morning. There'd be ice on top of the water-pail, and even ice on the reservoirs, which was their way of heating water on the back of the stove. They usually had a wooden barrel of water in the house for drinking water, and this used to be frozen up most of the time....

### **Organizing The Miners**

And there was quite a class set up in the mine. The foreign element, who they tried to get to do the bulk of the heavy work, were Ukrainians, Slavics, and Lithuanians, some Russians and very few Scandinavians. And the boss types seemed to be mostly of British extraction and Irish, English, and Scotch. Mostly English and Scotch and there was also some Welsh. But for shortness sake we'll call them British from now on. And they got most of the best jobs. The area bosses, which was a certain section of the mine, tried to compete with each other, trying to get the most work out of the foreign

miner. And they sure did! Those foreign miners were just as hard as nails. Their diet wasn't that good, but everything they had on their backs was solid muscle.

They were a sort of left wing group these bunch of miners. The employer types in the mine, the mine owners and the mine managers, they played up the ethnic division between the miners and they tried to get as much work out of the "foreign" element, as they called them, which was the Ukrainian group mostly. And they tried to play one Ukrainian against the other. They would give him a little promotion, just if he could keep the rest of his countrymen in line, and things like this. They might pay him a little better rate or give him so much for being timber foreman in the area, things like this, just to keep the ethnic pot boiling as much as they could, to keep the animosity between the groups at a fever pitch all the time....

They held some public meetings but in this respect most of the halls and the boarding houses that were around belonged to the employer group, so it was very hard to get a place to meet. Some of the tactics they used were to have a meeting at a farm house of one of their Ukrainian friends, and they'd have the union organizer over there to talk to them. They'd have a baloney sandwich maybe, and a cup of weak coffee made usually in the wash boiler. Then they'd go back and talk it up amongst their fellow workers, the few that did not get out to it. But everybody couldn't leave because right away the boss would get suspicious and follow. And then the boss was pumping his stool pigeon types as they came back to work the next day to see what he could get out of them; or get out as much information on how the union was doing or things like this. But they did get a little support from the railway groups and such as this.

So under this type of atmosphere it wasn't too hard for anybody to come in and get them to rise up as a body. But the union that came in, the Mine Workers of Canada, were a left wing organization, to the point of practically being communist, I would suggest. But they did try to organize the miners. Which was an awful job, because these miners you must remember were living on company property, all under the eyes of company security guards, who were legionaires and people of this nature, and mostly of British extraction. And their attitude was – "We'll keep this foreign element in check and keep them working and keep them producing coal, because it's good for business and the mine owners will make money." They always cried that they weren't making money, that they had to sell the coal too cheaply and this, but they were making money off the sweat and brow and the austerity of particularly the foreign groups, the Ukrainian groups.

The miners had some sympathy from other people because not only were there Ukrainians among the mining groups, there were Ukrainians for example working for the railroad. There were Ukrainian farmers around there and close relatives, like White Russians and there were some German people. The German people that were there seemed to be quite industrious. They seemed to be able to take it, seemed to be able to live with a little higher level of wealth than that of the Ukrainian, but it wasn't too hard to convince them there must be a better way, and we'll form a strike and we'll force the boss into giving us a better deal for our digging of his coal. And particularly after the riot the railway groups came, quite some distance...partly out of curiosity and partly out of support for the plight of the Ukrainian and the foreign miners – the coal digger. There was quite a lot of solidarity amongst them as an ethnic group.

**Saskatchewan Archives Board, Tape R-326**

**Excerpts transcribed from interview with Howard A. Babcock, local resident and mine cook in 1930s, interviewed 19 June 1973 in Regina by Larry Johnston.**

**Town Council and the Police**

There was quite a lot of pressure put on the city hall or the Town Hall as it was called in those days, in Estevan, to forbid the parade to come in. The Chief of Police forbid them to hold a parade, forbid them to hold a march in the town of Estevan, and they got police into the area, they were brought in by the railroad most of the time. They group was aware they were there and there was some of the more radical ones were itching for a fight. But they thought there was only one way to go and that was for conditions to get better. But the solid front against them – the police, supporting the employer groups, and the town, again supporting the employer groups. Because at the time there was many wholesale houses in Estevan which the mine company y stores bought their supplies from. They bought some of from Winnipeg but some of it was picked up in Estevan. And this made for two definite sides for each, tow different battle groups, if you like, and both were sort of itching for a fight. The mine owners were bearing pretty heavily on the police to protect their property, protect their interests. And the miners were just as determined that they were going to get justice out of their labour.

# THE TRUTH ABOUT THE STRIKE

## in the Bienfait and Estevan Coal Fields

August 26, 1931

JAMES SLOAN IN ADDRESSING THE MINERS OF THE DISTRICT IN THE TOWN HALL AT ESTEVAN, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS STATED, "IF YOU STAY SOLID TOGETHER, YOU WILL HAVE THE ENTIRE WORKERS UNITY LEAGUE OF THE RED INTERNATIONALE BEHIND YOU." AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE SUPPORT THEY MIGHT EXPECT TO RECEIVE HE INSTANCED THE BRITISH MINE STRIKE IN 1926, WHEN THE SOVIET MINERS SENT FIVE MILLION DOLLARS TO FEED THE BRITISH STRIKERS.

September 1, 1931

EACH MINE MANAGER OF THE DISTRICT RECEIVED A LETTER FROM JAMES SLOAN, PRESIDENT OF THE MINE WORKERS UNION OF CANADA, CALLING FOR A JOINT CONFERENCE OF ALL OPERATORS AND MINE REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE PURPOSE OF REACHING AN AGREEMENT OF HOURS, CONTRACT AND DAY WAGE RATES, AND HOUSING, AS WELL AS WORKING CONDITIONS IN AND AROUND THIS DISTRICT. THIS MEETING TO BE HELD IN THE TOWN HALL AT ESTEVAN ON SEPTEMBER 3, AT 7.30 O'CLOCK.

September 3, 1931

THE MINE MANAGERS, UNDER REGISTERED COVER, NOTIFIED JAMES SLOAN THAT UNDER NO CONSIDERATION WOULD THEY MEET HIM OR ANY OTHER REPRESENTATIVE OF AN ORGANIZATION SUCH AS HIS, WHICH BY HIS OWN STATEMENT BOASTS OF A DIRECT CONNECTION WITH THE ENTIRE UNITY LEAGUE AND RED INTERNATIONALE OF SOVIET RUSSIA. THEY STATED THEY WERE WILLING AT ANY AND ALL TIMES TO MEET THEIR EMPLOYEES TO DISCUSS MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST.

September 4, 1931

AT A MEETING BETWEEN THE OPERATORS AND MR. T. M. MOLLOY, COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, THE OPERATORS AGREED TO MEET A COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL MINES FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING AND SETTLING ANY GRIEVANCES OR COMPLAINTS THE MINERS MIGHT HAVE. THIS OFFER MR. MOLLOY REPORTED WAS REJECTED BY THE MINERS REPRESENTATIVES.

September 7, 1931

MINE MANAGERS RECEIVED ANOTHER NOTICE FROM JAMES SLOAN CALLING FOR ANOTHER JOINT MEETING THAT EVENING. OTHERWISE A STRIKE WOULD BE CALLED EFFECTIVE THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 8. TO THIS THE OPERATORS PAID NO ATTENTION.

September 8, 1931

ALL MINES THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT CLOSED BY STRIKE EXCEPT TRUAX-TRAEER STRIPPING OPERATION WHICH CLOSED DOWN VOLUNTARILY.

September 14 and 15th.

RIOTS OCCURRED IN AN ATTEMPT TO COMMENCE OPERATIONS WHEN THREE OF THE MINES ATTEMPTED TO START BY USING FARMER LABOR THAT WAS DESIROUS OF WORKING. AT ONE OF THE PLANTS THE BOARDING HOUSE WAS RUSHED, ONE OF THE FARMERS KNOCKED DOWN AND A SERIOUS FIGHT OCCURRED ON THE STAIRWAY WHEN THE SPECIAL CONSTABLES ATTEMPTED TO STOP THE STRIKE. MINERS ENTERING THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE BUILDING. THE MINES WERE FORCED TO TAKE THE FARMERS FROM THE PROPERTY DUE TO INSUFFICIENT POLICE PROTECTION TO HANDLE THE RIOT.

September 17, 1931

DUE TO THE EFFORT OF TWO ESTEVAN CITIZENS A MEETING WAS ARRANGED AND HELD IN THE MUNICIPAL HALL BETWEEN THE OPERATORS AND THE MINERS COMMITTEES. THE STRIKE LEADERS HAD STATED THAT THIS MEETING WOULD BE HELD IN AN EFFORT TO IRON OUT THE DIFFICULTIES AND AGREED THAT THE QUESTION OF UNION RECOGNITION WOULD BE A DEBATABLE ONE. AT THE SAME TIME THEY GAVE TO THE PRESS A STATEMENT "UNION RECOGNITION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION." AND AT THE MEETING AT NIGHT THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE STRIKERS STATED THAT BEFORE THEY COULD DISCUSS ANY GRIEVANCES THE UNION WOULD THEN AND THERE HAVE TO BE RECOGNIZED. THIS THE OPERATORS REFUSED TO DO FOR THE SAME REASONS SET FORTH IN THEIR LETTER TO JAMES SLOAN.

September 21, 1931.

MR. M. S. CAMPBELL CHIEF CONCILIATION OFFICER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, OTTAWA, ARRIVED IN ESTEVAN AND AFTER MEETING WITH THE STRIKE LEADERS MET THE DEEP SEAM OPERATORS WHO AGREED, "THAT SHOULD THE MINERS AGREE TO RETURN TO WORK AT ONCE PENDING THE REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION, THE MINE OWNERS CONCERNED AGREED THAT ALL THEIR FORMER EMPLOYEES, WHO REPORTED TO WORK, WOULD BE REINSTATED WITHOUT PREJUDICE." THIS WAS REPORTED TO THE STRIKE COMMITTEE AT NIGHT AND AN ANSWER PROMISED MR. CAMPBELL THE MORNING OF THE 22ND OF THEIR DECISION.

September 22, 1931

HIS HONOR JUDGE WYLIE OF THE DISTRICT COURT, ESTEVAN, RECEIVED AN ORDER-IN-COUNCIL FROM THE DOMINION GOVERNMENT APPOINTING HIM A COMMISSIONER UNDER THE INQUIRIES ACT TO INVESTIGATE ALL ASPECTS OF THE MINES IN THIS AREA. NO WORD AS YET RECEIVED FROM THE MINES AS TO THE OFFER OF THE OPERATORS TO REINSTATE THE OLD EMPLOYEES PENDING A FULL INVESTIGATION BY THE GOVERNMENT.

September 23, 1931.

THE OPERATORS AGAIN REPORTED TO THE CHIEF CONCILIATION OFFICER THAT THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO MEET THE MINERS IN A JOINT CONFERENCE AT 8 P.M. OF THIS DATE AND INSISTED UPON AN ANSWER FROM THE MINERS BEFORE 4 P.M. OF THEIR ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF SUCH OFFER. NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED FROM THE STRIKE LEADERS.

DO YOU KNOW: THE OPERATORS AS YET HAVE NO CONCEPTION AS TO WHAT THE DEMANDS OF THE MINERS ARE?

DO YOU KNOW: THAT EACH OF THE OPERATORS HAS AGREED TO MEET HIS OWN STRIKE EMPLOYEES FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING ANY AND ALL GRIEVANCES?

DO YOU KNOW: THE OPERATORS HAVE AGREED TO MEET A COMMITTEE OF THE STRIKING MINERS (PROVIDING THEY WERE EMPLOYED AS OF THE DATE OF THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE STRIKE) FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASCERTAINING WHAT COMPLAINTS THE STRIKING MINERS HAVE?

DO YOU KNOW: THE OPERATORS HAVE AGREED TO REINSTATE ALL OF THEIR OLD EMPLOYEES WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION PENDING SUCH INVESTIGATION.

DO YOU KNOW: THE OPERATORS HAVE BEEN AND ARE WILLING TO CO-OPERATE TO THE FULLEST EXTENT WITH BOTH PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OFFICERS IN AN ENDEAVOR TO GET THE MEN TO RETURN TO WORK BEFORE MARKETS ARE PERMANENTLY LOST TO THE SASKATCHEWAN OPERATORS.

DO YOU KNOW: TO ALL THESE EFFORTS THERE HAS ONLY BEEN ONE REPLY FROM THE STRIKE LEADERS, THAT BEING, "RECOGNIZE THE MINE WORKERS UNION OF CANADA BEFORE WE WILL DISCUSS ANY OTHER MATTERS"?

DO YOU KNOW: THE MINE OPERATORS HAVE STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE SUCH A UNION FEELING THAT IN DOING SO THEY ARE PROTECTING THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY, THE PUBLIC AT LARGE, AND THEMSELVES?

We believe the foregoing is sufficient information for the miners and public to draw their own conclusions.

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