

# DID CANADIAN COLLIERIES WANT MEN TO STRIKE?

Parker Williams Suggests That  
Company Had Occasion to  
Cover Up Poor  
Financing.

(From The World's Special Staff Cor-  
respondent.)

PRESS GALLERY, Victoria, B. C.,  
Feb. 18.—No little credit is due Parker  
Williams, the Socialist leader in the  
legislative assembly, for his ingenious  
and apparently ingenuous challenge to  
any member of the government side of  
the House to move an amendment to  
the resolution of want of confidence  
then under discussion, eliminating the  
first two clauses of the resolution and  
replacing them with some expression  
that the House desired an investiga-  
tion of the coal mines strike situa-  
tion.

"While we put it in the form of a  
vote of want of confidence," said the  
member for Newcastle, "it was not  
our desire to do so. What we want  
is an inquiry into conditions now ex-  
isting and those existing before and  
leading up to the troubles. If there  
is one interested member among the  
opponents of the government, I chal-  
lenge that one to adjourn this debate,  
and then bring in an amendment re-  
moving the want of confidence clauses  
from this resolution by cutting off the  
first two paragraphs and inserting in-  
stead a clause worded in such a man-  
ner as to make it the expression of  
this House that an investigation is de-  
sirable. Then let us get down to the  
bottom of this trouble."

### An Unexpected Move.

In making this suggestion, which was plainly quite unexpected by the members of the House, Mr. Williams observed that he was aware that if there was an ordinary opposition in the House such a defection as he proposed would play into the hands of the enemy. But as the membership of the House is constituted there was no danger of such a result. He would not, he said, suggest it if there were such an opposition. He urged the government supporters to show their independence by taking this stand, one which he felt would not do them harm in the eyes of the country, but would rather improve their position than otherwise. "The only change might be a slight reduction in the status of the premier and the attorney-general," said Mr. Williams. "And if that were so no harm would come to the party. Both gentlemen loomed so large that a considerable reduction would do them good."

As the member closed his remarks on the resolution with this challenge, Mr. Speaker at once gave the usual signal, "Are you ready for the question?" which being repeated three times in succession, is another of the rules by which the game is played. No member apparently found the spirit move him, so Mr. Speaker then read the resolution preparatory to closing the debate.

"Ring the bell, Mr. Speaker, please," said the member for Newcastle, "and let us see how they stand."

After some little delay looking up authorities, Mr. Speaker announced that he could not ring the division bell as there was not a full house—which therefore set down still another of the rules by which the game is played. The vote was recorded strictly on party lines.

### The Premier's Speech Condensed.

In resuming the debate after the House convened, Mr. Williams said the whole contention of the premier's speech of the day before had been reduced to a single paragraph in the morning paper—that the bottom of the trouble was in the recognition of the union. That this is true Mr. Williams agreed. But, he said, if the premier was so very sure that any inquiry would absolve the government, how can their continued refusal of an inquiry be accounted for? No satisfactory answer to that question had been, or would be, given.

There had been plenty of warning that trouble was brewing. It had been brought to the attention of the police, but no notice had been taken of the warning. The comments in the coast papers on the conduct of the provincial police court at Nanaimo had been open enough for the government—which at all times keeps a pretty close hand on the public pulse—to learn what was the state of affairs. There had been a petition with some 1200 signatures sent from Nanaimo requesting the removal of the magistrate. But so far as he could find out that petition had disappeared. It might have been lost in the disturbances of last August. However, there had been ample opportunity for the government to know what was doing, and to have entered on a common sense course to bring about a change.

### Mr. Bowser's Interviews.

Instead of dealing with the matter in a common sense way the attorney-general had given out interviews which had not been helpful to clearing up the troubles. In an interview with the Ministerial Association of Vancouver last November the attorney-general told them he "expected to put lots of miners in jail this fall," and that he was "keeping space for them."

Hon. Mr. Bowser here interrupted to ask if he understood the speaker to say that he had made that statement last November. He asked for particulars of the time and occasion.

Mr. Williams replied: "Yes. The attorney-general had stated that he anticipated trouble. Does the attorney-general question the accuracy of that statement?"

"I certainly do, Mr. Speaker," replied the Hon. Mr. Bowser. "I made no such statement. I explained to the Ministerial Association that in the fall of the year there was always an accession of numbers of men sent to jail for minor offences, owing to so many drifting into the larger cities at that time of year."

Mr. Williams replied that he had not expected to be questioned, and so had not come armed with the papers in the matter. At another time he would bring them in. Continuing he said it looked as if the attorney-general was anxious to have just such trouble as had been stirred up. "Perhaps," said the speaker, "he will deny some of the interviews of last August."

### Who Started the Shooting?

While it was true there had been considerable shooting at Extension, the attorney-general had not the courage to find out who started it. If he wanted to deal with the situation the first thing he should have done was to suspend those whom the miners blamed for the trouble. He took the responsibility for bringing in the militia, though the regular course was for the local authorities in a district to take the initiative. When the militia were placed in charge then the special police should have been withdrawn at once and the magistrate so obnoxious to the whole mining community suspended.

In practice, the member for Newcastle said, there was no virtue in the law to give protection to miners, but there was ample law to vindicate itself when the miners took the law in their own hands. It was not yet known what fraction of a million had been spent in dealing with these troubles, but under the financial conditions existing it would, he thought have been well worth while for this House to deal with this question of cost.

### Bail Denied Miners.

They had heard of constitutional rights, coming down from the time King John signed the Magna Charta, but here had been men thrown by hundreds into jails designed for but ten. They had every constitutional right to demand bail, but bail had been denied them. He spoke of conditions under which men penned up three together in cells 7x9x7 feet high had to exist for weeks at a time. Not the least cruelty was the overbearing actions of guards. He retold the tale of the three youths in one cell who sought to while away their 17 hours per day of close confinement by working out arithmetic problems with a half-inch of lead pencil which one of them chanced to have. A guard caught them at this offence and confiscated the pencil. Mr. Williams amused the House by expressing the belief that the gaunt hairy arm which had been thrust in through the grating of that cell door should have become paralyzed in the act, if there was such a thing as justice.

He asserted that he and the party he belonged to had tried to take the position that the ideals they sought to realize would come as a logical devel-

opment. The constitution was not written. It was subject to change at any time through the will of the majority. Therefore he had never been in sympathy with other than constitutional means of redress.

#### **Scored Mr. Price's Report.**

Turning to the report made by Mr. Price, the commissioner sent out by the minister of labor, and which report Premier McBride had quoted from, Mr. Williams made the charge that "up to the present time the gentleman who made that report has yet to ask the first question of one of the miners on strike." He criticized such a procedure strongly. No doubt the commissioner had talked freely with the colliery company and with the government, who seemed to be very close together in this whole matter.

The premier made excuse a year ago, and repeated it at the present time, that this was a fight between capital and labor. He took it that this House came together to prevent fights between capital and labor. At least they had a duty as representatives of the public, who certainly had suffered in this strike.

"If, as the premier says, this dispute is one that cannot be settled, and the government has not tried, how do they know? Is it because of the profound nature of the question or is it because of the meagre ability of the government?" Mr. Williams insisted that before they say it cannot be settled, the government at least should make a try at settling it.

Taking up the attitude and plans of the U. M. W., Mr. Williams said that, though not a member, he had been admitted to a meeting of the U. M. W.—an honor he doubted if the premier could get—and he knew that twelve months ago last September, the U. M. W. was not looking for a strike. If that were so, then the charge of fomenting a strike by foreign agitators fell to the ground. Those responsible for the policy of the U. M. W. believed a year ago that it would take two years to get ready for any action. Their whole policy was against a strike. It had come in spite of them, he asserted. The men went out without authority and so forfeited their right to strike pay. That did not look like an attempt to set up a dictatorship, as the premier had said.

#### **Sir Richard Misreported.**

Sir Richard interrupted to deny that he had used any such expression. "I will have to correct my friend," said the premier, "as he has sought to misconstrue my words. I tried to make it clear and plain that I had not one word of criticism of the U. M. W. for trying to establish in British Columbia. I never referred to them as dictators. I said they were seeking to gain control of the mines."

Mr. Williams countered by reading from the report of the premier's speech in that morning's Colonist, where the word "dictatorship" was used. He said he would be glad to have the premier repudiate the Colonist. Sir Richard reiterated that he had not used the word, in any way, and Mr. Williams advised him to revise the Colonist reports before they were published.

Recognition of the union was the logic of the action of the government when the delegates came back, said Mr. Williams.

"I wish to call attention to the fact that the entire delegation was composed of officials of the U. M. W.," interrupted the premier.

"I was not aware of that, but will take your word for it," replied Mr. Williams. "The delegates were not appointed by the union, but by a mass meeting of all the miners, irrespective of membership in the union. Does the department of mines wish to refuse recognition to the union?" he enquired.

"Absolutely not," replied Sir Richard.

"But it is curious that all the delegates were union men."

#### **Spy at Work.**

Mr. Williams asserted that it was very likely the Canadian Collieries could tell the premier whether or not there had been a strike planned by the U. M. W., for he stated that they had been getting confidential reports weekly from the head office of the U. M. W. at Indianapolis. They had had some person in the confidence of the executive of the U. M. W. on their payroll for weeks, and they now had on file in their office the reports of the spy. He suggested that very likely the Government might be able to get the privilege of consulting those reports. That would settle the question as to whether the U. M. W. wanted a fight or not. Of course, if the Canadian Collieries had learned that there was to be a fight they might very well have decided that it would be as well to bring it off a few weeks earlier than otherwise.

The premier interrupted to inquire if the member for Newcastle proposed to repudiate Farrington's statement, and to say that the U. M. W. did not try to establish themselves on Vancouver Island. Mr. Williams replied that he had not read Farrington's letter, and the premier retorted: "If I could get my hon. friend to admit this whole trouble was started by the U. M. W., as proven by Farrington's statement, it would clear up the situation very much."

#### **Misled by Spy Reports.**

Mr. Williams neatly retorted in return that, no doubt, it would relieve the premier greatly if some means of clearing up the situation were to be got. He did not know the statements in Farrington's letter, but this he was sure of, that Farrington had never said that the U. M. W. brought on the strike. It might be that the Canadian Collieries' spy reports from Indianapolis had misled them. He merely offered this as a possible explanation. But let this Government find out who the secret agent of the Canadian Collieries at Indianapolis was. They were, he suggested, close enough to the C. C. Co. to get the information. In that way they might get a little further towards a settlement.

There was another possible influence on the strike trouble. Mr. Coulson, the American gentleman who had come to manage the Canadian Collieries, had made statements as to the production he could secure from the mines, but he had fallen down very badly and it was

necessary to cover up his failure. "He may have employed the secret agent to help him skin the directors," suggested Mr. Williams.

### **Interest Had to Be Met.**

"There was a third possible consideration which might have had great influence on the situation, and which might or might not be brought out by an investigation. The Canadian Collieries had not been a factor in Island coal mining for very long. They had bought out the Dunsmuir collieries for \$10,000,000 or \$11,000,000, and they had reorganized, or recapitalized, at \$22,000,000. Then they had issued mortgage bonds for \$10,000,000 and sold stock to the extent of \$5,000,000. Interest on all this capital had to be met; if not out of production, then out of capital. When it became evident that production was not sufficient to meet this dividend charge, the same people had secured large interests in other industries which they were offering to the investing public in London.

If it became known that their first venture was a lie on the face of it, what would be the result of the other securities they proposed to float? Under the circumstances it was necessary to cover up. An explosion would have been a good excuse. The only other excuse would be a labor difficulty. Right in this set of facts, Mr. Williams charged, was to be found the explanation of the strike. The company for the purpose of covering up their situation had found a strike necessary. "When it is borne in mind how close the connection is between Mackenzie & Mann, Norton Griffiths and this government," said Mr. Williams, "it is evident that the premier knows well the situation and he seeks a man, named Farrington, in the United States, to put the blame on."

### **Enquiry Still Necessary.**

Now, he suggested, perhaps all his theories might be wrong, and after all it was the machinations of this man Farrington, which were at the bottom of the troubles. If that were so, there was still the necessity of an inquiry into the facts of the case. What, he inquired, had been the effect on all the industries of the province, of the situation in the coal mines of the Island? It was necessary from that point of view, to investigate. He drew attention too, to the fact that with the withdrawal of the men from the workings and consequent caving in of the mines, there were thousands of tons of coal which would now never be raised, and the government had an interest of 10 cents per ton in all this. What was the government going to do about it? Large natural resources were owned by corporations and frequently these were represented by aliens and owned by absentees. The situation was one which demanded closest inquiry.

Mr. Williams made his appeal for an amendment and an inquiry, and closed his address with that.