

# Press Releases on the Asbestos Strike

(April 30, 1949)

On April 30, 1949, Le Soleil ran the following press releases under a headline which read:

## Urgent Appeal from the Church Authorities

1) Monsignor 1. C. Leclaire, P.D. issued the following communiqué in St. Hyacinthe on April 29:

"Since the beginning of this strike affecting the asbestos-producing area of the province, the ecclesiastical authorities have been doing their best to contribute to a settlement. They have asked all parties concerned to intensify their efforts to reach a just solution. Unfortunately their endeavours, as well as those of the civil authorities, have so far been fruitless.

"Meanwhile thousands of homes are now in dire need of help. The strike has affected women and children, as well. In the circumstances Christian charity makes it a duty for all -- no matter what their social position or class -- to sympathize with the workers and their families and to give them, if possible, the material help they need. That is why we are launching an appeal to all men of goodwill to help the ecclesiastical authorities to organize a collection for the workers' families.

"All Catholics should pray God that those who are now struggling so bitterly will soon forget the past and enjoy the benefits of a just peace".

2) The President of the CTCC issued the following release on April 29:

"The asbestos strike is still going on. Negotiations since the beginning of the week have failed. The CTCC and the asbestos unions have tried in vain, through their representative, Mr. Théodore Lespérance, to reach an understanding with management which would provide a minimum of reasonable guarantees.

"Johns-Manville's representative has taken an unacceptable stand which has made conciliation impossible.

"While the Minister of Labour has helped to make agreement possible on one point in dispute, it is surprising to see him support the company on two items essential to a solution.

"In the circumstances it was no longer necessary to continue the negotiations.

"The fault is entirely Johns-Manville's, represented by Mr. Yvan Sabourin and supported by the provincial government which has refused to accept the conditions governing the miners' return to work as agreed upon with the highest ecclesiastical authorities.

"This obstinate refusal has prevented the arbitrators from choosing a chairman, since even if an arbitration board had been set up it would not have been possible

to convince the workers to return to their jobs without guarantees against possible retaliation. Canadian Johns-Manville was unwilling to give such guarantees. The choice of a board chairman was thus useless.

"The long negotiations did not concern the choice of a third arbitrator but mainly the preliminary conditions governing the workers' return to work.

"Since the beginning of the strike, the provincial government has invariably supported the companies and has taken an anti-labour stand throughout.

"The Catholic Church has viewed with sympathy the miners' difficult position. Many bishops, prelates, and priests as well as the chaplains of the CTCC and affiliated bodies have lent them their moral support. They have done their best to bring about an early and just solution to a problem affecting some 5000 workers and their families.

"The miners have of course been wholeheartedly supported by the CTCC and their unions, as well as by all labour organizations in the province and the people in the large industrial centres. The province's farmers, through the Catholic Farmers' Union, have also upheld them.

"The CTCC deeply regrets that no understanding has been reached and holds the provincial government, as well as the asbestos trust, to blame.

(Signed: Girard Picard)".

3) Théodore Lespérance, legal counsel for the CTCC, issued the following release:

"I agreed to represent labour during the negotiations leading to the appointment of an arbitration board chairman on the understanding that the terms governing the miners' return to work would comprise guarantees against reprisals.

"This was a condition essential to my role as an arbitrator, being the *sine qua non* of honourable and acceptable procedure.

"During the negotiations concerning a chairman, about which there was neither definite agreement nor disagreement, it *seemed* that Canadian Johns-Manville, represented by Mr. Yvan Sabourin, reserved its position as regards retaliation.

"This point became the leading obstacle and, since it proved impossible to clarify the company's stand on the issue, we had no recourse but to break off our talks.

(Signed: Théodore Lespérance)".

4) The Minister of Labour issued the following release:

"It is with considerable regret that I announce that negotiations aimed at solving the asbestos strike were broken off by the unions at 10:15 tonight.

"These negotiations had taken place in my office in the Parliament Buildings beginning last Monday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. They went on all week and came to an end tonight at 10:15 p.m.

"They were long and laborious. I may add that I did not spare myself in my attempts to bring about an agreement which would have made the arbitration board I had proposed possible.

(Signed: Antonio Barrette) Québec City, April 29, 1949.

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