

## Out of the Dust

Quebec's famed "fiber belt," which produces about 85% of the world's asbestos, was shut down tight last week by a strike.

Negotiations between the National Federation of Mining Industry Employees and the U.S.-owned Canadian Johns-Manville Co. had dragged on for two months. Last week the federation decided to skip arbitration, called an illegal strike. The strike closed down pits in Asbestos, Thetford Mines, Black Lake, Coleraine, St. Remi and East Broughton.

The union wanted a 15¢-an-hour wage hike, a checkoff under the justice Rand formula (TIME, Feb. 11, 1946), which collects dues from non-members as well as members, better protection against asbestos dust. Asbestos dust control, said Montreal's influential *Le Devoir* (circ. 18,000), was the most important issue. *Le Devoir* had published a 25,000-word survey of working conditions in asbestos mines, which called them "a charnel house almost beyond compare." For proof, it had cited case histories of deaths due to asbestosis (a disease brought on by asbestos fiber filling and badly scarring the lungs).

Johns-Manville, spokesman for all the asbestos companies, dubbed the talk of dust "a diversion designed to bid for public sympathy and to conceal the real aim, which is to tie up the entire asbestos industry in Canada with industrywide bargaining." It cited the \$1,000,000 it had spent for "a dust precipitation system, air suction fans and air filters." It offered to renew arbitration negotiations if the men returned to work.

At first, the asbestos strikers heeded the plea of their parish priest, and "moral counselor," Abbé Louis-Philippe Camirand, to keep the strike peaceful. But after five days, a handful of strikers moved into the company offices, took possession. The company promptly went to court, got an injunction to stop picketing, prepared to sue the union's parent body, the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labor, for \$500,000 for "damages and loss of production." At week's end Premier Maurice Duplessis hustled 80 provincial police into Asbestos.

Source: [Time Magazine \(Canadian edition\)](#), February 28, 1949, p. 24.