

ANARCHY FLARES IN ASBESTOS AREA

Just what is happening out in the asbestos district is a bit difficult to define. As a strike, it has been declared illegal by provincial authorities. If it is illegal it is something more than a strike. The developments of the past 24 hours give it the appearance of a planned and violent uprising against constituted authority.

People are being denied the use of the King's highway. Police are being overpowered, disarmed and beaten. Property is being destroyed. Strikers and their sympathizers are reportedly being reinforced by dangerous elements from Montreal. In short, there exists a reign of terror which has already become intolerable, and is becoming hourly more so.

All this has come about without any further clarification of the issues involved between the mine operations and the employees. There is still no clearly defined statement as to just what the strikers demand or what their grievances are. And it must be said, on the other hand, that statements by the operators' spokesman also have left the issues unclear.

Appraisal of the true inwardness of the situation is made more difficult by reason of the partial indoctrination of many of the people of the district with the dogma that it is possible to get rich quick by methods of "funny money," and the attitude of certain of the clergy, apparently in opposition to the position of provincial authorities.

Approximately 5,000 workers employed by the several operators in the district are involved. They have been idle since February 13 when the night shifts of the workings failed to appear for work at midnight. The National Syndicate of Asbestos Workers, under the Catholic Confederation of Workers, which is the union involved, refused to accept the arbitration of the issues soon after the strike became effective. On this basis the strike was declared illegal.

In the past few days some men have been returning to work at Asbestos and others have been coming in to work from surrounding districts, although no importation of strike breakers has been alleged by the union. Indications are that a rumor that the Johns Manville Company which had some 750 men at work, contemplated resumption of shipping asbestos, touched off the road-blocking campaign which effectively prevented outside workers from entering the town.

The prolonged strike, though illegal, and the minor outbreaks of violence that previously marked it, have been dealt with by the Provincial Government with caution and patience. Such a policy is easy to understand and even to commend, as it has been apparently motivated by the hope that some settlement would be reached.

But the dangers that arise when an illegal strike is permitted to be indefinitely prolonged are now apparent. Not only are animosities deepened, but many persons and groups not closely (if at all) connected with the issues at Asbestos seek to make the most of the trouble for trouble's sake. In this way the situation must tend in time to get out of hand, with violence becoming widespread and with authority openly flouted.

What has now happened in Asbestos would seem to indicate the importance of taking prompt and orderly action at the beginning of an illegal strike, to prevent the far more complex disorders that inevitably ensue, and which neither clarify the real issues, nor promote a sound adjustment.

It is to be hoped that the law and order may be restored with no more serious property damage or personal injury that has occurred up to the present. Further it is hoped that there will be an early clarification of issues by all elements involved to the end that industrial peace may be resumed and the people revert to normal productive lives.

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