

Strikes

C.S.

No.

87.

S. M., South Georgia

SUBJECT.

1920

16th January

Previous Paper.

561/09.

Strike among employees of Cia.
Argentina de Pesca, South Georgia.

MINUTES.

1

H.E.

Submitted.

From Mr Binnis' account it appears that this strike might have had very serious results but for the timely arrival of the "Dartmouth". Mr Binnis seems to anticipate further trouble in May when the men are finally paid off, but possibly the visit of H.M.S. It will have had a salutary effect. Some of the demands of the men, as shown in the enclosure to Mr Binnis's letter, are almost Gilbertian.

T.M.
6.2.20.

Copy of Magistrate's Report forwarded to
Sec. of State under cover of despatch h^o 15
of 9/2/20

T.M.

Subsequent Paper.

538/20



①

The Magistrate's Office,
South Georgia.

22nd, January 1920.

Sir,

I have the honour to report for the information of His Excellency the Administrator that on 11th. January 36 Russian labourers ceased work on the station of the Compañia Argentina de Pesca at Grytviken, and refused to take orders from the foreman. In the evening a deputation approached the Manager and demanded higher wages, with new contracts, and the old contracts to be returned, wages to be 150 pesos gold per month without part of the catch, and eight hours work per day.

The Manager offered to give them the wages asked for and change of contract, but was not prepared to take off the part of the catch as the men would lose interest in the work. This they did not agree to, and on the following day they massed together and went over the station and threatened the men who were working, forcing them to join the strike.

On the evening of the 12th. I was informed by the management that a deputation from the workmen would like to see me. I, thereupon, went to the station and sent for the deputation and asked the reason for such action on their part, pointing out the illegality of it, and explaining that, in the circumstances, they were all liable to punishment for breach of contract, but they took no notice of it. Considerable discussion followed on various points raised by the men. Vide ENCLOSURE I.

- a. The food was good but insufficient variety of dishes
- b. They were willing to work from 6am. to 3.30pm, provided they were paid overtime at the rate of 1 peso (1/9)

Stawley
The Colonial Secretary

I peso (1/9)

per hour after that time.^(e) The 3 men out of 220 who refused to sign the strike petition were to be deported. The latter part was not discussed as I refused to have any discussion on the subject, explaining shortly that the men in question had done no harm to anyone and had a perfect right to refuse.

I agreed to draw up a contract in English for the men, with the consent of the manager, who being present offered to pay them the highest wages obtaining on the Island.

Vide. ENCLOSURE II.

This was placed before a general meeting with the result that, the following day, a contract drawn up by the party calling themselves Bolshevists, was presented. ENCLOSURE III

At this stage of the proceedings a number of Spaniards and Scandinavians wished to return to work, but the Russians again threatened them. I received a letter from the Company asking for protection of the Company's property on the station as the men were becoming noisy and a riot was anticipated. Vide ENCLOSURE IV. I went with Mr. Simon to the warehouse where the sealing rifles are kept and stripped the bolts from each rendering them useless.

On the 14th, the whale-catchers came in with whales, and as each one entered, a committee of Bolshevists went onboard and forced the crew to strike; the consequence being that a letter^{was} received from the crews asking for 130 dollars gold per month, equal to about 450 kroner, and 2 dollars gold per whale! On an average catch this would amount to at least £38 per month for the season, for sailors and firemen. At this juncture there were some 24 whales lying at the buoy, so I proposed to the manager to leave the boats on strike as it would take a long time in the circumstances to work up all the whale matter, to which he

to which

he agreed.

On the 15th, certain members of the Bolshevist party who were now joined by several Norwegians and Swedes threatened the life of the Secretary, accusing him of not translating their terms properly and saying that if they did not get their contracts that evening, written in English and Spanish, and signed by the Magistrate with his seal, there would be trouble. I advised the manager and the officer who was threatened to arm themselves with revolvers and to send his wife and family to another station for the time being; at the same time a whaler was to be fitted out and sent to the Falkland Islands for assistance. I prolonged the discussion about the contracts in order to gain time. The contracts should have been presented at 4pm. on the 16th. but the timely arrival of H.M.S. Dartmouth at that moment put an end to further proceedings.

In the evening I called the Bolshevists up and told them that the Company would not accept their terms but that they could consider themselves discharged and would be fined according to the Summary Jurisdiction Ordinance, and sent back to Buenos Aires as deported aliens as soon as a whaler could be got ready. Notwithstanding the fact that the "Dartmouth" lay in the inner harbour within almost a stone's throw of the station, they immediately caused a repeated general strike.

There were 20 blubber and meat boilers in the process of cooking, but they forced the firemen to draw the fires and sent the cookers to the barracks. The boilers were left over Sunday and steam put on again on Monday. The loss to the Company in oil alone during the strike is estimated at £20,000, The added loss of having to send

to send

two whale-catchers to Buenos Aires for more men is difficult to state.

On Monday morning a few of the non-strikers commenced to work and carpenters, getting the whalers ready for sea. A party of Russians went onboard and tried to get the crew of the catchers to stop work. I went onboard as soon as it was made known to me and ordered them off, and asked the crews to take no notice of them.

It was arranged that 60 of the strikers should be sent away and the boats were to be ready on Wednesday morning at 6am. when each man in turn would be charged with breach of contract and fined accordingly before going onboard. I made application to Captain Hope of H.M.S. Dartmouth to land a party of Marines and sailors to act as police in case of necessity, while the men were being fined and sent onboard.

There is not the slightest room for doubt that the action on the part of Captain Hope saved unknown trouble, as a meeting of the Bolshevists was held the night before, and amongst other things, were determined not to leave the place without receiving the whole of their wages, and were prepared to use force in obtaining them if necessary, threatening to cut the steam pipes and electric cable on the station.

They did not expect the men from the "Dartmouth" and were not prepared for such an event, and consequently every man was safely placed onboard and at 7-30 am, the whalers left. I dislike to imagine the outcome of the strike had not H.M.S. Dartmouth been in port.

Immediately the whalers left several hands who had deserted the station the evening before returned, and with

and with

all the remaining hands asked to be allowed to return to work under the old contracts.

I anticipate no further trouble until the final settlement in May, so that if it is possible to arrange for another visit of a warship, it would greatly facilitate the paying off of the workmen.

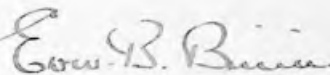
From what has already taken place since the commencement of the season and the past two seasons, referring to labour disturbance, I am of opinion that the only cure is a radical one such as the present; an example which will not be easily forgotten.

To ensure the peace of the Dependency force is needed and a revenue cutter would be sufficient. With a wireless station in operation it would be more simplified as assistance could be called when circumstances rendered necessary.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,



Stipendiary Magistrate.

The Honourable,
Colonial Secretary.
Falkland Islands.

To The Compañia Argentina de Pesca
Translation from Spanish.

Agreement between the workmen on the station at Grytviken.

CONTRACTS.

I hereby agree to work for the Compañia Argentina de Pesca at the whaling station called Grytviken, in the capacity of

1. Lowest wages to be \$ 150 pesos Argentina per month .
2. Overtime to be 1 peso per hour.
3. 8 hours work per day.
4. Better food with a greater allowance of sugar per week.
5. Old contracts to be handed back to the men and new contracts made, stamped and signed by the Manager and the Magistrate.
6. The Contracts to date from the 1st. October 1919.
7. Deckman, Flenser, Funder, Fisherman, Mateman, Blubber cutters, Boatswain, Oil tapper to receive not less than \$ 200 pesos per month.
8. All pay due to the workmen up to the 1st. October to be paid in pesos at the rate of 1.60 Kroners to the peso.

WHALE CATCHERS CREWS.

We the undersigned crews of the whale catchers ask the Company to be so good as to raise our wages to \$ 100 (gold) per month and \$ 2 gold per whale.

Form of Contract drawn up from conditions set forth by
workmen.

C C N T R A C T.

I _____ hereby agree to work for the Compañia Arg.
de Pesca on the whaling station called Grytviken, in the capacity
of _____, the hours to be as follows:

Commencing at 6 am, to 8.30 am. breakfast till 9 am. work from
9 am. till noon, dinner from 12 to 1 pm. work from 1 to 3.30 p.
Coffee till 4 pm. and for work done after 4 pm. I will receive
1 pasc per hour Overtime. the wages to be \$ 130 Gold equal
to Kroner 450.00. I promise to do whatever work I am put to
by the foreman either on board the company's vessels or on
shore. I also agree to pay to the Company mⁿ 2.50 per day
for my food if I lay up without the Doctors certificate
declaring me to be sick.

This contract will be deemed to have commenced on the 1st
day of January 1920, and terminate on the 15th. May, or can be
terminated 15 days on either side to suit my departure from
South Georgia.

Contractor.

Manager

Witness.

Reply by the workmen after receiveg copy of Contract offered
by the Company.

Compania Argentina de Pesca,

15th. January 1920.

Senor Gerente!

We cannot accept the conditions offered by you and place the
following before you for acceptance.

- Art. 1. I promise to work for the Compania Argentina de Pesca in the cap-
city of _____ in the land station of Grytviken the hours
of work to be 8 hours daily.
2. If necessary to work overtime after 3.30pm. the boss might
advise with 15 minutes warning, but without obligation for me
to work, the pay to be \$ 1 m/n, Argentine per hour.
3. I promise to load or discharge any of the company's vessels
provided the crew is not on strike.
4. If a labourer considers himself not fit for work he may not
be fined to pay any damage to the company even if the Doctor
refuses to certify him sick.
5. No workmen wanting to go away can be stopped by the company and
no labourer may be sent away before the 15th. May if he is not
willing to go.
6. The workmen allow the company 15 days and claim the same off the
company as to the date of departure.
7. The Wages to be paid in Argentine money and shall be for labour-
ers 150 peses per month.

see over for ARTISANS.

COMPAÑÍA ARGENTINA DE PESCA

SOCIEDAD ANÓNIMA

TELEGRAMAS "PESCA" BUENOS AIRES

GRYTVIKEN, 16th. January 1920
(South Georgia)

Enc. IV

To The Stipendiary Magistrate

E. B. Binnie Esq.,

Sir,

I beg to inform you that the workmen who have been on strike for several days on our station are inclined to adopt a threatening attitude towards myself and officers, and have also threatened to destroy the machinery and produce on the station. I would be greatly obliged to you, if you could offer us some protection or advise us how to act in the circumstances.

Thanking you in anticipation

we are Sir,

Yours respectfully

p.p. Compañía Argentina de Pesca,
COMPAÑIA ARGENTINA DE PESCA
SOCIEDAD ANONIMA

Fredrick G. ...
Manager.

*Letter written 1/2 an hour before
arrival of H.M.S. Portsmouth.*



S. G. No. 1/20.

The Magistrate's Office,

South Georgia,

16th. January 1920.

Sir,

I have the honour to report for the information of His Excellency the Governor, that there is much labour unrest in South Georgia. At present there are some 180 men on strike at King Edward Cove, besides the crews of 4 whalers, all demanding wages far in excess of the highest paid in South Georgia. The principal leaders are 36 Russians, who are adopting a very aggressive and threatening attitude to the manager and Officers absolutely refusing to do any work, and dictating their own terms, which the management are unable to accept.

The manager has written to me asking for protection of the company's property in case of serious insubordination or riots occurring. It was decided to deport the leaders but they refused to go, and I have not sufficient force to send them off, which I deem with the concurrence of Mr Simon J.P. very desirable.

The Russian element has spread so much dissension among the Scandinavians that they in some cases are almost as bad.

I would therefore be glad if a Warship could be sent with as little delay as possible as there is no protection against riots taking place, failing a Warship if about 15 Volunteers could come back with the whaler, I think I could deport the worst characters and establish peace. There has been many serious strikes since December 1st, and riots between the Blacks and Whites, but I have been unable to get any wireless communication. I am despatching

*M. J. P. Secretary
Colonial Secretary
Falkland Islands*

the, Whaler at once so as not to cause undue delay, it is essential
that she should return at once. Arrangements will be made to
return any men sent down later, direct.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,



Magistrate.