



MANX MINES ROCKS AND MINERALS

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LAXEY MINERS' STRIKE OF 1872 -
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

The Isle of Man Times AND GENERAL ADVERTISER

SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 1872

The great wages agitation which has been for months permeating every branch of industry in England, has spread like an epidemic to the Isle of Man and is running with electric speed from one industrial pursuit to another.

The following is the situation of things as regards Laxey:-

The first meeting was held on Thursday last, in the Old Schoolhouse, Glen, for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of obtaining an advance of wages. Several speakers addressed the meeting on the wages question, shewing that the present rate of wages was not sufficient to maintain their families, and resolutions were passed as follows:

1st. That this meeting, agrees that a strong and determined effort be made to get an advance of wages for the underground men belonging to the Great Laxey Mines. 2nd. That the advance asked for be 4s per week for miners, marines, and fillers whose present wages are 15s per week averaged, to be advanced to 19s per week. There was also a resolution carried unanimously and with acclamation:- "That there be no work done until these conditions are granted."

A deputation the same evening waited on Capt. Rowe, and presented these resolutions, which that gentleman immediately forwarded to the Chairman of Directors. The reply was as follows:-

Douglas, 7th June 1872

Dear Sir, -

The Directors have had under consideration certain resolutions stated to have been passed at a general meeting of the underground workmen of

the mine, held 6th instant, whereby a demand is made to increase the weekly wages of the men and

labourers four shillings a week each.

And the Directors have resolved not to increase the wages, considering that both men and labourers are well paid, - of which you are requested to give immediate notice.

By order of the Board

Geo. W. Dumbell, Chairman

Capt. Rowe, Manager of the

Great Laxey Mining Co.

According to arrangement, all the underground men met at the Level mouth on Monday morning at 7 o'clock, the morning shift intending to go to work if the request had been granted. The absolute refusal by the Chairman of the Directors to the men's request, the meeting adjourned to the old school, at the Glen, and resolutions were carried with acclamation to the following effect, viz.,

1st. That in the event of any person going underground to work before the men's demands are satisfied, the men hereby pledge themselves not to work, even if they obtain the advance, until the said men who may so have gone underground, be discharged from the company's employ. 2nd. That we negotiate with no captain or any person concerning the advance without articles in writing. 3rd. That we don't go to work under any consideration until our request be granted.

Before the meeting was closed strict injunctions were placed on the men not under any circumstances to do anything which would have a tendency to injure the property of the company in any shape or form; and entreating them that, though they were miners, in order to obtain their reasonable demands, that they should conduct themselves as men, and gentlemen. Impressing them, also, with the necessity of sobriety and good temper, under the circumstances; so that each individual man might act throughout the strike in uphold-

ing the moral law, that no dishonour would reflect upon the Laxey miners as a body.

'ISLE OF MAN TIMES'

SATURDAY JUNE 8TH, 1872

THE DEMANDS OF THE MEN REFUSED

"From the above which is sent to us by a correspondent, it will be seen that the underground miners and labourers employed at the Great Laxey have resolved to strike unless the wages of the miners are increased from 19s to 23s per week, and of the labourers from 15s to 19s. We understand that yesterday morning a letter containing the demands of the men was received by the Chairman of the directors, and that immediately afterwards a meeting of the directors was called for the purpose of considering the matter. The directors, after debating the subject in every way, unanimously came to the conclusion to refuse to accede to the terms demanded by the men, and the decision came to by the directors was at once sent to Laxey. The men had given notice that if the terms were not agreed to, they would strike on Monday next, so that it is to be feared that, if the men do not reconsider their determination, the result of this unfortunate dispute will be that in all probability this mine, one of the largest in the kingdom, will for a time at all events, be brought to a standstill. It is to be hoped, however, that wise counsel may prevail, and that the men will hesitate before they take a step which will result in immense loss to all concerned.

With regard to this matter we may state that in August last, when Mr. Warrington Smythe, the Government Inspector of Mines, visited Laxey, the men made a statement to him of what they considered their grievances. When he learned the wages they were paid, he told them that they were receiving exactly the same as the Cornish men, and that he considered that they were very well off. No more was heard of any desire for increased wages until the directors received the intimation yesterday.

We are informed that the underground men work at this in eight hour shifts, in other words they only work forty-eight hours per week. This eight hours include the time occupied in going from the mouth of the mine to their work and back again. The place at which some of the men are occupied is at such a distance from the mouth of the mine that it takes fully an hour to get to it, and the same time to return.

We do not know whether the same comparison would hold now, but a gentleman, who has made the question a special study informs us that as the result of an inquiry made a few years ago, that the Laxey miners were paid a higher rate of wages than any other miners in the kingdom. Next came the Foxdale men; then the Cornwall; and last the Devonshire . . . There is no special danger attached to working in the Manx mines. Indeed, a few years ago a Royal Commission inspected the mines of the United Kingdom, and

they gave it as their deliberate opinion that Great Laxey is one of the best ventilated mines they had seen, in fact it was much better in most respects than any mine they had visited. There was only one point in the south of the mine where any improvement was required. There was no other part of the mine in which they could suggest an improvement. The Commissioners also referred particularly to the safety of the foot ladders in the mines, which is a thing of immense importance to the men.

We understand that there is reason to believe that the movement at Laxey has arisen from the machinations of the emissaries of a body called "The Miners' Association", who are, however, not miners at all, but simply colliers.

Although the men make 19s a week as a rule, occasions frequently arise when they make considerably more than that; for instance, when they are employed at a favourable and easily worked "bargain".

There is no doubt that the men think that if they strike they will get employment on the railway, but we understand that the contractors are determined not to give a higher price for labour than the average wages of the Island. They think that it would be unfair to the permanent industries of the Island to do so.

At present the surface-men at the Great Laxey have not asked for any advance of wages. They receive similar wages to the underground men, but work 10 hours a day. However, if the underground men succeed in getting what they demand, there is no doubt that the surface men will also go in for an increase.

The demands of the men, if acceded to, would entail an immense addition to the expenditure of the mine. It must not be forgotten that the Company have recently had a severe struggle with the Wood and Forests on the demand made by that body, to participate as partners in the profits of the mine, without incurring any risk in any loss that might occur from its working. The Woods and Forests have been defeated on this question, there is no doubt about it, that they will now endeavour to force an increased royalty and rents from the Company. In face of these things, the directors feel that they could not, in justice to the shareholders, agree to the terms demanded by the men, and we hear they are consequently determined to bring men over to work the mine, rather than agree to such terms.

Some idea of the interest at stake in this dispute may be formed from the fact that the mine is now paying about £30,000 a year in wages alone. Yesterday was the monthly payday, and the amount paid was over £2,700. Of this a very large proportion is spent in Douglas; so that even the temporary stoppage of the mine will be a great loss to the "trade" of Douglas