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to Keystone. You may read  
it in your lodge R.D.

BEATON INSTITUTE  
EACHDRAIDH  
ARCHIVES  
COLLEGE OF CAPE BRETON  
STELLARTON, N. S., December, 1st, 1896.

To the Officers and Members of Keystone Lodge:

In reply to yours of 24th Nov., in which you say Keystone Lodge takes the position that legislation in favor of cash payments be sought for, and that your lodge intends petitioning the local government, for such an act; also that the lodge is of opinion that they have the right to my services in the matter, permit me to enter upon some explanation, and to call to the minds of the brothers some points they may have overlooked.

I am given to understand that some very hard things have been said of me, in reference to my past action on the stores. In every step, I took, I stand by, and I am willing to submit the case to any fair and unprejudiced tribunal. In any action undertaken I was uninfluenced by outside agitators. I had not in view the good of the farmer, or of the merchant, but, as an official of the P. W. A., my first consideration, at all times, has been, "what is good for the workmen as a whole."

The G. B. Council conv., Bro. McGillivray, is with you, and from him, no doubt, you received the reasons for the stand I took, in reference to a ballot. It may not, however, be amiss to go over the ground in your presence.

At last two meetings of Council the store question was discussed. At the last meeting the trend of the discussion was, that legislation should not be asked for closing the stores, or—what is equivalent—in favor of "no stoppages of wages for supplies." A committee was appointed, consisting of the Gt. Master, A. B. McGillivray, G. Barton, T. O'Neil and M. Tracey, to draw up desirable MODIFICATIONS of the Company store system. This Committee reported, as you are aware, as follows:—"That after a date, to be fixed upon by Gt. Council, the men now dealing in Company stores shall have the privilege of discontinuing their dealings: that the Co's shall not, after a date to be fixed upon deduct from the wages of any one who has left off dealing in the Company store, and is in debt to the store, a larger sum than ten per cent of the debtor's net earnings." One member of that Committee did not favor the granting of orders under any conditions. This report was carried by a very large majority, with this rider attached, "That all orders be given monthly, and for a specified amount." As A. B. McGillivray could tell you, this resolution was presented verbally to Mr. Donkin. He said he would like the request in writing. Having no see some of the directors of the Company, on other business—(work at Port Morien?) I concluded that it would be best to represent the matter to them. Judge of my surprise when I was told that the company instead of being willing to do any dabbling, would prefer to shut down the stores there and then. They declared that they did not want the stores a day longer than the men did not want them. One of the directors declared he was ready to lose what they had and sell the stores at once, rather than than keep on the stores, allow men to go in debt, and then have no security for payment of goods supplied. I said to close them down at once would be running from one extreme to the other. The director then said "If you can assure us that the men do not want the stores we will get out of them." I then said "well the only certain way to find out that, is to have a vote on the subject." After some persuasion it was agreed this should be done. I then made the announcement through the JOURNAL, plainly stating again, and again, why the vote was to be taken. I called a meeting of Council Com. together and informed them of what the directors and myself had agreed upon if it could be arranged. At the meeting there was present Corbett, O'Neil, McGillivray, Moffatt and myself. O'Neil and McGillivray were not much in favor of the vote, and wanted, if a vote were taken, that boys and men alike should vote. The others held it would be unfair that boys should vote. No definite conclusion was on that day come to. We parted on the understanding that I should do the best possible. After much discussion with Messrs Donkin, McKean and McLennan, it was agreed that a vote be taken and certain conditions were declared upon. I thought that November would be about the best time to have the vote, so as to give the Company 8 to 9 months to quit the business if the vote was adverse, and so as to give the men dealing in stores a chance to make preparations to deal elsewhere. I think the matter was arranged as fairly as was possible. Mr. McKean desired that I and Mr. Donkin should look after the vote. I objected, on the grounds that some might consider me as scarcely the proper person. Mr. Donkin also said he would rather be out of it. I then suggested the name of the Gt. Master. They agreed to this, and the name of D. M. Burchell was suggested as the Company's representative. It was understood that the vote was to be unfettered, and without canvassing on either side. I understand the officials of the Company did not solicit, only asked the men to go like men, and vote; but I am informed that there was some heavy canvassing by those opposed to the stores in certain quarters.

You know what took place subsequently, though I do not know, though I cannot even guess at any good reason why the men at certain of the collieries did not vote. Had they voted, in opposition to the stores, seeing they claim to be in opposition to them, the matter would have been settled, without further trouble. It would have been far, far easier to cast a vote against the stores than to sign petitions that an act be passed, which it is not in the power of the local government to pass, which the best men in the P. W. A. are opposed to being passed.

Some say, "oh the vote was for, or against, closing the stores. We are not for closing the stores; we are only against the stoppage of money for supplies."

The stoppage of orders for supplies is precisely the same thing as closing the stores. Anyone should know that the Company will not give out supplies in winter, nor at other times, unless it has security for payment. A vote for "no stoppages" would be exactly the same as a vote for "no stores." This need not be discussed. I state it authoritatively.

I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that whoever advised the men of certain collieries, not to vote, advised them very badly. I am extremely sorry, not for my own sake, but for the sake of the workmen generally, that there was not a full expression of opinion given. However let this pass.

You say your lodge intends petitioning for an act for "Cash payments." That is, or should be, now the system. Every man is free to deal where he pleases, and if he does not deal in the Company store he gets all his in cash. If you mean that your lodge is going to ask for an act prohibiting men giving orders on the office then I am afraid I cannot go with you. If I did I would be going counter to the ruling of Grand Council, who would not admit of the proposition that there should be no orders permitted. The rider attached to the report of Committee, which carried, 28 to 3, I think, reads:—

"That all orders be given monthly and for a specified amount."

Here then is the deliberate opinion of Grand Council:

1. That orders may be given.
2. That when given they should be renewed monthly.
3. That they should be for a specified amount.

I am quite willing to aid you in having legislation in which these in view passed, but as I stated in Grand Council, as I state now, I am out and out opposed to a law prohibiting workmen from giving orders. What! are we free men, or are we cowards! Are we men, or are we weaklings! Must we be guarded like imbeciles lest we do ourselves harm? The farmer may give his note, and may give anything he chooses as collateral security; the merchant may give his note, and give another friend having property as security; and yet a working man is not to be allowed to give his note, backed by an order on the office, which is the only security he can offer. Do you imagine I will so disgrace workmen, in the eyes of the people of the province, as to ask for such a law, and by asking it say: "The men I have fought side by side with for 17 years, are not to be trusted to do with their own as they please; if we do not restrain them by law they will do injury to themselves." Out on it, I will not so strike a blow at the workmen. I will not ask that there should be done to them that which I would soon should be done to myself.

You realize, I presume, what such a law implies. It means that a workman can never give an order for anything, nor at any time. It means that if any Company is stopped from collecting for itself, it surely will not collect for any other one or thing. It means, that there shall be no more stoppages for the P. W. A. or for churches, or, in short, for anything. Be sure on this point, that the Company will not collect for any church or society, if it is prohibited from stopping for itself. On principle I cannot be a party to ask that there shall be "no stoppages." I think too much of the workmen to make such a request, but I will assist you on the lines laid down by Gt. Council, viz, that orders shall be given monthly, and for a specified sum.

It was further passed at Council that if the Company did not agree to the proposal of the Council that legislation be asked for by those lodges opposed to stoppage of money and that these lodges send each a delegate, to lay the matter before the government." This your lodge, or any other lodge, may do, but my belief and conviction is that while the government may regulate the giving of orders they will not prohibit a man from giving an order.

Any evils or abuses, to the workmen, in the store, or in the stoppage, system, I will help you all I can to remedy, if a reasonable solution is offered, and to that extent command me. But do not ask me to put a bridle on the heads, and a bit in the mouths, of the workmen, lest they bite themselves.

In B. Bonds,  
R. DRUMMOND.