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TORONTO STRIKE OVER ASBESTOS HAZARDS IN PLANT 1973 B 253

JWZ285

DA JB HEC IAAA IBA
DD JF HEB IAE
DHB JH HEF ICA
HAA ICF
HBA ICH
JN HCB ID
ICD
ICC

Confidential

W. L. VanDerbeek - Research

TORONTO PLANT STRIKE

For your general information the following is an account of our public relations activities relative to the strike called at midnight June 27th.

The union called a press conference at the King Edward Sheraton Hotel on Monday, June 28th and two reports appeared in the Toronto Globe and Mail morning newspaper (see attached items A & B).

The I.C.W.U. charged that asbestos dust in our plant was a health hazard and that this was the reason for their strike. They played a tape recorded by Dr. I. Selikoff when he visited the union late in May obviously to assist them in arranging their strike strategy. W. A. Young, our Plant Manager, was able to avoid reporters but finally was contacted at home by telephone and was quoted in the second Globe and Mail report. He did an excellent job in presenting our position.

On Tuesday, June 30th, I talked at length with Bill Raines in New York to ascertain what publicity action, if any, we should take. All of the radio stations and newspapers were calling us for comment on the union charges. Bill discussed the situation with H.M. Jackson and we agreed upon what we should and should not say. I also talked with Bill Young and Roy Winkworth, Industrial Relations Manager, at the Toronto Plant. Following this I answered questions by telephone for the following reporters:

Rosemary Spears	-	Toronto Daily Star
Grant Maxwell	-	Toronto Telegram
Joe Forster	-	Radio Station CHOO Ajax
Joan McClelland	-	Station CFTO-TV
Fred Edar	-	Radio Station CHUM

Joan McClelland asked us if we would do an interview for television for CTV a national network. After discussing this with Bill Raines in New York we agreed to the interview and it was set up for Roy Winkworth to talk to Joan McClelland at 2:00 p.m.

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The interview went well and the TV crew left to interview Robert Stewart spokesman for the union. (Transcript of our interview attached item C). Notes prepared by Roy for this interview also attached (item D). Apparently the CTV editorial staff after reviewing these interviews didn't regard them sufficiently newsworthy and nothing appeared on television at all that evening.

Two articles concerning the strike did appear in the Toronto Telegram, June 30th, with no comment reported from J-M (items E & F). One article appeared in late edition only of the Toronto Star. I was quoted briefly. Nothing really new was presented in this report.

The union has claimed that we refused to permit Dr. I. Selikoff to visit our plant and take air samples. This is not true. To our knowledge he has never asked to enter our plant. Also our relations with the government and the Department of Health are excellent and we have never failed to meet their safety standards.

There was an incident at the plant Wednesday night where one of our trucks was moved out and used to damage a gateway. The police are investigating and we do not intend to comment to the press on this event. At the moment things are quiet and we have had no further calls from the press. Our strategy is to await further developments that might be initiated by the union. Our position is outlined in the memo attached.

I will keep you advised as further events take place.

T. S. Patterson

cc:
G. P. Loubert
W. P. Raines

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C.

Television Interview - CTV

Roy Winkworth with Joan McClelland CTV National News CFTO-TV Toronto

The Union has charged that Asbestos Fibres in the air threaten both the lives of workers and the residents in the area - what is your response?

> Asbestos in high concentration over a long period of time will cause Asbestosis. Currently and for the last several years we have had control devices within the plant filtering the air before it is recycled back into the plant which should protect workers satisfactorily. In addition any air which is leaving the plant from its processes is also filtered through same dust collectors and again it is well below what is currently accepted as a safe level.

What are the government regulations on this and does your plant here conform to the regulations?

> Yes, with regard to internal plant situations the Department of Labour and the Department of Health set the regulation level at 5 fibres per cc., and we do comply with the requirement. We do dust sampling - currently three times a year ourselves to determine whether or not we are meeting the requirements. The Department of Labour also come in periodically to do dust sampling to make sure that we are meeting requirements. From time to time there may be maintenance activities or cleaning of a collector where a man is exposed to something in excess of the 5 fibres per cc. We know when these things occur and we know that the exposure could be there. We provide the men with a respirator which is approved and is designed to remove the asbestos fibres so that he still does not breathe in a concentration that would be hazardous to him.

At this point you are waiting for a report from the Department of Health?

> Yes, the Department of Health was last in in May and they did air sampling throughout the plant and through the processes where we use asbestos fibre. I have not yet got the results of that survey - I expect it should be out not tomorrow but soon if I can believe what I read in the newspapers.

Has the question of a health threat been an issue during the negotiations?

> I don't think its the main issue - wages I think are the main issue but it is a point that has been raised by the union and we have made a proposal to them to set up a joint committee to consider problems of environmental control within the plant and we have offered to them - to this committee the numbers and the results of our own dust sampling surveys to show them just exactly what the situation is.. To do whats necessary we feel it is also necessary to have an educational programme so that they can help ... so that they are in a position to interpret what these numbers actually mean and that's the reason we haven't given the numbers previously.

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But you did offer them in the negotiations?

We have offered them to them in the negotiations as part of our proposal to resolve the problem of environmental control.

Could you just restate what you believe to be the main issue in this strike and why?

The main issue is wages. We have made a proposal to the employees through their Negotiation Committee which would cost 67½¢ an hour over the two year contract that we have proposed. The union's position I believe, has been unclear and varies from time to time, is for approximately $1.00 an hour as well as many other fringe areas - the proposal we had made to them last Friday has not yet been presented by the Negotiation Committee to the membership to allow them to have a secret ballot vote on it to determine whether or not it is acceptable to them.

What effect do you think this asbestos health threat will have on the strike?

The employees have been aware for, I'd say at least the last year, of this hazard both through our own communications to them and through their union committee we are not trying to hide anything - we have told them how the disease develops - we have tried to give them some information. Its the type of thing that certainly does frighten someone. I don't really believe it will have a serious effect in regard to lengthening the strike. I only believe that if we can resolve or come to terms with regard to wages that the strike would be over and we would end up with an environmental committee such as described previously to work on this problem.

You do have some people now who are on disability pensions because of this illness?

Yes we do, and these are people that started at the plant back in 1948 when conditions were not as good as they have been since - having been improved since because of the much improved knowledge with regard to health hazards in asbestos. The people, as a result of our annual X-ray programme, have been diagnosed as having the disease have been counselled by the Department of Health Doctors and by our own company Doctor. I told them how to go about applying for compensation personally to make sure that they know how to go about it. Some of the claims that have been filed have been rejected by the Board, others have been accepted. The Board has come out saying, in effect, that yes, this employee has industrial chest disease which is a result of his employment with you. And we believe that these all relate back to the first few years our plant was in operation. We don't think that today, based on conditions the way they are with the controls that have been put in to effect, we are creating any new cases nor do we think we are adding to or making worse anyone who has the disease at the moment.

- - Thank you very much.

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J-M Position

The main issue of this strike is wages not environmental control as suggested by the union. It is true working conditions have been discussed in our negotiations with the union and, while we are completely confident we have control of internal plant environment, we did include in our offer to set up a committee in which the union would actively participate to monitor environmental conditions in the plant. We have always worked closely with the Ontario Department of Health to ensure that our people are adequately protected.

Our offer to the union was a package that totalled 67½¢ per hour over a two-year period. We regret that the union has not yet given their membership the opportunity to vote by secret ballot on this offer.

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THE BASIC ISSUE IS THAT WE HAVE A STRIKE OVER WAGES. BY WAY OF BACKGROUND YOU MAY BE INTERESTED THAT NEGOTIATIONS STARTED BACK IN JANUARY OF THIS YEAR AND CONTINUED UNTIL MID-FEBRUARY WHEN THERE WAS A RAID BY THE CANADIAN TEXTILE AND CHEMICAL UNION. THERE WERE TWO VOTES HELD BY THE ONTARIO LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE WHO WOULD REPRESENT OUR EMPLOYEES. THE FIRST BALLOT WAS LOST BY 2 VOTES BY THE CANADIAN TEXTILE AND CHEMICAL UNION. ON THE SECOND BALLOT THEY LOST BY APPROXIMATELY 20 VOTES.

ONCE THIS SITUATION WAS CLEARED UP NEGOTIATIONS WERE STARTED AGAIN. THE MAIN ISSUE THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN WAGES, HOWEVER, ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL HAS ALSO BEEN A LARGE ISSUE. THE COMPANY HAS OFFERED TO SET UP A COMMITTEE IN WHICH THE UNION WOULD ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE WITH THE COMPANY TO HELP IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS WITHIN THE PLANT. WE CLEARLY INDICATED THAT WE WOULD ALSO BE DISCUSSING THE RESULTS OF OUR AIR SAMPLING SURVEYS.

WE MADE A FINAL OFFER TO THE UNION LAST FRIDAY MORNING THROUGH A MEDIATOR AT THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR AND SUBSEQUENTLY COMMUNICATED TO OUR PEOPLE, HOWEVER, SINCE THAT TIME THE MEMBERSHIP HAVE NOT YET HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A SECRET BALLOT VOTE ON THE COMPANY'S OFFER. THROUGH THE TWO YEARS OF THE CONTRACT THAT WE HAVE PROPOSED THE COST, IN CENTS PER HOUR, WOULD BE 67½¢.

WITH REGARD TO THE ALLEGATIONS MADE BY MR. STEWART YESTERDAY, THE FOLLOWING GENERAL OUTLINE SHOULD CLARIFY THE COMPANY'S POSITION.

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THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS IN HIGH CENCENTRATIONS OVER OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME COULD RESULT IN ASBESTOSIS. HOWEVER, WE CERTAINLY FEEL THAT ASBESTOS CAN BE HANDLED SAFELY UNDER CONTROLLED CONDITIONS SUCH AS WE HAVE IN THE PLANT. IN THE PLANT WE HAVE DUST COLLECTORS WHICH FILTER THE ASBESTOS FIBRE FROM THE AIR IN THE PLANT BEFORE IT IS EITHER RECIRCULATED INTO THE PLANT OR DISCHARGED OUT OF DOORS. THE COLLECTORS ARE MAINTAINED ON A REGULAR BASIS TO ENSURE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.

ANY AREAS WHERE MEN MAY BE EXPOSED TO CONCENTRATIONS OF ASBESTOS IN EXCESS OF THE SAFE LIMIT AS SPECIFIED BY THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT, THE EMPLOYEES WEAR RESPIRATORS WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO AFFORD PROPER PROTECTION.

IT IS TRUE THAT WE HAVE HAD a few CASES OF ASBESTOSIS DEVELOP IN OUR EMPLOYEES. WE FEEL THAT THESE ARE THE RESULT OF OPERATIONS IN THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF OPERATION AT THE PLANT WHEN WE DID NOT HAVE THE TYPE OF CONTROLS THAT WERE PUT INTO EFFECT SUBSEQUENTLY. THE REASON WE DID NOT HAVE THEM WAS THAT THE FACTS ~~THAT WERE~~ AVAILABLE WITH REGARD TO THE HEALTH HAZARDS OF ASBESTOS WERE NOT FULLY KNOW AT THAT TIME. They subsequently become known through recent medical research LOOKING AT THE SITUATION FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS THAT I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED AT THIS PLANT, BASED ON THE LIMITS WHICH HAVE CURRENTLY BEEN SET DOWN BY THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT AND CONSIDERING OUT CONTROL AND RESPIRATOR PROGRAM IT IS MY OPINION THAT WE ARE NOT PRODUCING ANY NEW CASES NOR ARE WE AGGRAVATING ANY EXISTING CASES OF ASBESTOSIS.

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