

Estevan Strike

Free Press, Oct 1/31

Estevan's Black Day

Free Press Oct. 1/31

After three dragging weeks of dissension in the Estevan coal-field two men have been killed and many injured in a pitched battle in the streets. Somebody has a lot to answer for. All over the world the development of coal fields has been accompanied by bloodshed and violence, and there will be many who think that it would be better to close up the Estevan field than to add still more loss of life to that staggering total.

The story as we have it is as old as the history of the industry. The workers claimed grievances, and miserable working conditions. The mine owners denied that there is ground for these complaints and refused to meet the union formed by the strikers, claiming they were agitator-led and had Communist affiliations. The dispute dragged on, and even the appearance of a Dominion conciliator and the appointment of a Commission to investigate conditions had no result. Then the men decided to hold a parade through the town of Estevan. A permit was refused. The parade took place in spite of the refusal, and contact between police and strikers touched off the explosion.

It is fairly certain that, had the parade permit been granted, no loss of life would have resulted. This has been the usual experience in the past. Surely a parade is an absurd issue on which to stake life and death. The whole issue should have been grappled with many days ago. The Royal Commission had been appointed for some days. Why had its inquiry not been begun before? Now the investigation must be held under the shadow of Tuesday's tragedy, making the whole problem a more complicated one to handle.

As for the larger issues involved, the men's grievances, collective bargaining and the allegations of extremism against the strike leaders, these are issues on which judgment must be deferred until such time as the Commission has made its report. Too much time has been lost. It must be hoped a speedy conclusion will be reached.