



Columbia Avenue in Rosland is seen circa 1908-13 in a photo by a prolific but unidentified photographer.

Photo: Greg Nesteroff collection

The *Rosland Evening World* A Workers' Voice for the Kootenays

By Ron Verzuh

Four months after his election as the fifth mayor of Rosland, Quebec-born Charles Octave Lalonde glanced through the inaugural edition of the *Rosland Evening World*. It was May Day 1901. The four-page daily was dedicated to the mine workers of the bustling Kootenay mining town that Harold Kingsmill, Rosland's first historian, envisaged as "the nucleus of a big city."¹ The paper was also committed to fighting the owners of the rich Le Roi Mining Company and that fight was brewing.

The bushy-bearded Lalonde might have felt a sense of civic pride given that two daily newspapers now served a population of just over 6,000.² Had the *Rosland Record*, the town's oldest paper, survived beyond the

previous December, Rosland might have enjoyed the unique status of being the only town in the BC Interior boasting three daily newspapers. As it turned out, the *Record* succumbed after a squabble with its unionized staff. Editor-owner William K. Esling fought back, arguing that his paper was "thoroughly a union paper," but by late 1900 the daily was dead.³

The arrival of the *Evening World* prompted the editor of the *Sandon Paystreak*, a pioneer weekly serving the nearby ore-rich Slocan Valley, to suggest that the *World* was "the first labor daily to make its appearance in Canada."⁴ The *Paystreak* had it wrong, but the new paper's owners did have something to celebrate: they had founded one of Western Canada's first daily labour



The Rossland Miner and the Industrial World were rivals who often presented opposing views, especially on labour issues.

Photo: Greg Nesteroff collection

newspapers. The owners, Local 38 of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), were stalwart members of the sometimes-violent union based in Colorado. In fact, the WFM had a growing reputation as “the most militant” union in US history.⁵

Mayor Lalonde may not have saluted the *World's* birth, but he did have the political savvy to buy an advertisement. He knew that good relations with Rossland’s workers were critical to sustaining the electoral support of the local working class. To show his goodwill, and to drum up business among the workers, his ad noted that his two shoe stores stocked J.D. King and Company’s union-made shoes.

In 1895, Rossland was a rough mining camp that was home to “legions of boomers, tinhorns, prospectors, women of easy virtue...drifters, gamblers, [and] petty criminals.”⁶ The *World* planned to offer this motley readership a voice in civic politics and play a role as its labour advocate. Judging from its strong labour news content, especially its international strike coverage, and its hardline pro-labour editorial stance, Mayor Lalonde saw that such a daily could inspire the civic interest of the local mine workforce.

The mayor had also observed first-hand the power of the local press at election time when he lost his first bid for the mayoralty in 1897, the year Rossland officially became a city, “arguably the fourth largest in BC,”

suggested local historian Garnet Basque.⁷ Lalonde’s campaign focused on law and order. His opponent, newcomer Robert Scott, planned to take a more tolerant view of the rough behaviour typical of western mining towns.

The Rossland Miner, a morning daily founded in 1896, supported Lalonde. The *Record* backed Scott. Scott won with editorial support from Eber C. Smith, founding editor of the *Record*.⁸ When the election dust settled, Scott awarded the *Record* an exclusive printing contract. When the *Record* closed under pressure from Typographical Union Local 335, the *Miner* got the contract.

Owned clandestinely by mining and railway magnate Daniel C. Corbin, the *Miner* soon began to promote Corbin’s railway route to the United States, which bypassed the nearby Trail smelter that F. Augustus Heinze, the young Butte, Montana, copper king, began operating in early 1896. In 1897, Heinze secretly bought the *Miner* from Corbin. Four years later, Heinze sold the paper to the Le Roi Mining Company. He had sold his smelter and a small railway to the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1898 and had exhausted the paper’s use as Heinze’s promotional tool.

The new owners of the Le Roi, the British American Corporation in London, England—later Spokane—were as determined as Corbin and Heinze to promote their

financial interests in local mines. What they had not counted on was the arrival of a new daily dedicated to opposing them.

Labour unrest had been percolating in Rossland since at least 1899, when the *World's* weekly predecessor, the *Industrial World*, set the tone as the region's labour defender. Now that unrest was about to boil over. On May Day 1901, the weekly went daily and declared itself an "advocate [of] the cause of organized labor."⁹ Meanwhile, the *Miner*, which under its first editor, David Blyth Bogle, had been sympathetic to labour, had become the voice of the mine owners.

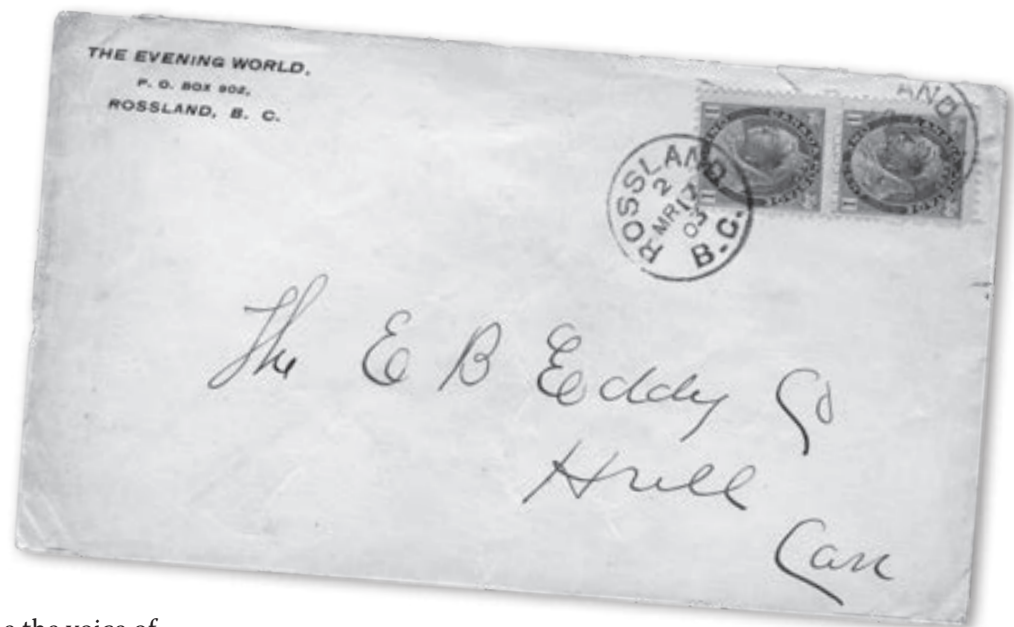
Operated by the World Publishing Company, the new daily officially represented WFM Local 38, founded in 1895, and WFM District Association 6. As historian Gerald Boucher noted, "despite the attractions of the saloon, by 1900 there was one working-class institution of undeniably greater importance to the Kootenay hardrock miner—the union."¹⁰ He might have added that a daily newspaper that would speak for the working class shared that importance.

On May 13, James H. Fletcher's name appeared in the masthead as "manager," but no editor was identified. For that job, the union hired Fred Moffatt who at first seemed an unusual choice. Moffatt came from a well-to-do eastern Canadian family. He graduated from Osgoode Law School in Toronto where he practiced law for a time. He was no radical trade unionist. In fact, for many years after he left Rossland he was secretary of the Nelson Conservative Association. Although it was a short-lived appointment, he had been Heinze's man at the *Miner*, the *World's* nemesis.¹¹

Despite the obvious detractions, Moffatt was a good fit at the *World* mainly because of his insistence on strict adherence to the federal *Alien Labour Act*. He was also a capable journalist. Robert T. Lowery, editor of the *New Denver Ledge* and the doyen of pioneer newspapering in the Kootenays, described him as "well-educated, well-connected, gentlemanly in bearing and has good judgement."¹²

Moffatt's opening editorial was unequivocal as to the *World's* purpose. It would be a "workingman's journal, framed particularly to protect and advance his interests," but it also intended to deliver the news to a "city of busy workers."¹³ The daily also swore to "take an independent stand on all political, municipal and local matters."¹⁴

Initially, the *Miner* paid no heed to the *World's*



This envelope, postmarked 1903, might have enclosed an order for paper or payment for same. The E.B. Eddy Co. had a pulp and paper plant in Hull, Quebec.

Source: Greg Nesteroff collection

arrival. However, other members of the local press acknowledged its presence. The *Greenwood Miner*, for example, noted that it is "neat typographically...and is independent politically."¹⁵ The *Nelson Tribune* called it "independent in politics and municipal matters."¹⁶ The *Northport News* said it was "ably edited and is bright and up-to-date locally."¹⁷ The Butte, Montana, *Reveille*, eventually a Heinze-owned paper, called it "a bright, spicy little paper."¹⁸

Under Moffatt, the *World* would need to live up to such billings if it expected to mount labour's defence against a formidable international mining investment empire. At the top of that empire sat London-based financier James Whitaker Wright, head of the London and Globe Finance Corporation. Wright "was adept at manipulating stocks and restructuring his companies, each time adding to his own assets," writes historian Jeremy Mouat.¹⁹ Under the influence of Charles H. Mackintosh, a former lieutenant governor of the Northwest Territories, Wright formed the British America Corporation, which began acquiring mining properties in Rossland. Among them was the lucrative Le Roi mine.

In 1899, Wright hired the anti-union Bernard Macdonald to manage the Le Roi. Macdonald then hired Bela Kadish to supervise the Le Roi smelter in Northport, Washington. Edmund Kirby, manager of Rossland's War Eagle and Centre Star mines, was Macdonald's equal in opposing unions.

Four weeks into its first volume, the *Evening World* would be tested by these managers when on May 25 smelter workers at Northport, Washington, about



The debut issue of the Rossland Evening World was dated May 1, 1901.

Source: UBC Historical Newspapers Collection

20 kilometers south of Rossland, were locked out. Macdonald soon ordered Kadish to shut down the Northport smelter for no apparent reason. Speculators suggested that Wright demanded the shutdown to force stocks down so he could purchase them at the lower rate, then reopen showing a handsome profit.

Kadish refused to recognize the newly formed Northport WFM local as the workers' bargaining agent and declared, "We have decided to break up the union at any cost. You must abandon your union if you work for us."²⁰ He then hired scabs to replace the smelter workers. In late May, the *World* opined that, "If it should turn out that the whole trouble at Northport was caused by a stock deal and that the employees at the smelter were simply 'used' for the occasion, public opinion here will execrate the London management of the Le Roi."²¹

On July 11, the Rossland miners voted to strike

"in sympathy with the Smelters' Strike at Northport and for \$3 per day for shovelers [muckers] and carmen and to adjust other differences."²² The next day, between 1,200 and 1,400 miners walked off the job. The Rossland News Boys Union refused to deliver the *Miner*, which, along with the Rossland Board of Trade, formed the main public opposition to the strike. The newsboys then struck in sympathy with the miners' union.²³

The *World* took aim at mine employers for violating BC's 1899 eight-hour law and at the federal government for not enforcing its 1897 *Alien Labour Act*. Unfortunately for the strikers, the mine owners continued to violate the law.

In August, the daily, in its supporting role against scabs, leapt to the defence of Joseph Colistro and Thomas Beamish. The WFM members had been arrested for allegedly accosting Joseph Horn for encouraging scabs. At the same time, the *World* attacked the *Miner* for its pro-company stance. John Houston, the *Nelson Tribune* editor, supported Moffatt. So did the *Grand Forks News*.

By late August, new names began to appear in the daily. With all the comings and goings, the *World* hoped someone would "unwind the tangle."²⁴ That someone was thought for a time to be Robert J. Frecheville, an English mining engineer that the Le Roi's board of directors assigned to investigate the situation. It was another false hope.

Autumn brought an increased flow of scabs, and union attempts to stop them were barred

by a court injunction. As the *World* put it, the impact of the injunction was "to hand over to the employers a legal club with which to fell a defenceless class in the community."²⁵ That unemployed men had migrated to Rossland and Northport was no coincidence. Agents had enticed them with false promises and lies about the strike being over. Even former Rossland police chief John Ingram had become a "scab herder for the Le Roi mines."²⁶

Not until early November did the federal government send an investigator to settle the strike. When deputy labour minister William Lyon Mackenzie King arrived on November 7, he at first seemed sympathetic to the union. The *World* argued that King "will have no trouble ascertaining...that the law was openly, willfully and outrageously violated by the mining companies."²⁷ But the daily was displeased to learn that King was of the opposite opinion and that he would return to

Ottawa with an anti-strike message. “The situation [in Rossland] is one of the grossest tyranny of a labour organization,” wrote King to a friend, “and the dealings of those who have manipulated the affair are as crooked as they can be.”²⁸

The continued use of scabs persisted through the end of November when a banquet was held in honour of the WFM’s Colistro and Beamish upon their release from jail. In early December, a lecture on Christian socialism seemed to inspire political activity in Northport where the union’s socialist ticket won all but one council seat. That victory bolstered the striking smelter workers. But the strikers got their biggest boost when WFM vice-president James Wilks returned from the WFM executive meeting in Denver, Colorado. Wilks reported that the WFM executive had pledged full support for the strike. However, the WFM international office soon claimed it was unable or unwilling to fund the strike any longer.

Meanwhile, the annual civic election was in gear, with alderman John Stilwell Clute campaigning to replace Lalonde as mayor. The *World* called him the “candidate of the ringsters” and accused him of accepting a “rake-off” from professional gamblers.²⁹ When the *Miner* endorsed Clute, the *World* sided with labour candidate Peter John McKichan.

Moffatt charged the *Miner* with undermining the election. “That journalistic calamity peddler, the Whiner, has done its best to scare the voters into the belief that unless Mr. Clute is elected they will wake up to see wall-eyed ruin staring them in the face.”³⁰ Nonetheless, the January 16, 1900 vote, though close at 455 to 393, saw Clute defeat McKichan by 62 votes.

The election was a turning point for labour; it was now a clear player in Rossland municipal politics and had inspired future participation by labour candidates for mayor and council. Other towns would follow its lead. But the strike was on life support. Eight days after the election, on January 24, WFM Local 38 secretary Frank E. Woodside announced that the Le Roi strike was over.

More bad news came from London where the court trying Whitaker Wright acquitted him of stock manipulation. He “has risen to victory from the depths of defeat,” the *World* reported, noting that he was “again on top in the Le Roi Company.”³¹ With Wright’s victory, Macdonald was restored to his previous role as manager of the Le Roi mine and Northport smelter.

The end of the strike did not spell the end of the *World*. But the survival of the daily presented a false front to its readers, for all was not well with the union. In April 1902, WFM District 6 held its convention in

Kamloops. The *World* called it “a great success.”³² The international convention to be held in late May would be a different matter.

On May 1, 1902, the *World* congratulated itself on its first anniversary, noting that its “prospects are brighter now than they were on May 1st, 1901, its usefulness to the community is sufficiently demonstrated.” It also said farewell to its first editor, praising Moffatt, “whose endeavors to promote a right understanding of the warmly debated points at issue eventually broke him down in health.”³³ It was the first mention of Moffatt’s name in print.

At the international WFM convention held at Denver from May 26 to June 7, debate about the Rossland and Northport strikes was acrimonious. “The strike at Rossland was a complete failure,” WFM president Ed Boyce reported. “The same is true of the lockout at Northport.”³⁴ Wilks had resigned as president of District 6 but stayed on the WFM executive and attended the international Denver convention. He did not sign the convention’s executive report about Rossland, knowing that the Rossland union executive blamed Boyce and the international WFM executive for the failure of the strike.

The 1903 *Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes* in British Columbia blamed outside agitators for the troubles, but the evidence presented in the *World* suggested otherwise. The federal government’s failure to enforce the *Alien Labour Act* was to blame as was the provincial government’s unwillingness or inability to enforce the eight-hour law. Predictably, the *World* also blamed the Rossland “Whiner.”

For historian Jeremy Mouat, “their strikes lost and their policies discredited, the moderates within the WFM were replaced by more militant and radical leaders.”³⁵ Charles O. Lalonde continued to thrive as a local merchant. After Moffatt left, Fletcher carried on as *World* general manager until June 30, 1904, thanks to a legal proposition that had given the paper a two-year reprieve. A month later, the *World*’s role in shaping working-class political opinion in the Kootenays was silenced without a murmur of explanation.

In examining the *Evening World* today, we might ask what might have been accomplished if a national newspaper like it had been created in the pre-internet era. Would it have encouraged the numerous labour and social movements over the decades to mount a better fight for social justice? Perhaps. Then again, perhaps the *World*’s legacy is simply to remind us that when a band of determined workers muster the courage to challenge a daunting enemy, a daily newspaper can be a formidable weapon. ■

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Endnotes

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25. "Injunctions," *REW*, October 24, 1901, 2.
26. "A Prize Scab Herder," *REW*, October 2, 1901, 2.
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Ron Verzuh is a writer, historian and photographer. He holds a PhD in history from Simon Fraser University. His book, *Smelter Wars: A Rebellious Red Trade Union Fights for Its Life in Wartime Western Canada*, will be published by the University of Toronto Press in March 2022. Verzuh is also the producer/director of three short documentary films: *Joe Hill's Secret Canadian Hideout* about the Rossland Miners' Union Hall, *Codename Project 9* describes the role of the Trail smelter in building the atomic bomb, and *Salt Remembered* recounted the showing of a banned Hollywood film in the Castle Theatre in Castlegar. All films can be viewed on YouTube or Vimeo or are for sale at amazon.com. For more of Verzuh's work, visit www.ronverzuh.ca.

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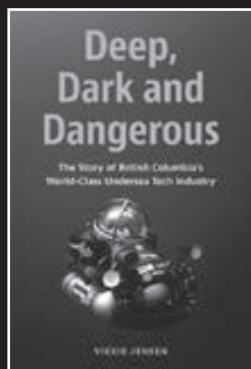
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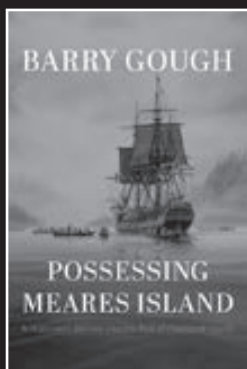
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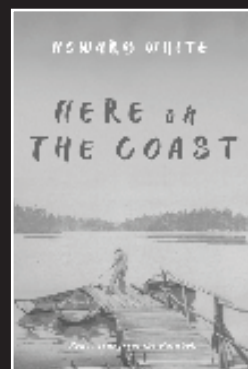
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