

Flyers Refuse To Work Until Requests Met

Strike at Odiham Continues in Second Day 1,500 Men Urge Speed-Up of Repatriation

Ottawa, Feb. 6. — (CP) — Air Minister Gibson to-day went into conference with top-ranking officials of the R.C.A.F. to discuss the strike of nearly 1,500 Canadian airmen now in its second day in Hampshire, England. The men have said they will not resume work until arrangements are made to speed up their repatriation. Pending outcome of the conference there was no statement from either the minister's office or of R.C.A.F. officers on the strike.

Planes Stay in Hangars

Odiham, Hampshire, England, Feb. 6.—(CP Cable)—A strike of nearly 1,500 Canadian airmen continued into its second day to-day at Odiham Transport Squadron station of the R.C.A.F. and the men decided not to resume work until they receive a definite decision from Ottawa on their demands for a speed-up of repatriation.

No planes left the hangars here to-day. Only essential services such as hospital, signals, post office and messing, were operating. These services involved about 50 men.

Officers and senior non-commissioned officers are not striking.

R.C.A.F. headquarters in London said that only ground crew personnel were involved in the strike but added that the work stoppage kept aircrew personnel from flying.

This is the first reported airmen's strike in the United Kingdom, but it is similar to R.A.F. strikes in the Far East recently.

Paradoxically, the R.A.F. strikers want to return to their homes in this country, while the Canadians are striking because they cannot leave Britain for their homes in Canada.

Quit Jobs Yesterday

The men quit their jobs yesterday charging that while most of them had not volunteered for further service, they were being held in England against their wishes.

The acting commander-in-chief of the R.C.A.F. overseas, Air Commodore H. B. Godwin, told the men that most of them would be back in Canada by next September.

ber. He added that by March 4 the R.C.A.F. overseas would be reduced to the occupation force of 8,600.

Air Marshal G. O. Johnson, overseas commander of the R.C.A.F., at present is in Ottawa discussing repatriation problems.

It was rumoured among the strikers here that Canadian airmen at Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, will strike in sympathy this afternoon.

The Odiham decision to strike was taken two weeks ago, spokesmen for the idle airmen said. All men interviewed by the Canadian Press made it clear that their "main beef" was repatriation.

Laud Station Leader

"We have nothing against Group Capt. N. W. Timmerman," said L.A.C. Bill Bilinski, of (10162 104th street) Edmonton, in commenting on the station's commanding officer. "Our main complaints are the repatriation program. We want to go home."

Bilinski has been in the R.C.A.F. 3½ years and has been 18 months overseas.

Group Capt. Timmerman is from Kingston, Ont.

L.A.C. George Helner, of Lachute, Que., said: "We are being kept over here against our will. The Government made certain commitments for an occupation force and it first was planned that these troops would be volunteers. It got them, then sent them home and discharged them. We are not volunteers for the occupation."

L.A.C. Frank Towson, of (676 17th avenue) New Westminster, B.C., said: "We want to get home—that is our beef."

Senior officers at Odiham declined to make any comment, referring all queries to R.C.A.F. headquarters, London.

The sit-down began at 10 a.m. Tuesday with only a few participating at first. A station parade was held later and the remaining men went on strike immediately afterward.

Officer Attends Bar

To-day the walk-out was so complete that even the officers' mess had a commissioned man behind the bar instead of the usual air-craftman.

The strikers are staying inside their barracks except at meal times, when they go to the mess hall. Hard-pressed cooks are receiving aid from the ranks of the strikers.

A sign at the entrance to the men's mess hall reads: "Our demands: A replacement for every man who wants to go home. Until we get them—no roll call, no work, no nothing."

The strikers are being ignored by air base officers and any negotiations for settlement are being left to headquarters in London and Ottawa. The last senior officer to visit the station was Air Commodore Godwin yesterday.

After his visit, he relayed the men's grievances to Ottawa.

"All we do is ship civvy stuff to civilians on the Continent," L.A.C. Howard Steiss, of Kitchener, Ont., said. "It's a civil air force."

Cpl. Samuel Ivy, 41-year-old airman from Toronto, a five-year man, asked: "How about the Government's promise for replacements? I joined in 1941 and spent one year in the Far East and six months in England. Why should we be kept over here?"

Overseas Protest Printed

Windsor, Ont., Feb. 6.—(CP)—A letter signed by "the men of 126 Wing," of the R.C.A.F., in Germany, demanding "democratic rights" for wing members and contending conditions in Germany were not in accord with impressions given in Canada, was received to-day by the Windsor Daily Star.

The letter said men and officers of the wing were addressed last January 12 by Air Minister Gibson, and that "what he told us was not in accord with the impression the Canadian Government, the press and radio is giving the Canadian people with regard to our status, repatriation, length of stay in Germany, or the date when we may expect to return home."

"The lack of a clean-cut, open statement by the Government to the people of Canada is causing untold frustration and personal suffering to our wives and our families," the letter said. It added that the wing members "deem it our democratic right" to expect that the Canadian Government make our people familiar with the following facts:

Reports Refuted

"1. That contrary to reports or impressions given in the Canadian House of Commons, the press and radio, we are not the volunteer occupation air force.

"2. That the overwhelming majority of volunteers for the occupation air force are in Canada.

"3. That the volunteers for the occupation air force will not leave Canada to come here to replace the men desirous of returning home.

"4. That contrary to reports of "5. That it is expected we will start to break up on June 30, 1946.

"5. That it is expected we will start to break up on June 30, 1946.

"6. That it is expected that all of the men may be home by December, 1946."

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