

Letter from William Read to "Messrs. Walker Brothers," June 20, 1878

Walkerville, M.T.

June 20, 1878

Messrs. Walker Bros.
Salt Lake, U.T.

Gentlemen:

As a result of the meeting of the union last night, we were visited just before noon to day, by a body of the members 150 strong formed in line and preceded by a brass band & flag. They first marched to the Magna Charta & ordered all contractors to stop work, then they directed their course for the Alice Mine Hoisting Works, where they were met by Messrs. Daly, Dunn & several others of the employers & upon being asked their business they said they had come to stop all work in the mine, contractors on the lower level, men on the top, mechanics, bricklayers &c and also to stop the pump.

Daly remonstrated with them & showed the inconsistencies of such a course & after a long talk succeeded in inducing them to postpone any attempts to stop the pump for the next 13 days or until we can get full instructions from you & a reply to this letter.

The question of stopping the mechanics on top was then brought up & urgently argued by Daly, showing that not only was it outside the province of even a miners league to interfere with the trades, but that all such men were getting big wages & had a right to keep at work as long as they pleased; further that the machinery they were putting in must of necessity be completed on the mine before any work by miners could be resumed & by stopping such work, the time when miners would be needed would be still further off.

The mob however insisted that the mechanics should quit at noon, but said they would hold a meeting again on Sunday evening, and if after carefully considering the question they concluded to *allow* the mechanics to resume work that they would at once notify us of such action. The President of the union, Witty or Witter, headed the band & although very cool & to a certain extent respectful in his manner, seemed quite determined & in fact did most of the talking. The army under his command were of all grades and condition of men & some of them looked especially forbidding. . . .

The citizens of Butte are watching the proceedings with a great deal of interest, but we have reason to believe that their sympathies are largely with the strikers. You see there are so many companies here that have made no change & are paying the old wages. . . .

The mines at Philipsburg are all keeping up the old rates & of course all these men are supporting the strikers, and giving them aid. In fact this thing looks as if it would be a long fight, and a very grave & difficult thing to settle properly, & certainly requires a deliberate & well considered policy before proceeding to combat it. We really do not know whether to advise you to come up or not & therefore leave it entirely to your own judgement. . . .

We sincerely hope these labor troubles will soon be over.

Respectfully
W. Read

Source: *Alice Gold and Silver Mining Company Records, 1877–1930. Manuscript Collection 57* [box 5 folder 1]. Montana Historical Society Research Center. Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 130–31.