

Although it is good that we can still manage a chuckle at a humorous take-off on what is occurring in real life, the sad fact is that the events portrayed in the comic strip could have appeared just as well in the news columns of the same newspaper.

### **7.7 million man-days**

**Canada lost 7.7 million man-days in strikes last year—a record by far. Previous highs were about five million in 1966 and 1968.** It is discouraging to contemplate what the box score will look like at the end of this year when it is realized that bargaining takes place for approximately 900,000 of the 1.6 million union members under the wing of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Traditionally, labour relations experts have adhered to the proposition that the privilege to strike is an integral part of the collective bargaining process. It is presumed that meaningful negotiations will not take place unless the possibility of a work stoppage exists. Although I do not subscribe fully to this, the proposition does have sufficient validity that any examination of the use of the strike weapon should not be divorced from a look at the whole process. Collective bargaining worked relatively well in the past—what has changed? What adjustments are needed to revive it as a viable institution? And, if it continues to fail the public interest, what might replace it?

It is crystal clear that a balance of bargaining power no longer exists between employers and unions. All major key sectors of the economy are highly unionized by a handful of powerful monopolistic unions that can write their own ticket to a significant extent. And they do this despite high levels of unemployment and with arrogant disregard for pleas for wage restraint from the governments and others. Monopolies are inherently bad—in unions as elsewhere—and they must be regulated if not curtailed, in the public interest.

**Today's striker is in a quite different position from his counterpart of yesteryear. He has assets. He is paid substantial strike benefits in many cases. Credit is readily available, as are benefits under government hospital, medical and other schemes.** He is more mobile than his father was, and some of the younger people don't see any particular virtue in steady work anyhow.

It is not my purpose to venture a judgement on any of these developments, particularly the last one. I simply point them out as being important factors in the shift of the balance in collective bargaining. We are bound to acknowledge that, for most individuals, expenditures rise to meet income or exceed it, and a little more debt incurred for one reason or another—such as a strike—is not unduly upsetting. After all, for the past 25 years, times have been good, and most of us have been able to work out of temporary financial difficulties.

Is this why an Inco employee, after being on strike for over three months at Sudbury last year, would go for a car dealer's offer of \$200 cash to the striker and three years to pay for a new 1970 car, with the first payment delayed until after his return to work on termination of the strike, whenever that would come about? A striker rarely loses his job in this day and age, regardless of the length of the jobless rolls. Although permitted by law, it is a practical impossibility for the vast majority of major companies to carry on production operations during a strike. The Inco striker and the Sudbury car dealer both knew that the former would not lose his job.

Some corporations have grown to be financial giants with a diversity of operations. This superficially suggests that their bargaining power with the unions is enormous. The facts are, however, that more and more, various operations in our economy or in an industry or, indeed, within a single corporation are so interdependent on one another that a strike at one often has substantial impact elsewhere.

**Only a relatively small number of employees may be involved in the actual labour dispute, but the overall impact can be devastating. A strike by a few plumbers can shut down a 100 million dollar project, a tug boat strike can almost paralyze a whole province.** I suggest that this development was not foreseen when our collective bargaining legislation with its presumed balance of power was first laid down. Also unforeseen were the enormous amounts of capital that would be required for investment in new projects. Obviously, costly facilities cannot sit idle for very long without highly damaging results. For example, capital invested for each job created in the two newest mines in the Noranda Group is \$218,000 at one and \$240,000 at the other; at