

144301

374 Piccadilly Avenue,
Ottawa, January 18, 1943.

Dear Mr. Meighen,

I spent some hours yesterday trying to concoct something readable for you on this steel strike, but I was so exhausted by weeks of insufficient sleep that I couldn't produce anything worth sending. I hope to have better luck now.

The truth about this affair may really be summed up in one sentence: the Government's wage policy is blowing up in its face. That policy was unfortunate in its inception. A drastic, even a revolutionary, departure from anything to which the British peoples have been accustomed, it was imposed without consultation with Parliament, and virtually without consultation with the unions. About 48 hours (or less) before King made his broadcast, members of the National Labour Supply Council (joint body set up to advise the Government on labour matters) heard of what was in the wind and demanded a meeting. They got their meeting, and made certain suggestions, but you can imagine about how much real use this sort of "consultation" was. In England, of course, nothing half so drastic has been done, and whatever has been done has been done only after the fullest and most careful consultation with the unions. Obviously, this is the common sense way of proceeding; but of course our great "democrat" and friend of the working man couldn't be expected to do anything of the sort.

With the purpose of the Wage Control Order, and the basic idea underlying it, no one has any serious quarrel. The unions fully recognize the desirability of avoiding inflation, and the necessity, for that purpose, of restricting spendable income. But they question whether the present Wage Control Order is the only way of doing this; they think it works out inequitably; and they see no reason why a particular Order-in-Council, intended originally as a means to an end, the winning of the war, should become an end in itself, a sort of sacred cow. King says "Nothing matters now but victory"; but in this matter he seems to be acting as if "Nothing matters now but P.C. 5963."

I emphasize this because the majority report of the Barlow Commission simply ignores the whole question of the substantial merits or demerits of the men's case. We put in a lot of stuff on the adequacy of the existing wages in relation to health, physical efficiency, morale and ~~the~~ maximum production. In the whole majority report, from start to finish, I have been unable to find a single syllable on any of these questions. It is all just a legal argument on the meaning of P.C. 5963. We also put in elaborate argument on the question of inflation and various methods of preventing it, and on the inequities of this particular method as applied by this particular Order. The majority report again simply does not ~~mention~~ mention the subject.

It is, of course, arguable that the terms of the Order-in-Council appointing the Commission (a typical King production, capable

MEIGHEN PAPERS, Series 6 (M.G. 26, I, Volume 222)

PUBLIC ARCHIVES
ARCHIVES PUBLIQUES
CANADA