

Workers rights

Government legislators, and editorialists across the country, tell us that there are some people who, because of the work they do, shouldn't be allowed to strike.

But more and more it seems that it really doesn't matter what work the employees do, but what matters is the employer. Nearly 25% of Canada's labour force is, in one way or another, employed by government (from municipal to federal levels including crown corporations. This group includes everyone from maintenance staff of government buildings, to laboratory workers.

In Ontario, even the employees of the provincial liquor control board have been declared "essential" and as such, denied the rights to withdraw their work from the employer in contract dispute. At the same time, while all of us have to eat, no restaurant or grocery store workers have been told they can't strike. Somehow our access to food supplies can be terminated, but our access to liquor is guaranteed as an essential service.

The truth is that there really aren't too many **essential** services that are only provided by the government workers. The government operates a varied group of services. Here in Nova Scotia they operate some hospitals, but there are a lot of other hospitals the government does not control. (See article page 8). Yet nurses in the government hospitals are denied the right to strike, while their counterparts at private hospitals are free to exercise that right.

The right to strike—to withdraw one's labour during a dispute—is the only real bargaining tool working people have, who neither own nor control what they produce. Denying working people this right is an extremely serious step with alarming implications.

Is the recent popularity of back-to-work legislation the next solution to "keeping working people in their places," now that the Anti-inflation Board has passed away? What are the real motives of governments who declare workers essential, when that is clearly not the case?

We would do well to look more closely at the real issues involved in each labour dispute, distinguishing our frustrations with interrupted services from a true understanding of what is at stake.

Our governments, both provincial and federal, seem intent on passing legislation that undermines the bargaining rights of workers but are unwilling to legislate protection for the thousands of people laid off each year by multinational corporations.

There are services that ought to be considered **essential** to a society: children, working and older people should be able to live with the guarantee that certain things will always be available to them. People need guarantees of housing, a healthy environment and schools where reading, writing and self expression prepare people to build a society, not to be its servants. People need legislation that guarantees safe and fulfilling employment at decent wages, not legislation that ties their hands.

Atlantic Issues

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The editorial board for this issue was: **Harvey MacKinnon, Eleanor MacLean, Sue Calhoun, Jim Guild, James MacLean, Mark Simkins, Susan Johnson and Marc Allain.**

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Letters

To the Editors:

I'm impressed, having just read your Spring/Summer issue. Enclosed is a cheque for \$10.00 as a contribution/subscription. Could you send back issues since January 1978, please? This would assist me in a research project on "people news" which I'm carrying out as a freelancer (after 25 years in the media).

Fraternally,

Grant Maxwell,
Ottawa, Ontario.

To the Editors:

On a recent trip to Nova Scotia, I picked up a copy of **Atlantic Issues**. I found it worthwhile reading, providing good commentary that showed concern for people and for the land.

Please put me on your mailing list. A small donation is enclosed to cover postage.

Best wishes,

Mieke van Geest
Toronto, Ontario

Three years later . . .

The daily newspapers in our region are controlled by individuals who have a vested interest in the existing economic structures—those same structures that have created high unemployment, run-away inflation, industrial disease, waste, crowded cities and the gross inequality of income. Only rarely do these newspapers take a look at regional issues from a perspective which does not take these structures for granted.

Atlantic Issues exists to provide Maritimers and Newfoundlanders with information and analysis which cannot easily be found in the regular newspapers of our region. The principal concern of **Atlantic Issues** is that the existing economic and social structures are not working to the advantage of the majority of Atlantic Canadians, that while the region is underdeveloped it is also the object of a type of development whose principal beneficiaries are the wealthy.

Now, going into our third year, we aim to continue this coverage. We intend to continue publishing critical views of many different aspects of life in Atlantic Canada.

In our first issue we said that occasionally we would publish articles concerning the problems of other countries and their relations to our own problems. This year we are planning to carry out this promise, with articles linking development in our region to the kind of development that multi-national companies are carrying out in other parts of the world. We will be able to see that the development in our country is linked to the underdevelopment in our region and other parts of the world.

Atlantic Issues welcomes comments from its readers on the articles in this issue, and we invite submissions from people who share our concerns.