

Railway Operations Act

small, the poor, mainly those who need protection the most.

A brief summary of the causes of conflict could undoubtedly provide grounds for reflection for those who really care about improving the situation: the steady increase in the cost of living through the multiplication of taxes, rates, control boards, commissions, inquiries, etc. Add to that the complexity of laws which result in lengthy and costly legal procedures and you will better understand the reasons which contribute to building up a striking mentality about which both management and workers are concerned.

It is rather strange to see some propensity for organizing small union battles on various fronts. We now have a situation of mutual misunderstanding. And why in most cases? To obtain salary increases which are immediately reduced by increases in product prices and taxes of all sorts.

There are fights to obtain true salary increases, the missing dollars without thinking too much about who makes them, who controls them and who determine their value.

What is the use of earning \$4. or \$5. an hour, if a dollar is only worth 50 cents or less. This is a matter of wealth and purchasing power distribution.

Labour agreements were negotiated in a truly harmonious atmosphere a few years ago. Things have changed since then: strikes come first and bargaining follows which is too often the case. Although some of the claims are really legitimate, there has been lately a certain amount of irresponsibility which is not conducive to the spirit of understanding which ought to exist during bargaining, through illegal strikes if necessary, while trying to exert pressure on the employers at the same time.

I would say, however, that a good many employers and the government as well have not set too good an example in this regard, allowing considerable delays in negotiations and thus aggravating the position of their employees for months. Such is the situation with the railway workers.

On two occasions, employees have returned to work hoping for an improvement in their working conditions, but they never obtained what they had been expecting.

Since Parliament has now reconvened to put an end to the railway strike, why not take this opportunity to assure workers—not only those on the railways, but all those whose working conditions come under federal jurisdiction and most of whom are quite understanding—through adequate legislation, of decent working conditions, in order to avoid the continuous conflicts we are witnessing now?

We often find that private enterprises and some administrators of public services make a lot of fuss over the violence which often erupts during disputes, but these people rarely mention the mental and physical suffering which thousands of workers must bear, year after year, to earn a living in difficult and often painful circumstances. A well-balanced legislation should aim at eliminating abuses of this kind. Labour legislation should be written in a clear style to enable union leaders and workers to understand their scope without calling too often on the

[Mr. Dionne.]

services of lawyers who apparently do not need to go on strike to increase their fees.

Union dues could be used more effectively to help individual members in difficult circumstances through illness or accidents, instead of paying for the costs of slow and expensive procedures or finance struggles pitting unions against unions which foster nothing but animosity between them.

Let all legislators draw from the same inspiring sources the salary adjustment grounds that were brought forward at the time of the pay increase for ministers, members of Parliament, senators, judges and some senior officials and we shall thus avoid useless and harmful strikes.

The right to live is derived from a natural right and that right must be recognized long before the right to strike or the right to exaggerated profits and steps should be taken by legislators to provide every one first of all with the right to live. We should have enough clearheadedness to organize an intelligent distribution system for existing goods without resorting to strike when the vast majority of citizens wish to work.

In the present case and in order to promulgate a balanced legislation, we should create a committee secure from undue influences, made up of experienced people, well informed about labour and management problems, including a few experts qualified to provide accurate data on the changes in the cost of living index and determine the bases of wages in various industries, considering all relevant factors whenever a normal production of goods or services is required.

In public services, an arbitration court made up of qualified labour and management representatives should apply a salary adjustment mechanism based on the cost of living index and check-up should be made every six months. Members of such a court should also assume the responsibility of ruling on employee grievances concerning working conditions, and that within a maximum of ten days, and organize a secret ballot system enabling employees to vote freely for the union of their choice and the decisions that should be made.

Let us stop thinking in terms of compulsion when it comes to contributions or arbitration and let us consider rather a fair and just distribution of the firm's profits and of the workers' salaries and peace shall prevail in relations between employers and employees; the solution will not come without some effort, but the current situation compels us to take the proper means, and without delay.

It is imperative to restore the equivalence of the purchasing power on the basis of the needs of individuals and the value of the wealth, considering that physical work tends to be replaced by machines.

The worker is in search of means to live and earn the living of his family; let him be treated in fairness so that he may not have to wander around holding a sign to demand the right to enjoy rights and to bargain for agreements which often become disagreements.

● (1730)

[English]

Mr. Turner (London East): Mr. Chairman, I want first of all to extend my good wishes to the Minister of Labour.