

*Labour Relations*

other by Don McGillivray on May 19, which go far to debunk this myth about allegedly excessive wage increases. Mr. Cook quotes figures to show, first of all, that inflation in Canada "is under better control here than in Europe or Japan"; secondly, that our strike record is not nearly as bad in terms of international comparisons as had been thought; and, thirdly, that the rise in wage costs in Canada has been lower than in all countries except the United States and West Germany.

In his article, Mr. McGillivray admits that Canadian wages have been rising faster than those in the United States, but so has our productivity. In the five years 1969 to 1974, Canada's real gross national product, eliminating all inflation, grew by 23 per cent, as compared with a growth of only 10.2 per cent in the American real gross national product. Mr. McGillivray also points out that when the statistical distortions are removed, average Canadian wage gains have been running at less than 1 per cent ahead of those in the United States over the life of collective agreements, instead of the widely but incorrectly reported double the United States figure. I am not implying for one moment that all settlements are reasonable; some are obviously not, and these remain a matter of real concern. I think this myth about Canadian wage settlements being double those in the United States should be laid to rest right now.

The motion before us refers to an alleged "toleration of illegal strikes" by the government. I would challenge anyone to substantiate that charge. When parliament has acted in cases of economic crisis to enact back-to-work legislation, defiance of the legislation has met with the appropriate response to enforce compliance. This action may not satisfy the authoritarians. It may not appear to be sufficiently prompt or punitive. However, it has been taken in the most feasible way to ensure an orderly resumption of work without going to the harsh extremes that prolong, rather than end, the dispute.

We must always remember that ad hoc, strike-ending legislation, while it may sometimes be the last unavoidable means of protecting the public interest, is a poor substitute for voluntary agreement. I agree with the spokesman for the Conservative Party, the labour critic, in that regard. It necessarily imposes a settlement that is not freely accepted by one of the parties, usually the union. It appears to the labour movement to be a one-sided intervention by parliament on the side of the employer since it takes away the union's sole bargaining lever and forces the employees back on the job against their wishes.

This brings me back to the question of what the government, and my department specifically, is doing to bring about the needed changes and reforms in our particular labour relations system. We are convinced that the system can be improved to meet the challenges of the times and that it can best be done through consultation with the participants. This is a slow and often tedious process, but in our opinion it is the only way. It involves much more effort and time than would be involved in passing the kind of legislation called for in the motion before us.

The goals of the proposed legislation are in some respects admirable and not far removed from our own objectives. However, they cannot be accomplished unilaterally, without involving the parties in the decision-making

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ing process. It would be convenient, as the motion urges, to set up "tribunals made up of experts" to devise the new approaches and policies required. However, there are no real experts in the labour-management field; there are only people with enough knowledge of the complexities to know that there are no simple answers to be handed down from on high.

We hear today that the public is fed up with strikes. This has been said repeatedly and to a degree it is true. However, this is an oversimplification and one might ask: If the public is fed up with strikes, why do we have strikes? When we speak of the public, we cannot segregate working men and women in Canada from the public.

In most strike situations today, working men and women are fighting for more dollars to keep ahead of the inflationary spiral that is plaguing this country and indeed the western world. There is another underlying cause for the labour unrest we are experiencing today. As society changes, traditional job values change and people become, rightfully or wrongfully, dissatisfied with their place in the pecking order, as basically we still relate salary to status. We have not yet reached, if we ever will, the millennium or Armageddon described by Alvin Toffler in "Future Shock" where people will have to be paid a salary to stay home and our whole status of values related to wages and salary will have to change.

With larger segments of our working force moving to the service sector of our economy, strains have developed. Those engaged in some services feel there should be drastic changes in the pecking order. A few years ago snide remarks were made about the work of the garbage collector. In today's society we find his work can be pretty important if garbage is piled in the parks in the summer months when he decides he is entitled to more dignity, which in today's terms can only be accomplished through the status of a higher wage. The same holds true for hospital workers and, indeed, the trained nurse—whose skills are greatly needed—takes the position, why the great disparity between her salary and that of the doctor with whom she works?

Traditionally, remuneration has been based on higher education. It was the hope of every working father to be able to put his children through university so they would not have to toil with their hands and they would enjoy the status delegated to those with degrees by our society. I sense the winds of change taking place in this country. Perhaps we will have to pay a premium to those we ask to bend their backs and toil with their hands. Perhaps we will have to pay a premium to those who keep unpleasant things out of our sight, such as garbage, and to those who look after our sick and aged in hospitals and old age homes. It is all very well for us to sit in this House and express horror at certain percentage increases without examining the base rate. We might have different ideas of what our percentage increase should be if we were handling bedpans in hospitals or clearing the garbage from the streets.

Our problem is that as people fight to better their position in the pecking order and correct long-standing inequities and anomalies, other highly organized groups within the work force say, "Traditionally our wages were such a percentage higher than this group, and we must