

Homer Stevens....

Fishermen's dispute caused by canneries

Unionizing the fishermen of Canada's coastal areas is not an easy task, and only recently has any significant progress been made in this area. However, even with recent inroads into the problem, there is still a great deal wrong. One of the major problems, according to Homer Stevens of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union (UFAWU) is that sometimes fishermen are induced - or railroaded - into a union which may not be the best one for their needs. As an example Stevens points to a continuing and confusing battle being waged between two rival unions in the Straits of Canso area of Nova Scotia.

Stevens feels that the UFAWU would be the best union for the fishermen and shore workers of this area; however, at present the workers in two communities - Petit-de-Gras and Canso - are members of a rival union, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters of North America (AMCNA), an international union. Stevens is not at all happy with the way the fishermen became members of the AMCNA and his union is now organizing itself for an all-out attempt to enlist these workers.

The situation has a long and complex history. In 1970 the fishermen of the two communities went on strike, and the strike was not settled until November of that year. After the strike was over, Stevens claims that the majority of the workers in the two communities wanted to join the UFAWU; but since the company (Acadia Fisheries Ltd.) wanted them to join the AMCNA they were told

that if they didn't join the AMCNA they would be fired.

"Most of the workers in Petit de Grat succumbed to this pressure," says Stevens, "because they had families to feed and were in economic difficulties already because of the 7-month strike. I am convinced that most of them wanted to join up with our union, but I certainly can't blame them for bending under the pressure applied by the fish plant. However, in Canso it was a different story. A lot of people refused to join the AMCNA and they were fired, with scab labour being brought in from Newfoundland to replace them. Most of the Newfoundlanders quit when they realized they were being used as strike-breakers, so the company and the AMCNA got together and decided to bring in more scab labour, this time from the Gaspé Peninsula. Meanwhile, the fishermen who had lost their jobs were, in a great many cases, forced to leave Nova Scotia and seek a livelihood elsewhere."

"In Petit de Grat, the fact that most of the workers agreed to join the AMCNA made it easy for the union to get certified; but in Canso they had a much tougher time. The AMCNA claimed that they had the support of the majority of the workers there, and when hearings were held in April, May and June they managed to come up with a list of 57 signatures which they claimed meant that the majority of fishermen there wanted to join the AMCNA - since the total number of fishermen is about 107. But they failed to take into account the fact that about 400 different fishermen were involved, and that 107 is just the average



HOMER STEVENS

number at any one time. So they didn't necessarily have the support of the majority after all. Besides, we never saw the signatures, so that made us pretty suspicious. Anyway, they finally got certified by the province. As for the Canso fishplant workers, they just joined the AMCNA recently, so I don't know the exact details of that deal."

"We're obviously not very happy with the way all this was done. We feel that most of the workers in the area want to join the UFAWU, but through threats and shady backroom tactics they have been inveigled into joining the Meat Cutters."

"Right now we are concentrating on trying to organize workers in other parts of Nova Scotia so that we can gain a foothold in the province. Also, we're hoping that many of the workers who left for other parts will return and help us in our fight. We have a big problem, of course in the fact that we're just a small union without much money while the AMCNA is a large, rich international union."

"We feel that the actions of the AMCNA have been detrimental to the labor movement in Canada."

Poverty conference report....

Farming is slavery

"Power and wealth are what poverty is all about". Ian Adams, author of the Real Poverty Report told the opening session of the Conference on Poverty Wednesday night. "People are poor because others are rich; it's as simple as that".

The media obscures this fact though because it concentrates on the brutality of poverty but offers no analysis of what is keeping people poor.

The majority of poor people are not on welfare but are the working poor. Poverty is created in an economic and industrial society by government programmes and policies or the lack of them.

The government's declared war on inflation was not meant to benefit the worker but the person whose income comes from investments. In periods of high economic activity employers reach down and look for employees to train and their wages increase: with a tightened economy however, these people are the first fired.

A restructuring of the tax structure and government outlines for corporations how to behave are necessary said Adams. But no political in Canada can do this by itself. These goals have to be reached by workers who understand what is going on and who are willing to take united action.

A representative of the Cold Lake band of Indians which is still staging a sit-in at the department of Indians Affairs office then put in a plea for support from the audience and described the poor living conditions. He said that the department had planned only \$85,000 over five years for construction of new schools on the reserve. He said it is not that funds are not available because

the department has \$10 million available for school construction. "We may be hurting our children now," he said "but if we do not fight now we will hurt all our children in the future."

Fred Guodmondson, Director of Organization and Education of the National Farmer's Union then spoke on poverty among farmers. "Poverty doesn't just happen", he said, "it is created for a purpose to make it possible for some people to live in affluence which some people never have a chance to witness let alone live in. The laws are designed to protect the rich from the poor."

Farming is the most sophisticated means of slavery, he said. If a farmer was paid one dollar for every hour he put into farming then his food would be produced with not a penny for labour. An economic Council of Canada report in 1968 disclosed that 40 per cent of all farmers are living below the poverty level (3,000 a year).

Don Gardiner, Deputy Minister of Labour speaking for the government, talked in vague generalities about "new directions", while specifically only offering "counselling" and "retraining" as his solutions to the poverty question. He also opposed increasing the minimum wage of the province.

The conference continues tonight, dealing with "The working Poor and the Unemployed", and "Social Change".

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