

FORUM FIVE



Rebuttal

Carl Kuhnke's editorial vituperations against the Edmonton Transit workers in the January 17 GATEWAY deserve the condemnation of all persons interested in defending the interests of working people and advancing social progress.

The sentiment behind his remarks isn't mere insensitivity or viciousness, it is a form of class hatred - of contempt and hostility for the problems working people face. Notice some of his remarks: "If the bus drivers don't want the offer, I'll even help willing workers to cross what's left of the picket lines."

Not surprisingly, he doesn't feel obliged to treat the transit workers as mature human beings; instead, he patronizingly remarks "Sorry boys, but I'm on the City's side."

In the manner characteristic of many right-wingers, Kuhnke defends the social status quo against changes brought about by organized workers. He seems to have four 'arguments'. First, that the transit workers are not skilled workers and therefore they don't deserve the increase they've demanded relative to skilled workers. Second, that there are many unemployed workers around who would be willing to do the transit workers' jobs at a lower wage. Third, that the transit workers are greedy and selfish in continuing a strike against the City which will only inconvenience the citizens and raise our taxes. Fourth, that it is false to claim that the bus drivers have "immense responsibility" for human lives or expend a great deal of "sheer physical exertion" in the course of their work, as contended by POUNDMAKER.

First, we suspect that Kuhnke has not even investigated the facts about the wage structures of skilled and

unskilled workers in Canada. There are in fact, many skilled trades whose rates as of June 1975 will be well above the Settlement of \$6.12 by December 1975 reached on Thursday.

However, even if Kuhnke weren't mistaken, why would he begrudge the transit workers a good wage? Perhaps he is concerned about the very real plight of lower paid workers and like many others feels that keeping down the wages of transit workers will help the lower-paid. In reality, the experience of trade unionists is the opposite: the holding back of wage increases against organized workers generally results in higher profits and lower taxes for business, particularly big business. The solution to the problem of lower paid workers is organization of the unorganized, coupled with more unity among all workers. All workers, lower and higher paid, gain far more by unity with their fellow workers than by following the lead of anti-working class elements and fighting amongst each other. The example of the successful battle of the transit workers will contribute confidence and build unity among other sections of the working people, especially the lower paid, so that they may also improve their lot.

If Kuhnke's concern is for the plight of the lower paid workers we applaud his concern but criticize his solution. If, on the other hand, he wishes to keep down the wages of all workers, including the higher paid, so that his sympathies for the lower paid and unemployed are an opportunistic ploy, then he is truly anti-labour.

Second, it has often been argued as Kuhnke does that is wages are low enough unemployment will be eliminated. This is the 'classist' argument for cheap labour which is also heard in the call for increased competition among workers the 'classic' argument for cheap labour which is also heard in the call for increased competition among workers in order to lower wages. The historic fact is that the capitalist system, even when relatively low wages are prevalent, has never been able to secure full employment. To answer Kuhnke's implied argument would require more extended discussion than the GATEWAY

would probably provide, but one small point should be mentioned. That is, the general interests of the working people including the unemployed have more in common than any particular interests that may divide them. This is recognized by large numbers of working people in this country who refuse to aim their main criticisms against each other and instead concentrate them on their common enemy, the capitalist class, who are the main defenders of the capitalist system.

Third, the transit workers, contrary to Kuhnke's pronouncements, are not greedy or selfish. The disruption caused by the strike was unnecessary; the City could have settled without an increase in taxes for working people. It is about time that Kuhnke took a class point of view when it comes to taxes, in other words, it is about time that the question should be asked 'who should be taxed'? If tax increases are necessary, then the City should tax some of the truly greedy and selfish elements of our society, the bigger business in our city, including banks, real estate companies, manufacturing and refining companies, large hotels and so on. It is simply false to argue that an increase in transit workers wages, necessarily means increased taxes for other working people although many of those who defend the status quo would like to make us think so.

Further, Kuhnke has said nothing of the very compelling arguments of the bus drivers about inflation; is this nitty-gritty point too strong for him to answer?

Fourth, Kuhnke's last attack seems the silliest of them all. If someone who drives or repairs a bus containing human beings does not have a great deal of responsibility for human lives then we wonder what Kuhnke must mean by 'responsibility'. Perhaps, a bus would have run over an embankment killing or injuring all on board before he will admit to the POUNDMAKER's contention. As for the matter of physical exertion, we suggest that Kuhnke does a serious investigation of the transit workers' fatigue, muscle, back, and shoulder ailments, etc. Aside from their straightforward tiredness after a days work. He might find even if he talked seriously with the transit workers themselves - that their claims are more substantial than his cavalier pronouncements.

We are inclined to note that if Kuhnke thinks the transit workers have such an easy and wealthy existence, why doesn't he consider the prospect of spending the rest of his life behind the wheel of an ETS bus? In such a situation he might think twice about attacking the workers who fought hard for those benefits which he would have the opportunity to enjoy at least until inflation caught up with him.

Finally, Carl, since this expensive university and its privileges exist here for you and us only as a result of the blood, sweat, and discipline of working people who keep this society alive economically, we suggest

editorial

Lonely

I felt rather lonely covering Monday's Student Council meeting. I was the only student there that wasn't a council member or S.U. manager. Granted, going to a Students' Council meeting isn't the most exciting way to spend Monday night, but as the articles in this issue show, it's sometimes interesting and the decisions sometimes important.

At the next meeting on Monday, January 28th at 7 p.m. in University Hall, Council will be giving final reading to the bills changing election procedures and increasing executive salaries. The measure authorizing the HUB rent increases will also be considered.

If you're interested in any of these topics or any others, go to the Council meeting Monday night. There is a 1/2 hour question period at the beginning of each meeting; and if you contact the Speaker Howard Banks beforehand, you can make a representation to Council.

Gary Draper



that before you launch into any more frustrated diatribes against trade unionists or other working people you take a large piece of humble pie and savour its morsels.

Kimball Cariou

Vandalism

It is shocking to note that vandalism is increasing in the University. One wonders whether these childish activities are done by adults knowing what they are doing, or by young children who are trying to draw our attention.

Get into the washrooms, especially men's washrooms, and note the dirty words on the walls. It is incredible that a man with his 120+ IQ can do that, and in this University we have men and women with more than 120 IQ.

Get into GS Room 319 and note how desks have been spoilt. These are just two examples, and I could give you a dozen more. Dirty words on washrooms, carving on desks etc, is also, vandalism.

We should respect University property - buildings included.

M.Y.S. Machoya
Faculty of Education

An apology

Recently, (January 15/74) Gateway published two complaints under the heading "Cafeteria". Of course the two courageous complainants did not include their names in their complaint which would have allowed persons to make them aware of how their complaints should be registered. Therefore, might I suggest that Gateway publish, for the benefit of students, how to lodge a complaint.

It is requested that Gateway publish an apology to this lady who was merely following instruction. There is nothing to be gained by students and staff throwing mud at each other, this would really be grist for the mill to those people in society who already feel that too much money is being spent on education.

Yours sincerely,
Phil Arnold
General Executive Secretary
NASA

An apology and retraction was printed in the Jan. 22 issue of Gateway on page 5.

A.C.

The Gateway

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