

rapidly changing society with its growing interdependence and technological advances.

We agree that there must be reforms. The structure of collective bargaining and of industrial relations in general must adapt to the new challenges and complexities that now confront it. But that does not mean we should legislate away basic rights, abandon our faith in the ability of the parties to accommodate their conflicting interests, and try to substitute a Big Brother-like regimentation of all labour relations activities. In a democracy, change—if it is to be durable and acceptable—must come from a process of consensus; and that applies even more forcibly to the volatile world of labour-management affairs.

My department quite openly identifies itself with the interests of the labour movement. We exist to foster and facilitate its legitimate objectives of promoting the welfare of working people. We consult with labour leaders on all aspects of policy affecting their members. We have in recent years expanded this kind of consultation in an effort to involve organized labour in the discussions and dialogue that form such a vital part of the decision-making process of government. We make no apologies for this policy and we intend to develop other channels of consultation with labour and, of course, with employers as well.

As a result of the greater frequency of strikes—particularly those that interfere with public services—many people are complaining about what they perceive as the exercise of excessive power by unions. The hon. member makes this point in his motion. There is a clamour in the press and in the legislatures and in some company boardrooms to curb this alleged abuse of union power. The motion we are debating today reflects that feeling when it refers to “certain union figures wielding powers exceeding their responsibilities.”

This conjures up an image of autocratic union leaders bullying their reluctant members, feeding their aspirations with unreasonable wage demands and goading them into strike action against their wishes. This stereotype of the average union leader bears no resemblance to the world of reality. The average labour leader of my acquaintance today is trying to curb his members' expectations and militancy, not stimulate them. He is trying to dissuade them from adopting unrealistically high demands. He is doing his best to avert strikes, not start them.

There are, of course, exceptions. A few well publicized union leaders are speaking and acting irresponsibly. A few are guilty of inflating their members' bargaining objectives and of inflaming their distrust of the employer through misrepresentation and distortion. These few are the ones you read about. The vast majority who are conducting themselves responsibly—who are much more typical of union officials—get little attention in the media. They are too lacking in controversy to make news.

Actually, a good case could be made that most unions and union leaders, far from being too powerful, are not powerful enough. One of the main reasons for the multiplicity of strikes now being experienced—especially those that occur successively in the same industry—is that collective bargaining is splintered among so many different bargaining units. Power, instead of being concentrated in

Labour Relations

one union or one bargaining unit, is diffused among several organized groups.

When we talk about the need for industry-wide bargaining to do away with this fragmentation of contract negotiations, what we are in effect advocating is the concentration of more union power. This would repose in the central union leadership, rather than in the hands of numerous small union fiefdoms, the power to bargain for all the workers in an industry. Strikes would be fewer and would require the approval of a majority of the entire work force instead of a majority of each small subgroup.

I am not implying that all central labour organizations lack power under the present bargaining structure or that they are not sometimes guilty of abusing their power. We have only to look at the revelations of the Cliche commission in Quebec to see how corrupt, venal, unscrupulous leaders can gain control of some unions and misuse their power to the detriment not only of the industry and the economy, but of their own members as well. Although the rot that permeates the construction industry in Quebec is outside the federal jurisdiction, it does serve as an object lesson of what can happen when rank and file unionists lose or surrender their democratic rights. It also underlines a glaring omission in the internal mechanism of the labour movement in Canada—the lack of a code of ethics and the means to enforce it.

The reticence of the Canadian Labour Congress preceding and during the Cliche commission hearings—as well as its aloofness from the latest controversy involving the Seafarers' International Union—has not been particularly impressive.

If the congress does not set up the needed internal machinery to expose and correct wrongdoing among its affiliates, it will have no one to blame but itself if governments are compelled to step into the moral vacuum and do the clean-up job the labour movement neglected to do. Government intervention of this kind should be a last resort, undertaken only when the central labour body has attempted to institute reforms and failed. Because the CLC has no ethical standards or mechanism for policing them, the government intervention to which labour objects remains the first and only corrective available.

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This is not to convey the impression that corruption is rife among CLC affiliates. Far from it. The vast majority of affiliated unions, locals and union officers at all levels are scrupulously honest and honourable. We all know that. Their over-all record for integrity, I am sure, would match that of any other institution or section of society. This is all the more reason, of course, for the honest majority of unionists to act quickly to rid their organizations of the minority of those whose interests and actions do not reflect those of the membership.

Time does not permit my dealing as extensively as I would like with the prevailing myth that excessive wage settlements are the main cause of inflation, that they are running at double the average rise of wages in the United States, and that they threaten our competitive advantage over the Americans.

I would refer hon. members, instead, to two articles in the *Financial Times*, one by Peter Cook on April 21, the