

ence of being an employee whose union is on strike, so they are inclined to offer glib and unrealistic opinions. The cost of a strike to a worker and his family can be crippling. Try someday to live on beans and bread for a few weeks. Try to imagine your savings—where they exist—dwindling with each passing day. Management's salaries continue throughout the strike period, but the worker's income is cut off. The strike pay offered by the average union is only enough to buy beans and bread. Often there is no strike pay at all. A worker does not decide lightheartedly to engage in a strike. It is a tactic by means of which he pits possible pay-off benefits against a calculated risk. This is the same kind of risk that businessmen are always beating their chests about—the venture that is supposed to be the very heart and core of our free enterprise economy. The entrepreneur risks his capital, gambling for a pay-off in the form of a steady and substantial stream of revenue.

Life and times of a worker

Riggin states in his article: "... some of the younger people don't see any particular virtue in steady work anyhow." Newspapers are replete with stories on the seriousness of today's alienated youth, and the message they are attempting to communicate deserves our wholehearted attention. How many of us realize how seriously the working man has been alienated since the industrial revolution began in the late 1700s? All the creativity and the meaningful satisfaction have been completely sucked out of many jobs, and they have degenerated into routine, repetitive, sterile, meaningless exercises. Work functions generally are over-supervised and unchallenging. It is likely that if firms eased up sharply on such instruments as time and motion study and made some effort to build industrial tasks around personalities instead of around fingers, hands and feet, they would be pleasantly surprised at the eventual reduction in the unit labour costs of output.

Public Service Strikes

When it comes to pointing out all the gross inefficiencies of government enterprise, businessmen probably form the most vociferous segment of society. There is some truth in the argument. But, has it ever occurred to these businessmen

that one way of improving the quality of government services would be to heighten motivation for its employees, and to program more appeal and challenge into the work in order to attract more qualified candidates? And has it ever occurred to businessmen that one of the ways this could be accomplished would be to raise the salaries offered? But, of course, "We already pay too much in taxes..." You can't have it both ways! Businessmen are against the use of the strike by public service employees. Yet, they will tolerate a system in which postal workers, in order to raise their salaries by about 2 per cent—the original government offer was 5 per cent a year, the final settlement approximately 7 per cent—were forced to engage in a 12-month "bargaining" session that included a summer-long strike. Was the government bargaining in "good faith?"

In most ways, the government is like any other employer. Only a few of its services are really "essential" in any sense of the term. And the wages and salaries of Public Service employees have to compete with the wages and salaries of private sector employees for the goods and services in the supermarkets and department stores. If wages in the private sector rise by 9 or 10 per cent a year, how can we expect to attract high quality, well-motivated individuals when this employer is willing to go only to 5 per cent and is eventually dragged—at a high cost to the employees and to the public—to 7 per cent? Those who complain about government inefficiencies would do well to keep tabs on the differences between wages and fringe benefits in the private and public sectors.

Nobody likes a strike. A strike imposes inconveniences and hardships on everyone connected with it. But the worker needs this instrument—even if only for its potential use—to compel his employer, be he in the private or public sector, to think hard about the relative costs of the union proposals versus the ultimate disagreement. If the employer responds to the worker's threat with a "no," he could provoke a strike. He is, in effect, making a rational, economic decision: It is cheaper for me to risk a strike than to accede to your requests involving higher production costs to my firm. The strike possibility forces both sides to face the consequences of their respective positions.