So what transpired at the CLC Convention at Edmonton in May? No time was devoted to solving the many problems of collective bargaining. A week was spent debating social action programs and political activity, and vilifying the efforts of the Prices and Incomes Commission. And the usual roar of approval was reserved for the perennial echo-of-the-Thirties speech.....about those industrial and financial tycoons who put the working man in chains while they continue to pick his pocket. Surely it is saddening to see this archaic nonsense take the place of a constructive attack on some of the problems of collective bargaining which, after all, is a union's first order of business.

Whether organized labour wants to believe it or not, collective bargaining in Canada is definitely on trial. The public is fed up, and immediate improvements are needed if it is to be allowed to subsist. What are some of these?

Pending needed changes, our existing labour laws must be enforced. Unlawful conduct in support of unions and strikes should not be exempt. Union monopolies should be curtailed. Union power over union members should be diminished. Times have changed so much that.....comments about the working man in chains are now applicable to some unions. The union member requires a bill of rights for protection against his union. An ombudsman appointed by union leaders from within the union, as endorsed by the CLC last month, is surely an attempt to smoke-screen the real need.

If one of the measures required to help restore the balance of power is a law to curtail use of the strike weapon, then so be it. Let's get on with it before more serious damage is done. Hopefully we are not yet too late. A settlement made in good faith at the bargaining table should be made to stand.

There will have to be more intervention in labour disputes, with government empowered to order cooling-off periods, fact-finding inquiries, and a host of other intervention processes that promote and encourage peaceful settlements—but not settlements at any price. The public interest demands that settlements accommodate themselves to national goals established for the good of all society.

If measures such as these do not put our industrial relations system back on an even keel, then the public will rightfully require that it be abandoned and replaced by some other system. In such an event, it seems probable that the new system would involve some kind of compulsory arbitration of wage disputes. In my opinion, arbitration need not stultify meaningful collective bargaining. For example, a requirement that the arbitrator accept in toto the last best offer of either one party or the other would effectively encourage a company and a union to put its best foot forward without running the risk of having the arbitrator cut the baby in half, as the saying goes.

Strike privilege, not a right

It is sometimes forgotten that collective bargaining and the strike are not rights. They are not Holy Writ. They are privileges granted by law, and they can be taken away by our lawmakers. With maturity, statesmanship and realism, we can voluntarily relegate the strike to tantamount extinction. If we continue on our present course, legislation will shove the strike into the grave-yard with the dinosaurs.