

Let us look at some of the trends in working conditions which illustrate the benefits that have accrued to labour partly from collective bargaining.

After World War II, and almost to the present time, with rising prices, we have been confronted with serious problems of wage adjustments. Workers have talked in terms of standards of living; management has worried over market prices - both with good reason. But compromises have been forthcoming which have pushed earnings to unprecedented levels. Since 1945, the annual average of weekly earnings has increased by over 75 per cent. Even if allowance is made for changes in consumer prices over the period, weekly earnings on the average in 1953 have a purchasing power that is more than 13 per cent above 1945 levels. During the same period, I might add, total corporation profits in Canada have increased substantially.

Important decisions have also been taken on non-wage items, for example hours of work. The length of the work week has been reduced for most workers during the post-war decade, an intensification of the trend begun before the war.

The five-day, 40-hour week has become the standard work week in many industries. While it was not common before the war, this arrangement did exist in some sections of industry, particularly in parts of the building trades. For example, the collective agreements of plumbers with contractors here in parts of western Ontario indicated a five-day week as early as 1932.

The average length of the normal work week in manufacturing has declined by more than two hours since the close of the war. Approximately 75 per cent of the plant workers in manufacturing in 1952 worked a five-day week as compared with about 50 per cent in 1947.

Over-all vacation policies have also become more liberal. Other so-called "fringe" benefits have been given increasingly wider application in recent years. Time and a half for overtime is now given to almost all manufacturing workers and double or even triple time is given in some cases, particularly for work performed on statutory holidays. An increasing number of holidays are being allowed with pay; in manufacturing at the present time close to half the workers receive at least eight paid statutory holidays. Pension plans now cover more than half of the workers in manufacturing and about 84 per cent are in plants where some type of medical or health insurance plan is now in operation.

These material gains attained through collective bargaining and otherwise have been important to the Canadian standard of living. I should like to call attention, however, to other consequences of bargaining for the Canadian worker. For example, it is fairly easy to measure the extent of the five-day week, but the value of collective bargaining in terms of, say, the attitude of the worker to his job is a little more difficult to measure. It should, however, never escape our notice. For the man on the job, the right to bargain and the existence of the collective agreement clearly establishing his status with respect to hours of work, wages, grievance procedures, seniority and many other items have important psychological benefits.