

Essential

The right to strike

Due to an error on the part of our printers last week's editorial was rendered illegible. For that reason it has been reprinted below in the manner originally requested.

by Michael Donovan

In 1974 Nixon said, "National Security" and the majority of Americans refused to abrogate their basic rights on the basis of such a simple, self-serving rationale. In 1978 Trudeau says "essential services" and the majority of Canadians swallow it.

Why?

The right to strike is an "essential" part of what it means to be a Canadian; the right to say "no" to the conditions of your work place is the "essential" distinction between a worker and a slave. Why do Canadians lie back and accept such infringements on their most basic rights?

If the withdrawal of services by the postal workers placed the country in such imminent peril why has the Canadian government made offers which are clearly irresponsible—by taking away already acquired benefits?

The answer can only be that the government wants a showdown with the Union. Perhaps the government, sensing the mood of the country, is looking for right wing votes or more foreign investment (something an emasculated labour force virtually guarantees).

It is clear that the government has successfully garnered the sympathy of the public. The Canadian people are against the postal union without really knowing why. It is a shame because the Canadian Union of Postal workers is one of the most democratic and progressive unions in the country. Its demands have traditionally been non-monetary and oriented towards worker control and dignity. It is not a fat-cat union.

Just what are the demands of the union and the offers of management?

For the Union there are four principal demands:

- cessation of hiring casual workers or term employees except at peak periods such as Christmas
- technological change that does not adversely affect union members without adequate compensation
- protection against arbitrary firings and disciplinary action
- a basic wage increase of 88c an hour plus high overtime benefits to discourage the use of overtime by management and thereby improve efficiency and morale.

The offer of management is:

- basic wage increase of 41c per hour
- deletion of several benefits acquired in the 1975 collective agreement including principally:
 - (a) deletion of the cost of living allowance
 - (b) elimination of certain sick leave benefits
 - (c) elimination of sections protecting workers from the adverse effects of technological change
 - (d) standard of proof at disciplinary hearings to be in the favor of the disciplining supervisor (guilty until proven innocent)
 - (e) worker must accept relocation without benefit
 - (f) the terms of the collective agreement will not continue after the termination of the agreement until a new agreement is signed.

There are a number of popular misconceptions about CUPW. First of all, CUPW is not against

technological change. It supports technological change as long as: 1) it does not adversely affect any worker without compensation, that is, no one is fired or laid off after being replaced by a machine, and 2) as long as the benefits of improved productivity are shared by the workers with the government.

These are not unreasonable demands and the government ought to realize that, in this enlightened age, technological change involves more than simply the capital costs of purchase and installation.

There is a labour cost in terms of increased noise and monotony and loss of sense of control which must be considered. This cost is, in fact, the most significant since it is born by people, the very people who make up this country, who make it run, who work the machines, and who are supposed to benefit from them.

Another misconception is that CUPW is coercing the rank and file into accepting its militant stance. One has the feeling that the government actually believes its own propaganda. If this is so, it is a case of extreme blindness. The facts are that almost 80% of CUPW's voting members voted in favor of the current strike. The vociferous stance of the CUPW membership can only be explained as the result of years of gross mismanagement, the roots of which run very deep. To put the blame on the shoulders of a coercive or obstructionist few is to ignore the fact, that in grievances between the Union and the Post Office the Union came out the winner in 84.9% of the cases.

The 1966 report of Honorable Andre Montpetit on working conditions in the Post Office lambasted the government for bad management practices. W.S. Martin, Chief Adjudicator of the Public Service Staff Relations Board, in a decision rendered on April 10, 1969 criticized the government for bad faith in carrying out the collective agreement with respect to union consultation or technological change. He stated:

"It is quite clear that this conduct (going through the motions) has created unrest, the undermining of morale, and the development of hostility between the parties.

Fairness and good faith must be in evidence to have a genuine willingness to consult. The autocratic issuance of directions and the unilateral determination of dates of implementation do not provide requisites for the attainment of these results."

But perhaps the best comment on the question of a worker's best basic rights to strike was said by a person well known for eloquence:

"... justice presupposes equality, which presupposes the right to strike, which presupposes that the workers have the right to protect their strike. Justifying scabs in the name of freedom of individual workers is the act of ignorance, and for the most part of hypocrisy... Those who suspect union leaders of calling strikes against the will of the members have never spent a week trying to go to the picket lines with workers who are cold and hungry and who for the most part did not want to stop work."

Pierre Elliot Trudeau
The Asbestos Strike!
translated by James Boale



RCMP distorts

by Marc Allain

Last week the Gazette production staff voted to refuse an RCMP advertisement that they feel distorts and misrepresents the Force's history.

The ad in question appeared in the Gazette's second issue and was the subject of several complaints from our readers and staff. The ad implies that throughout its history, the RCMP has been a multi-racial force mirroring and dutifully dedicated to serving Canada's multi-racial society. The history of the Force, however, suggests a much different perspective.

One of the main reasons the government of Canada created a national police force in 1873 was to control the native people of the western prairies. The coercive element used to first compel native people onto reservations and ensure they remained there was the RCMP's predecessor, the North West Mounted Police.

Canada's national police force was from its very origins a racial unit (white)* used to repress the self determination of a racial minority (native people). The Force was in fact created as an instrument to advance the interests of Central Canada's economic elite (predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant).

From these sorry beginnings the RCMP's relationship with native people and other minorities has been one fraught with racism, bitterness and violence. Public relations officers of the Force, however, have managed to effectively conceal the sordid elements of the Force's history and instead envelop it in the mythology of popular heroism.

The Gazette production staff feel that they would be contributing to this mystification of the Force and misleading Gazette readers by continuing to publish the aforementioned ad.

The national ad network through which the ad was received will be informed of our decision as will the members of Canadian University Press.

*An Unauthorized History of the RCMP p. 13, Caroline and Lorne Brown.

Letters Dissenting view

To the Gazette:

I have just read your interview with Mr. Victor Maslov, a visiting professor at Dalhousie from the Soviet Union. After reading this interview, I found that I was unable to keep silent.

Professor Maslov spoke about "the Soviet citizen's right to work". I know personally dozens of Soviet citizens who were denied this right because their views deviated from the officially prescribed ones. The right to work is denied to Soviet dissidents. Many become dissidents not because "they have been broken by fate," to use Professor Maslov's words, but because they are unable to continue the play of concealing their real thoughts from the Soviet government and the world in general. The price for speaking out in the

Soviet Union is invariably the same: ostracism, imprisonment and, since the early seventies, forced emigration. People become dissidents not because their fate is broken, rather their fate is broken by Soviet officials after these noble-minded people speak out in order to defend human rights in Soviet Russia.

After almost seven years of being outside of Russia I find my thinking has changed from what it was before my departure from the country of my love and of my grief. I

disagree with many dissidents on many issues concerning Russian society, its past and future. Now I live in North America, and many of its worries have become my own. But to a great extent, each of the dissidents who raise their voices against totalitarian government is my brother or my sister. As a rule, they are motivated by nobility of spirit, and before they spoke out they had as good a chance as anyone of becoming pros-

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The Dalhousie Gazette, Canada's oldest college newspaper, is the weekly publication of the Dalhousie Student Union members, and is a founding member of Canadian University Press.

The views expressed in The Dalhousie Gazette are not necessarily those of the Dalhousie Student Union, the editor or the collective staff. We reserve the right to edit material for space or legal reasons, or if it is considered offensive to our readers.

The deadline for articles and letters-to-the-editor is noon on Monday, no unsigned material will be accepted but anonymity may be granted on request. Letters should not exceed 500 words and must be typed on a 64-character line and double spaced.

Advertising must be submitted by noon on the Friday preceding publication. National Advertising is handled through Youthstream, 307 Davensport Road, Toronto, Ontario (416) 925-6359.

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