

the working level. Also, there is good reason to believe that negotiations at the working or plant level are more likely to be guided by practical rather than theoretical or even ideological considerations.

I do not want to leave the impression that in Canada bargaining at the plant level is carried on without reference to outside forces--far from it. Patterns established by agreements reached in the larger establishments are an active influence in local bargaining. Standard policies formulated by the head offices of the different labour unions are frequently carried into the negotiations at the local level by the union representatives.

For their part, employers are obviously interested in the bargaining policies followed by other firms. In fact, the views expressed by both parties at the bargaining table are found to reflect the rates paid and the working conditions prevailing in the area and even in competing firms outside the area. In other words, bargaining at the local level takes into account many regional and national factors but, in the process of doing so, it does not ignore local factors which may be equally or even more important.

Arising out of this rather practical and immediate approach to bargaining is a second distinguishing feature of the Canadian industrial relations system--namely the emphasis on administration of the collective agreement.

The typical agreement in Canada does far more than specify the wages, hours, vacations and other working conditions of the workers it covers. It sets forth also seniority provisions, grievance procedures, and clauses designed to deal in orderly fashion with questions of workload, promotions, job transfers and other matters affecting the worker's security and status.

The administration of a union contract day by day requires skill and patience on the part of union and management officials, affecting as it does the rights and the aspirations of both workers and management. Employers in Canada, while they strongly oppose the insertion in the agreement of any clauses which might unduly circumscribe their rights, nevertheless find value in the orderly procedures set forth in the agreement.

A third significant feature in the industrial relations system in Canada is that bargaining between the parties is usually an annual affair. Practically all collective agreements specify a termination date for the contract, and almost 80 per cent. provide for renegotiation at the end of one year.

Annual negotiation means that the parties have an opportunity every year to revise clauses in the agreement that have not worked well. This almost continuing process of adjustment provides a flexibility in the labour-management relationship, attuned to the complexity of the agreement and the fact that the environment in which it operates is itself subject to constant change in response to trade fluctuations, climatic extremes, technological progress, or the ebb and flow of international tensions.