

Atlantic Issues

Michelin retreads Trade Union Act

by Ralph Surette

When Nova Scotia's "Michelin Bill" went to a legislative committee before third reading in early December, the chamber was packed with union people intent on having their objections to the legislation registered. They were angry but orderly. Anger soon turned to shock as they discovered they were being systematically photographed by a plainclothes policeman.

The incident—a particularly jarring one in this usually placid province—was a stark reminder of how far the various powers-that-be are ready to go in order to do the bidding of the province's largest private employer, Michelin Tires (Canada) Ltd.

The Michelin bill—actually a set of amendments to the Trade Union Act—places all plants belonging to the same employer, and which are interdependent in the manufacturing process, in the same bargaining unit. This means non-union plants would all have to be unionized as one.

The legislation is clearly meant for Michelin alone—specifically to block an attempt by the United Rubber Workers of America (URW) to unionize the company's Granton plant by throwing the Bridgewater plant into the required bargaining unit. Since the two plants are more than 150 miles apart, since Michelin is the grand master of every anti-union tactic known to man, and since there's a three-month time limit on any union recruiting drive in Nova Scotia, the bill is nothing short of a guaranteed future without unions.

The bill's retroactive clause also ensured that the Labour Relations Board would never count an October vote taken among Granton workers to determine if they wanted the URW to represent them. For many members of the public, this anti-democratic feature was the most reprehensible aspect of the bill.

To make sure the bill was passed before the Labour Relations Board could meet to count the vote (planned for mid-January), the legislature sat for several days from early morning to late evening, and well into the customary Christmas break. The bill was passed on December 28.

For the government—and for Nova Scotia as a whole—there is a supposed payoff involved: jobs. At the very moment when the government was being pinned to the walls of the legislature

by the opposition, Michelin announced through Development Minister Roland Thornhill that it would build a third plant in the province. About 2,000 more jobs would be added to the 3,500 or so in the two existing plants, he said.

Even if we assume that in job-hungry Nova Scotia it's worth dispensing with a few democratic niceties, for the sake of 2,000 jobs, the public uproar over this bill goes deeper still. For what the government is doing is not just legislating to solve a specific problem for Michelin. Its intent is to effect a change in the entire social climate of the province according to the Michelin-inspired philosophy it is using to justify the bill.

The government's official rationale for the bill is that it is meant to "create jobs." It will do this by "stabilizing the labour climate," bringing "labour peace" and establishing "an environment for development." This established, companies will rush to Nova Scotia.

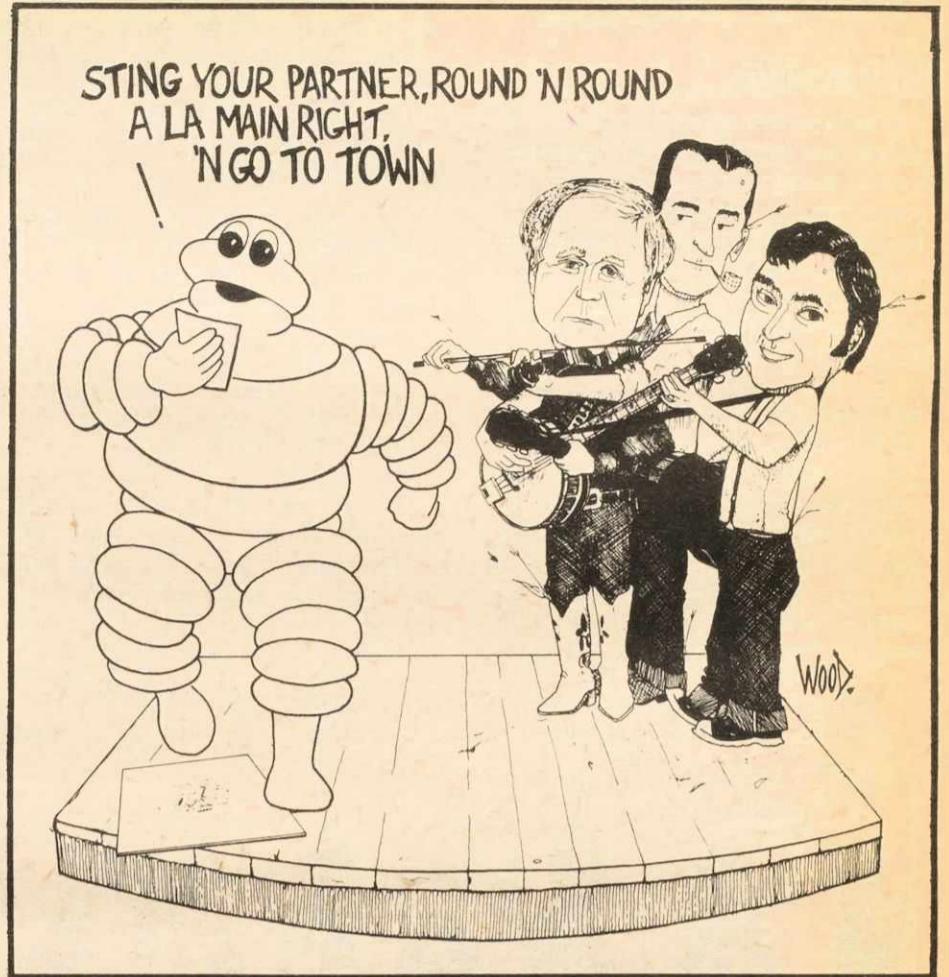
For an explanation, we can turn to the sayings of Jean Gorce, former general manager of the Granton plant.

by Sandy Martland

Newfoundland Premier Brian Peckford, expressing fear that recently approved licences for freezer trawlers will damage the Newfoundland fishery, has openly confronted the federal government and the giant H.B. Nickerson Ltd. over the issue.

Peckford, at a press conference in early December, said he had sent notice to H.B. Nickerson Ltd. and its subsidiary, National Sea Products, to immediately stop landing fish caught off the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts in mainland ports. The replacement of existing wetfish trawlers by freezer trawlers will enable companies catching Newfoundland cod to completely bypass the plant facilities in this province, he warned.

"All mainland fish companies operating in this province are put on notice that if they accept, directly or indirectly, Newfoundland cod caught by freezer trawlers and landed on the mainland, we will reserve the right to consider them ineligible for any pro-



In a remarkable full-page interview with the sympathetic **Halifax Chronicle-Herald** back in May 1979, Gorce explained, in didactic tone, what the legislation would do, how it would work and what he expected of it. Gorce, in short, knew far more about the bill than the basically uninformed government ministers. If he had not drafted it himself, the source of the government's inspiration was abundantly clear. In the last paragraph Gorce compared the situation in Nova Scotia with that in Alabama and South Carolina, where the company has five plants in areas hand-picked for their anti-union possibilities:

"Unlike our provincial governments, state governors are able to sit eyeball to eyeball with companies' representatives and to point to unbroken records of smooth construction, plants operating within the framework of integrated locations and

a string of decisions by the National Labour Relations Board that tend to indicate that clusters of independent locations, when functionally integrated, should not be fragmented."

Amid that arcane gobbledygook the logic becomes clear at last: Gorce wants Nova Scotia in the same league as Alabama and South Carolina. "Labour stability" is a euphemism for "cheap and docile labour" which often enough does help to create jobs, after a fashion. To push the argument one more step, if Nova Scotia joined the same league as South Korea and Taiwan, and Nova Scotians worked for ten cents an hour, full employment would likely be achieved in short order.

Back in 1973 some 20 operating engineers at the Granton plant applied to the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board for certification—normally a routine matter for the

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Newfoundland

Moves to protect fishery

vincial assistance programs or to apply for any further processing licences . . . in addition, all licences currently held by such companies may be reviewed both as to whether additional specific conditions should be attached to the same; and indeed, whether they should be renewed at all."

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His remarks were aimed particularly at the Nova Scotia-based H.B. Nickerson—National Sea Products company, who own and/or operate several plants in the province as well as in Nova Scotia and the United States.

Opposition leader Don Jamieson, although he questioned the method of confrontation used by Peckford, threw his party's support behind the statement.

Reaction from outside the province was predictably negative—the Nova Scotia legislature passed a resolution supporting the federal government's approval of freezer trawler licences and one MLA, Fraser Mooney, suggested Peckford was the "blue-eyed oyster." Federal Fisheries Minister

Jim McGrath and Prime Minister Joe Clark were "baffled" by Peckford's statement, insisting that it makes no difference whether the fish is caught by freezer or wetfish trawlers because the quota remains the same.

However, Cabot Martin, senior policy adviser to Peckford, explained that the replacement of wetfish trawlers with freezer trawlers will give mainland companies greater offshore

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