

PROSPECT OF SETTLEMENT

Some doubt seems to exist as to whether the asbestos union will accept the services of a new board of arbitration. The Minister of Labor, Mr. Barrette, says the union has agreed; Mr. Jean Marchand, secretary-general of the union says it has not. What is clear is that a number of impartial men of goodwill have been trying to bring the parties together and are close to doing so. Surely, in these circumstances, when there is a chance to settle a dispute in which everybody – companies, unions and the public interest – loses, the union will not refuse the good offices now offered. It has nothing to gain by persistence in the rigid attitude maintained since the strike was declared ten weeks ago.

That the union officers realize this is indicated by one part of Mr. Marchand's statement. The Minister's statement, he said, may have been based on the union's acceptance of the principle of arbitration. Having come so far as to accept the principle the union can hardly justify to its rank and file a refusal to act when a new board of arbitration is offered.

There is this difference between the proposed board and the board from whose proceedings the union walked out, that the parties to the dispute can name the impartial chairman by agreement. No one will be imposed upon them, nor are they bound by the board's decision any more than they would have been bound by a finding of the original board.

This right to name the chairman is a departure from the general law. It is evidence that the Government and the company are willing to ignore the illegality of the union's strike action and help the parties make the fresh start recommended here the other day. Rigid adherence to the law, in circumstances in which it cannot be enforced, would be as foolish as rigid adherence to the attitudes which have characterized this strike until now.

The union should take advantage of this disposition to let bygones be bygones. The companies undertake to receive employees back without discrimination, the union again becomes the bargaining agent. It can hardly ask more than this. There is the further persuasive argument that agreement to arbitrate will put the men back on the payroll again. The self-imposed hardships of the last ten weeks will come to an end.

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