

WHAT HAPPENED TO COMMON SENSE?

Negotiations leading to a settlement of the asbestos strike have broken down. They seem to have broken down on the understandable reluctance of the company to re-hire strikers against whom criminal charges are pending and the union's insistence that all strikers be re-hired without discrimination.

If this is the cause of the breakdown, it indicates on the part of the union stubbornness out of all proportion to what it has a right to expect after a strike lasting four months and the commission of more than one illegal act. What does the union want? Does it expect the community – and make no mistake, the community is involved – does it expect the community to say that it was right from the beginning, that it committed no illegal acts or that, if it did, they were wholly justifiable within the context of the strike? It can surely want no such thing. It is not entitled to so clean a bill of health.

All that the community is disposed to do is overlook the original illegality in the interests of a settlement. It is not disposed to break down the legal processes of this province so far as to allow the union, or anybody else, to bargain with the law. No one should be allowed to.

Surely the moment has come for the use of common sense and the introduction of some conciliatory spirit into this dispute. The Government, through the Minister of Labor, Mr. Barrette, has used its good offices to bring the parties together. The company has agreed to ignore the strict letter of the law and bargain again with a union that by its own act has surrendered its bargaining certificate. This is generous enough.

There were intimations for a time that the union itself was prepared to make some concessions in the interests of social and industrial peace. It has retreated from the impossible conditions laid down at a union meeting two weeks ago and, until a few days ago, showed some disposition to settle on a give and take basis.

Any formula worked out for settlement necessarily involves some face saving. Surely the union wants no more than it has gained. It has gained the support of the church [sic] and a large measure of public sympathy. Whatever the outcome, it emerges from the strike in a strong position. What more does it want? To refuse to compromise now will lose it all the support gained.

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