

MINISTER'S ASBESTOS PLAN FAILS

Breakdown of negotiations between Eastern Townships asbestos operators, Canadian Catholic Confederation of Labor and the Provincial Government is a matter of grave concern to all the province. The nature of the present impasse tends to strengthen the conviction that there is more to the dispute than meets the eye, and that those controlling the lives of some 5,000 workers at the moment are interested in other things than a settlement which would permit the differences between companies and the workers being adjusted through orthodox and legal methods.

Briefly, the Canadian Johns Manville Company has submitted a plan of settlement. The union involved has submitted another. Neither was acceptable to the other side, but with these two plans to work with, Labor Minister Antonio Barrette evolved a compromise plan which he considered to be a "happy medium." Representatives of both the company and the union met yesterday with the Labor Minister to consider his plan. The company signified its acceptance of all eight points of the proposal. On the other hand the union representative rejected the plan on the basis of three clauses which he found unacceptable.

The attitude of the union leaders is revealed in the provisions of the rejected clauses. Hon. Mr. Barrette's plan provided that the company might suspend "any employee who is under criminal charge." It also provided that the company would not be compelled to reinstate "those who are found guilty" of criminal accusations. Clause 7 of the minister's plan called for routine conciliation and arbitration proceedings in the event of disagreements which might occur during negotiations for a collective agreement after work was resumed.

Under the Barrette plan the re-certification of the union would have been recommended, and with work resumed the Minister would have also recommended amicable settlement of civil court proceedings between the company and employees.

In place of following routine in the matter of establishing an arbitration board, union leaders have demanded that the Chief Judge of the Quebec Appeal Court or his appointee be named chairman of any tribunal so established. The company did not discuss this demand yesterday but previously had met the proposal by telling the union representatives they could choose the third member of any board from among the chief justices of the various Quebec jurisdictional courts.

It would seem that Mr. Barrette's proposal might indeed have been found a happy medium which could have served to provide a basis for the settlement of a conflict in which everyone involved is a loser and which is causing serious losses to the province and the country as a whole.

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