

The End of the Strike in Sight?

Half of Quebec's asbestos workers return to the mines tomorrow. The men at Asbestos are still out, but it must be hoped that the end of the strike is in sight. It has been a desperate affair in which everybody concerned, including the public, has lost heavily. It is impossible not to feel that it could have been settled long ago had the leadership of all sides shown the capacity from the beginning that is being revealed now.

The men at Thetford Mines were wise to go back to work without demanding prior settlement of all the points in dispute. Their own long-range interests were being threatened, for customers for asbestos do not wait indefinitely the settlement of a strike: they go out and buy a substitute, and the market for asbestos becomes permanently weaker.

At Asbestos the situation was more complex. There had been violence and arrests there, none at Thetford Mines. The problem of re-hiring at Asbestos therefore includes the problem of the men who are up on court charges. It is to be noted that the union no longer insists that all men be re-hired. Exceptions are made in the case of men found guilty in the courts. This is a proper exception to make, and the union was well advised not to stick to its former "Rehire all or none" position.

To drop court charges indiscriminately, to forget that maintenance of law and order is an essential of any organized community, is something that the Government of Quebec properly refuses to accept. The Government has indeed made a substantial concession in continuing to use its machinery in spite of the fact that the strike was illegally called. This has been a substantial contribution to the abatement of violent feeling, even though it suggests also that the labor law in its present form needs amendment. An effective labor law must be one that wins the substantial respect of labor as well as management. Otherwise it is apt to fall down in moments of crisis.

The court charges must be carried through. Only thus can Quebec's tradition of law and order be re-established, and the union will strengthen itself in the long run by admitting the justice of this course. The union can indeed count itself fortunate that it now has the chance to effect a settlement which leaves its organization still intact. Many a union has been smashed as a result of the kind of events which surrounded the strike at Asbestos. The union may pride itself that it has not so suffered, but its members should remember that management and the Government, by their restraint, have helped to create a framework in which a settlement can be made.

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