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GENERAL INFORMATION TO ALL UNIONS.

SUBJECT: THE LONGSHOREMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR JOB SECURITY.

The membership of eleven locals of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in B.C. have voted by the huge majority of 93.5 percent to go on strike if our demands are not met.

Let those who imagine that a waterfront strike would be a reckless or irresponsible action consider the implications of that overwhelmingly united expression of the membership's wishes. Our members are fully aware of the consequences of strike action, having engaged in an industry-wide strike only five years ago. They understand the risks they take -- the loss of income, the domestic problems, the possibility of a hostile and resentful public attitude. Yet they have taken this decision with only a handful of dissenting votes. What are the issues that have led us to this action.

The basic issue involved in this dispute is job security, in the face of labour-saving mechanization. In common with all other workers today, we see our jobs menaced by the machine, and we are determined to do something about it.

A few years ago, bulk commodities such as grain, coal, sugar were stowed in the hold of a vessel in sacks. While this was a primitive method, it provided many jobs. Today, bulk loading methods have been devised which eliminate the handling of the cargoes by labour, requiring men only to tend the machine. This results in a tremendous displacement of manpower. Lumber, which makes up a very large portion of the total shipments from British Columbia was formerly handled by the individual piece. Today it is packaged at the mill and loaded with cranes, again eliminating large amounts of labour. The same is true of many other commodities.

Quite apart from the labour time saved by mechanization up to the present time, further large savings are possible by reducing the size of the longshore gangs despatched. This requires the agreement of the Union to change the despatching rules. Such agreement will not be forthcoming until the employers are prepared to meet our terms for utilizing part of the savings to provide some security for our members.

Furthermore, apart altogether from the fact that smaller gangs and fewer manhours will be used in the loading and unloading of cargoes, tremendous profits are available to the employers from the fact that the loading time of the ship is reduced. Each day that is cut off the turn-around time of the ship increases the total amount of cargo that it can handle over a given period of time and enhances its earning power. The union is quite prepared to make this saving available to the shipowners, but not at the cost of having our members thrown on the breadline.

Our program for security envisages, first of all, a commitment that as long as the volume of shipping holds up to present levels no presently registered longshoremen will become unemployed. This does not mean that the labour force is permanently frozen at its present level. It means rather that reductions in the labour force will take place in an orderly and humane way through retirement of older members, and through non-replacement of members who die or who leave their employment voluntarily.

Secondly, our program would include measures for ensuring that the full amount of employment remaining in our jurisdiction would be reserved for our members. To this end, it would be provided that where there is an unusual shrinkage of employment in one port, while increasing cargoes are improving the work opportunity at another, longshoremen would be assisted in moving from the one port to the other and would have a prior claim on the new jobs.

Also,where existing jobs are eliminated by mechanization, but are replaced by jobs requiring new skills, the displaced workers would be retrained for the new jobs, and not displaced by outsiders. This point has unfortunately given rise to much misunderstanding regarding jurisdiction. The new jobs created by mechanization tend to involve skills which in some other industries come under the jurisdiction of specialized craft unions. Thus when new machines are introduced, the employers seek to avoid the necessity of retraining our men by bringing in men from such unions to operate the machines. We insist that the jobs remain in our jurisdiction when they have been mechanized. This is not a jurisdictional dispute, since we have maintained good working relations with the other unions concerned. It is purely a matter of protecting our men from being thrown out on the street while work is available in our own industry. If other unions were seeking to invade the docks there would be a jurisdictional dispute, but they have not been doing so although the employers have on many occasions hired their members in preference to re-training ours.

If agreement can be reached between our union and the Shipping Federation providing on the one hand that we will relax the work rules in order to permit the maximum saving of labour through mechanization, and on the other that the Federation will grant us the protections that we desire, it follows that there will be large savings of cost to the employer, and great benefits will follow for everybody concerned.

One part of our program is that the workers in the industry will receive a share of the savings resulting from mechanization. We propose that this will be accomplished by setting up a mechanization fund, from which certain stipulated benefits will be paid to our members. These benefits would take the following forms:

1. If the amount of work available is insufficient to provide our members with an average of 35 hours a week of employment, older members would be encouraged to retire early (at 64, 63 or 62 instead of 65) with the pension prior to normal retirement age being paid for out of the mechanization fund.

2. Men whose health would make them eligible for disability retirement, but who would be unable to live on the actuarially reduced disability pension, will be assisted to retire early by means of a lump sum payment from the fund.

3. Members who are compulsorily retired at normal pension age will receive a lump sum from the mechanization fund to supplement their pensions.

The whole program which we have described is in effect on the United States Pacific Coast. There, it has been acclaimed by labour, management and government alike, as a sound and progressive approach to the problems of mechanization. The problems which brought it about there exist in the same measure here, and the ultimate solution will have to be the same.

We have been negotiating with the Shipping Federation about the problems of mechanization for seven years. Some slight progress was made in 1956, and again in 1960. In the current negotiations the union membership resolved to achieve a settlement of the issue. To this end, we have been in negotiations almost continuously for two years, and have still not reached agreement.

We earnestly believe that the settlement of this dispute on our terms will yield great benefits to all parties concerned, including labour management and the public, and that the benefits which result will far outweigh the temporary cost and inconvenience of a strike.

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