

Unions: Have we created monsters?

There was a time when the purpose of a trade union was to ensure that its membership wasn't taken advantage of by its employer. Now, it seems — to the naked eye at least — that the purpose has changed into seeing how big a fight union reps can get into with management.

As organized labor and professionals across the country engage in battles with governments and private enterprise over wages, benefits and job security, it is often difficult to distinguish which party is the bad guy in any one dispute. In many cases, union leaders would have the public believe their memberships aren't being paid enough, that their job security is being threatened and management is heartless. Meanwhile, the employers argue they need to save money through wage restraints and layoffs if they're to employ anybody at all, and that union negotiators are being unreasonable.

From these widely diverse viewpoints, Canadians get strikes. And it's the incessant harping by labor leaders that a strike in this sector or that sector is imminent if management doesn't back down, that has led many Canadians to wonder if union leaders are representing their members or their own egos.

Few would dispute that unions have contributed much toward better conditions in the workplace over the past 150 years. Yet many would argue that in the last 10 years, trade unions in North America have all but destroyed the mutual respect between employer and employee. Rather than seeing themselves as partners, each with something the other needs, bosses and their workers have begun to see themselves as opposing factions out to get the most at the expense of the other.

This attitude can clearly be seen within Canada Post where union members and management make no pretenses about being friends. And strikes by postal workers, many of whom already make more than their non-skilled counterparts in the private sector, have hardened the view of Canadians toward large unions with the power to stop public services when strikes suit their purposes.

The growing dislike of organized labor has been shored up with strikes by school teachers, transit workers, liquor store employees and federal clerks, to name a few.

Moves like these by unions have almost negated the good they have done over the years. They've made the public unsympathetic to their cause. Many people are just plain fed up with strikes and threats of strikes, regardless of the reasons, by people who call themselves professionals.

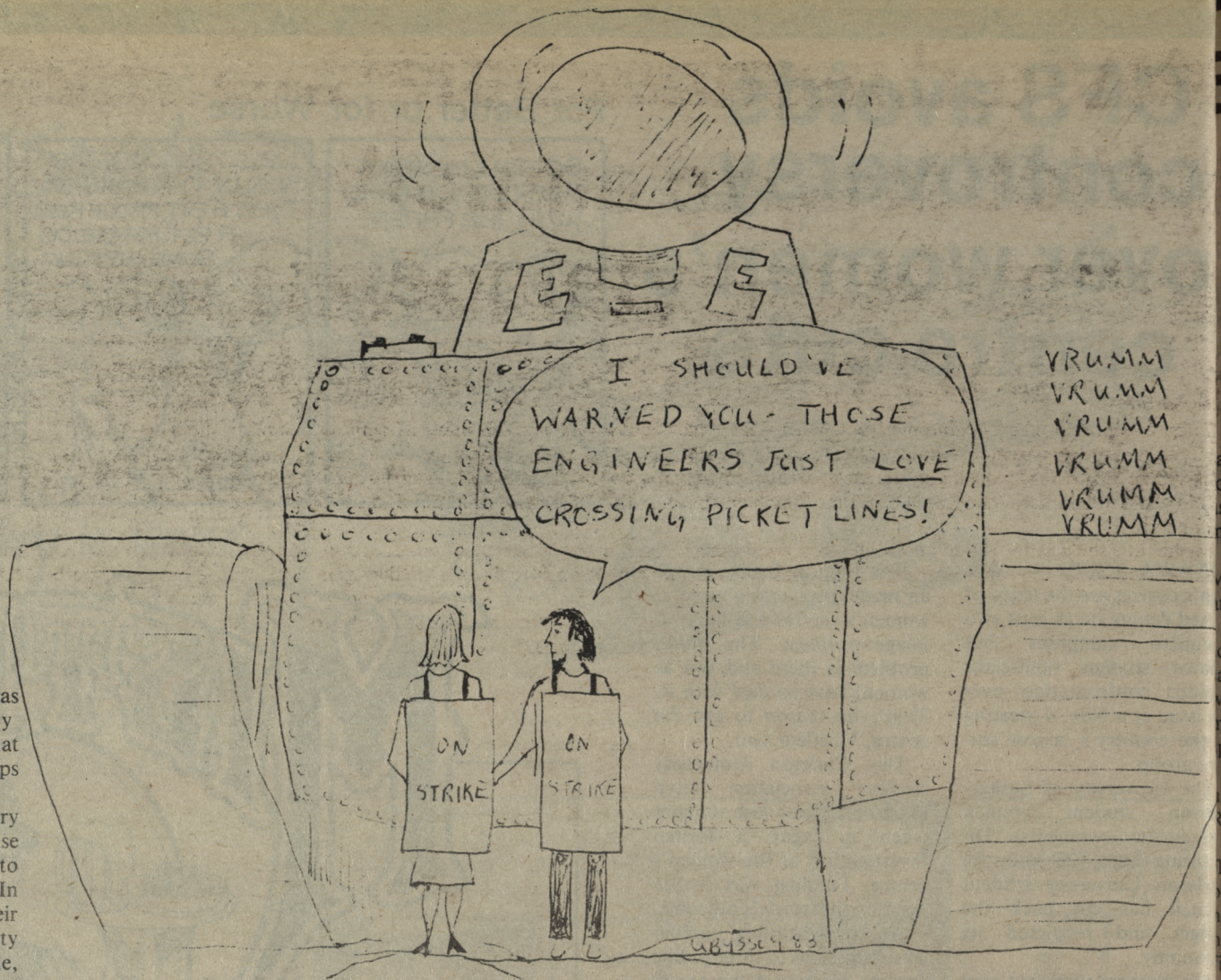
Where does this grotesque public relations error by unions leave Canadians?

Well, it leaves them with a bitter taste in their mouths when acronyms like CUPE, CUPW and PSAC are mentioned. And it makes them want strikes outlawed in many public service jobs. It means employers aren't as scared as they once were to challenge union negotiators because they know there is a percentage of the public that doesn't believe organized labor should be able to walk all over management.

As a result, unions are losing their power. Witness British Columbia where Bill Bennett's Social Credit government arbitrarily decided to fire 25 per cent of its civil service. By press time the strikes and threats of strikes had only elicited from the premier a promise of "consultations".

As the sympathy of Canadian toward unions appears to lessen, it is possible to foresee a day when governments with motives not totally altruistic can ban unions, or at least the right to strike, because they believe public opinion will support them.

In the end, then, workers would have come full circle: from having no rights to speak of, to having more than their share and back to having none.



LETTERS

Blasphemous Cartoon

How dare you print that inane picture (page 6) in your last issue?

Have you no respect for those who fought and died so that we could live in a free unoppressed country?

It would have made more sense to leave a blank spot in your newspaper — or maybe

your aiding and abetting CUP fielder Rich Janson wouldn't allow it?

Are you saying that war is a game, a new fad like the video games, and the only thing lost is a few quarters?

I, personally, don't like violence or war any more than the next person. However, I am eternally grateful that those men gave the ultimate sacrifice.

How dare you be so blasphemous? I am disgusted at this display of your

pathetically ungrateful attitude.

Leah Parker.

Support Island Businesses

As a regular at the Student Union recreation Facility, I get a chance to view the inside as well as the outside. The point I wish to address is why the Student Union, and therefore the student body, is supporting a non-Island firm when they could be supporting a firm that operates right in the heart of Charlottetown. In this I mean buying beverage products from Coke, which is made and bottled in New Brunswick, when we should be purchasing Island-made products from Seaman's Beverages. The product is much better and this is due mainly to our clean fresh water, unlike the swampy water of the mainland, which really isn't fit to drink. The service has to be better also: the firm is a mile down the road not hundreds like Coke.

A student should sit back and think of where the money he spends on drinks at the Barn goes. The money from the pop is presently going to Coke (New Brun-

wick), the money from the liquor to New Brunswick and/or Nova Scotia, and the last portion goes to the Student Union to pay for the entertainment, 95% of which goes to bands from outside P.E.I. Even the beer we drink comes from the Mainland. The buying of liquor at the moment cannot be helped but is worth noting. Unfortunately we have to purchase our liquor abroad (thanks to politics) but we don't have to buy the mix abroad too! This is like selling fish and chips in the cafeteria, and getting potatoes from New Brunswick.

So it all boils down to our Student Union activities putting money into Mainlanders' pockets. Why not put a little bit of money into our neighbors' pockets — in this I mean our next door neighbors, not our provincial neighbours? Why not give Islanders jobs and promote Island products? This university of ours needs the support of Islanders and the Island could use some support from the University. Wake up Student Union, our Island industries need help.

Hopefully the Student Union executive will react to this promptly and I for one and likely many others, would like to come from Christmas break to see pop machines in the Barn which belong to Seaman's rather than Coke.

Watchdog

The Netted Gem

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Staff

We are now a very proud editorial collective. Our competent and curious staff includes — New s Editor Ruth Edgett, Copy Editor Sharon Leighton, Production Editor Carolyn Ryan, Arts Editor Jonathan Orlovski, Sports Editor Phil Stanyer, Editorial Page Editor David Doiron, CUP Editor John Dougan, Photo Editor Darrell Blacquiere, Editor-in-chief Denise Richardson, and the vitally important Joanne MacKinnon, Mickey Place, Aileen Matters, Derrick Webber, and John Pendergast.

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