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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AT LAVAL UNIVERSITY

GÉRARD DION

Labour relations, of recent years, have acquired considerable importance. They are the object of sensational stories in widely circulated newspapers; they are a real cause of headaches to rulers searching for social peace; they are an element of distraction to employers who complain of being no longer their own masters; finally, they are creating a stir in the labouring masses themselves. Altogether, they present one of the knottiest problems demanding solution in the internal affairs of a country.

This question of labour relations has given rise to multiple groups of employers, of workers, and to a complete machinery of public administration.

Most American universities have created institutes, departments or sections for the training of those suited to analyse, understand and solve these problems or to exercise an influence in this field of human activity. The movement, starting in the United States some twenty years ago, has crossed the boundary and Laval University, by creating its Department of Industrial Relations in 1943, has become, together with Queen's University at Kingston, a pioneer in Canada.

The mission of all universities is to respond to a need. If the urgent need for scholars, leaders and technicians in Labour Relations occasioned the establishment of the Department of Industrial Relations at Laval we would be wrong in thinking that this was the only motive that brought it about.

Though realized only of late years, labour relations are nevertheless, one of the permanent phenomena which we find in history because of being so intimately linked with human nature. The all important law of work is inscribed as deeply in the heart of every man as is the necessity for him to procure his daily bread. The activities to which it gives rise possess a special character which cannot perfectly be explained by what it is convenient to call the traditional learning. Sociology, economics, psychology, law, ethics, technology, taken separately, can embrace only a partial and incomplete aspect of this complicated subject. Also, to deal with industrial relations on the university level is to make war on the empiricism, on the prejudices, the passions, the interests of men and to consider the nature of

these relations and the problems which spring from them in a purely objective sense, or, if you will, in their existence outside the minds which conceived them. To train the men who study labour relations in a comprehension of these relationships as *they are* and as *they are becoming* in order to help make them what they should be — this is the function of the university.

The expert in industrial relations is essentially a man whose intelligence and will are adjusted.

His intelligence is if it is able to observe social facts in this field of human endeavour with due regard to all their aspects and the inter-relations of which they admit. Only so can it analyse them completely even if it does not feel qualified to render true judgements.

By his decision on the ends to pursue and the choice of means to take for directing these activities, for managing them so that they are attained efficiently, his will should, in its turn, be set straight by a knowledge of the moral sciences, and of the techniques proper to this domain.

The initiated in industrial relations then should possess a fundamental idea of all the social sciences but the particularity of his knowledge should be the ability to utilize partial aspects of these sciences and co-ordinate them in one specific unity. It is not because historical circumstances have permitted the neglect of labour relations that one has the right to deny them a place in the scientific domain.

This object which labour relations constitute can be envisaged and studied according to the two methods which we find in all the social sciences.

1) The *positive* method, which is content to observe, describe, classify and analyze what occurs in the labour relations field and to discuss the constants which are designated under the name of laws.

2) The *normative* method, which while also based on the observation of facts and the consideration of the reason and aim of these relations, discloses what must be done for their wise disposition.

To this must be added also a knowledge of the techniques which, while taking into account the two preceding methods, permit at the same

time an adequate and detailed realisation of the ideal sought after.

Contrary to certain idealists whose feet are not solidly planted on reality and who adopt a fatalistic conception of the evolution of humanity, the Department of Industrial Relations at Laval does not try to make of its students impassive spectators of a world moved by necessary and inescapable laws. Without neglecting the positive methods, which allow objective observation and careful analysis of the phenomena presented by labour relations, it deems it just as necessary and scientific to show students the normative side of a planning which conforms with justice and charity as well as the techniques capable of realizing it.

That is why the training which the Department of Industrial Relations offers its students includes first of all the elements necessary to a general knowledge of the social sciences which they receive in common with all the students of the Faculty — moral science, philosophy, economy, the social encyclicals, social philosophy, sociology, political economy, research methods, statistics, social hygiene, civil law etc. In the course of three years of specialization are included, as well, courses in labour relations, professional sociology, labour economics, labour and social security legislation, organizing of workers and employers, labour psychology, industrial hygiene, the techniques of personnel direction, of analysis, evaluation and rationalizing of jobs, the negotiating of collective agreements and finally, the application of labour legislation.

As the year-book of the Faculty indicates, the graduates can carry the title of Industrial Relations Counselor. Their economic and social knowledge will be invaluable to *enterprises*, to *unions* and to the *government agencies* charged with the application of labour and social security measures. They will be equally useful for personnel direction and for the work of co-operation and industrial peace.

The Department possesses also an Industrial Research Bureau — its own special laboratory —

which is a section of the Social Research Centre of the Faculty. Thanks to it, professors and students can make an original contribution to the study of many problems connected with labour relations.

Owing to the fact that many people are already engaged in this domain who have not had the advantage of following special studies, and above all owing to the lack of any organization prepared for this purpose the Department of Industrial Relations together with the Extension Courses in popular education of Laval University extends its teaching facilities to special groups. It organizes intensive sessions of a few days up to two weeks for labour leaders, personnel directors, heads of enterprises and officers of public administration. As the University would betray its mission were it taken in tow by the interests of one group or another or allowed to serve the particular ends of either employers or employees it is evident that its teaching cannot in any way whatever partake of the character of propaganda.

The Department of Industrial Relations has since its organization dispensed its teachings to many thousands of people through its annual congresses, and its numerous intensive courses.

Finally, to give a character of permanence to this teaching and to diffuse amongst a still larger public the work of its research bureau and the findings of its professors, the Department has published, for more than three years, a monthly bilingual review, unique of its kind — the Bulletin of Industrial Relations.

The Department of Industrial Relations of Laval whose teaching is at once positive, normative and technical in its character appeals first of all to its students who are the coming professionals and then to the different persons interested in labour relations and to the public in general.

The numerous testimonials which the Department has received from widely different groups since its inception in 1943, and the success reported by its graduates encourages us to continue the work in the way so clearly indicated.