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Wage Structure

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QUEBEC

March 1950

The Fifth Industrial Relations Conference of Laval University

WAGE STRUCTURE

The fifth Industrial Relations Conference will be devoted to the study of the vast problem of the remuneration of labour.

Perhaps, the theme chosen — "Wage Structure" — does not do justice to all the conferences, but it leaves no doubt that they will be centered about the "length and breadth and height and depth" of wages, their formation, types and variations. If it is true that there is a structure in wages, then it must be admitted that there is a technique to wages.

Wages vary in business, not always subject to the will of workers or employers, but under the influence of other economic factors susceptible of analysis. Even if the basic wage is fixed in an industry, rates for the different job classifications have to be set up; some jobs are more difficult or more laborious than others and postulate a higher rate of pay accordingly. Hence there will be a study of the elements of control of the remuneration of labour.

Many industries lend themselves to a divisibility of operations and the assembly line technique. With the aim of increasing production by paying each workman according to his output, the piecework system is still used in spite of its human inconveniences. How can we organize both to assure high level production and to safeguard human rights? Some of the speakers will deal with this technique of remuneration.

In a free and private enterprise economy employers, with the help of specialized engineers, do their utmost to find ways to augment production while reducing costs, not only by choosing the right machines and introducing scientific work simplification, but also by putting into application very varied systems of production bonuses. It is here that we glimpse the importance of recognizing the human character of work and the necessity of appealing to the intelligence and free will of a man if we wish to realize bigger and better production returns.

Precisely in order not to leave in the shadow this question of the human character of work and its dependance on the moral law we have invited a reporter to remind us of the social and moral criteria of the just wage. Wages are not a commodity even if they often fall under the imperious influence of the market; they are first and foremost the normal means for a multitude of people to meet their needs and to accomplish whatever they can of a full human life.

Economics leads us to necessary positive studies. How explain, for instance, the phenomenon of wage variation in units of the same industry? What are the connections between the large, the middle-sized and the small industries in the same sector of production? Should the wage index follow the industrial development of each member firm in the industry, or should it vary according to the geographic situation of the plants, or according to their predominance in urban centers or rural? If in these cases there must be some differential in wage rates, is there any norm besides that of the trial and error method to determine it without harming the common good?

And what should be said of wage variations in different industries? What is the economic cause of the divorce between aristocratic industries and proletarian ones? What is the part of monopoly, of the play of imports and exports, of trade union influence, of the nature of the finished product, of technical difficulties in work, of mechanization, of unemployment risks, of tradition itself, in the unevenness of wage rates in trades and occupations of different industries?

There will be speakers who will give us the results of their researches and endeavour to answer these questions.

Without looking for the conquest of the absolute we will try finally to ask ourselves whether there are immutable economic laws to explain the determination of wage rates and their variations. If such laws exist or tend to manifest themselves, we will seek to discover how man can get the better of them and subject them to his own law which, in a world where the primacy of the human person is recognized, can become a law of justice and charity.

GÉRARD TREMBLAY

We are assured that the attendance at this fifth Industrial Relations Conference will be as numerous and interested as last year's. Theoricians and practitioners of economic and social questions, employers, engineers, labour leaders, labour legislation administrators and officials, will all find interest and profit, we are sure, in the conferences and the free discussions following. One can find further information about the Conference in another page of the Bulletin. Registration should be made as soon as possible at the Département des relations industrielles, Faculté des sciences sociales, 2, rue de l'Université, Quebec.