

The Causes of Labour Unrest, 1919

. . . The unrest is most pronounced in western Canada. There it assumes a distinctly different character from that which prevails in eastern Canada. In several western cities labour was represented by many holding extreme radical views. Undoubtedly a portion of the labour unrest at present prevailing is to be ascribed to the upheavals in Europe and the disturbed state of the public mind generally owing to the war. This has given rise to a desire on the part of workers generally to secure a position for themselves in a comparatively short period of time, which otherwise might have been the result of evolution during a long period of years. This desire varies in degree amongst different groups of workers. One group lays down as a principle the complete possession by themselves of the machinery of production and the full product of their toil, whilst the group at the other extreme would be satisfied with merely a larger purchasing power of the wages they receive. In between these groups lie the more moderate, and we believe the majority, who would welcome co-operation and industrial peace until by a gradual process of evolution a system may be ushered in by which the workers will receive a more adequate share of what their labour produces.

. . . Though the advocacy of extreme views both by speech and by the distribution of literature may be a contributing cause to occasional outbursts, the real causes of unrest are of a more fundamental nature.

The chief causes of unrest may be enumerated as follows:

1. Unemployment and the fear of unemployment.
2. High costs of living in relation to wages and the desire of the worker for a larger share of the product of his labour.
3. Desire for shorter hours of labour.
4. Denial of the right to organize and refusal to recognize Unions.
5. Denial of collective-bargaining.
6. Lack of confidence in constituted government.

7. Insufficient and poor housing.
8. Restrictions upon the freedom of speech and press.
9. Ostentatious display of wealth.
10. Lack of equal educational opportunities.

We recommend that legislation be enacted to provide for:

- (a) Fixing of a minimum wage, specially for women, girls, and unskilled labour.
- (b) Maximum work day of 8 hours and weekly rest of not less than 24 hours.

We recommend immediate enquiry by expert boards into the following subjects, with a view to early legislation:

- (a) State insurance against unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age.
- (b) Proportional representation.

We recommend that suitable action be taken by the Government to:

- (a) Regulate public works to relieve unemployment.
- (b) Help the building of workers' homes.
- (c) Establish a bureau for promoting Industrial Councils,
- (d) Restore fullest liberty of freedom of speech and press.

Other general recommendations are:

- (a) Right to organize. Recognition of Unions.
- (b) Payment of a living wage.
- (c) Collective bargaining.

- (d) Extension of equal opportunities in education.
- (e) Steps towards establishment of Joint Plant and Industrial Councils.
- (f) That the findings of the Commission be put into effect in all work controlled by the Government where the principles of democratic management can be applied. . . .

Source: Canada, *Royal Commission on the Industrial Relations*, published as a supplement to the *Labour Gazette*, v. 19 (Ottawa, 1919): 5–6, 18–19.