

Contacts and Conflicts Between Foreman and Steward **Contacts et conflits entre contremaître et délégué d'atelier**

F.D. Barrett

Volume 11, Number 1, December 1955

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1022662ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1022662ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Barrett, F. (1955). Contacts and Conflicts Between Foreman and Steward. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 11(1), 25–43.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1022662ar>

Article abstract

Contacts occurring between foremen and stewards are contractual, if they arise from grievances related to the interpretation of a contract, and non-contractual, if they have to do with other matters. Potential difficulties stemming from such contacts may vary from one industry to another, from one business concern to another and from one department to another. What are, however, the attitudes toward each other which those two groups — representing management and the union respectively — will have to adopt to solve such problems? This article is a tentative solution to the important problem of the sharing of authority in the enterprise.

Contacts and Conflicts Between Foreman and Steward

F. D. Barrett

Contacts occurring between foremen and stewards are contractual, if they arise from grievances related to the interpretation of a contract, and non-contractual, if they have to do with other matters. Potential difficulties stemming from such contacts may vary from one industry to another, from one business concern to another and from one department to another. What are, however, the attitudes toward each other which those two groups — representing management and the union respectively — will have to adopt to solve such problems? This article is a tentative solution to the important problem of the sharing of authority in the enterprise.

When we think about contacts between foremen and stewards, the first thing that comes to mind is the grievance procedure. In many, if not most, cases grievance contacts are the only type of contact that occur between these two officials. However, once the foreman-steward relationship has come into existence it can develop in many different directions. It can become infected with suspicion and mutual hostility, it can become very formal, business-like and emotionally colourless, or it can become a relationship characterized by mutual trust, respect and confidence.

One of the most interesting possibilities is that the foreman and steward may begin to contact each other on matters other than formal, contractual grievances. They may develop a habit of contacting each other to work out solutions to complaints which employees have about matters which are not covered by the contract. They may in addition contact each other in order to find ways and means to help a worker who is having trouble in meeting the requirements as to punctuality, absenteeism, and production standards. In practice, some foreman-steward relationships can be found where

BARRETT, F.D., Docteur en philosophie et sciences économiques industrielles (M.I.T.), membre du département du personnel des chemins de fer nationaux du Canada.

contacts occur about these non-contractual matters as well as about contractual matters.

The fact that it is possible for foreman and steward to have these non-contractual contacts raises questions of great practical interest. One of the first questions that comes to mind is whether management and union should encourage or discourage this broadening of the foreman-steward relationship as a matter of policy. Related to this question are a variety of other more specific questions. Under what circumstances is the foreman-steward relationship likely to flow over the official contract boundary lines and embrace other matters? In shop society, how many non-contractual problems are there as compared with the number of problems which are covered by the contract? Finally, if these problems are to be handled by joint consultation between foreman and steward, then what attitudes and skills do the foreman and the steward need in order to work effectively on such non-contractual problems. These simple questions become extremely complex as soon as we begin to explore them.

Since the subject of foreman-steward contacts breaks down into two divisions which we may call contractual contacts and non-contractual contacts, these divisions can be discussed separately. Because contractual, that is grievance, contacts are primary in origin and importance they may be considered first.

CONTRACTUAL CONTACTS

SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE

The grievance procedure occupies so central a place in labour relations, that it is repeatedly described as the "heart" of the contract. This view of the importance of the grievance procedure arises because it makes possible a system of industrial jurisprudence. Due process of law is followed in handling some of the important problems which arise in shop society. Under this system of individual jurisprudence the steward can be regarded as a kind of lawyer whose job is to protect the constitutional rights of his fellow citizens as these rights are defined in the contract. The foreman on the other hand can be regarded, from this point of view, as the representative in shop society of the *government* of the enterprise, that is of management.

During the course of a single year in Canada thousands or even millions of these contacts occur between steward and foreman to set this system of industrial jurisprudence in motion again and again. In these contacts thousands of foremen and stewards are involved and hundreds of thousands of workers. It is this gigantic scope of the grievance procedure, its role in a system of industrial jurisprudence, and its day-in day-out operation during the year that causes it to be regarded as the heart of labour relations in modern industrial society.

Formal grievances in industry group themselves into a relatively small number of categories. This is, of course, a direct reflection of the fact that the collective bargaining contract itself covers usually a quite limited, even though exceedingly important, number of categories. The kinds of matters covered by formal grievances, by contractual grievances, is so well known that there would be no reason to list them except that to provide a basis for making inter-industry and inter-enterprise comparisons and, later, to bring to light the range of human problems in industry which are *not covered* by the collective bargaining contract. Briefly then, the main categories of contractual grievances are those which arise over seniority, work loads, rates, job classification, and discipline. All of these matters have to do with those particular issues which are of primary rather than secondary concern to the worker, namely, income and economic security. When we wish to proceed further and put the grievance procedure under a microscope to dissect it, it becomes necessary to look at variations between industries, between enterprises and between different departments in the same enterprise.

DIFFERENCES AMONG INDUSTRIES

In looking at differences in grievance activities between one industry and another, it becomes immediately apparent that the *frequency* with which grievances arise varies considerably depending on the industry. It becomes apparent also that the *kinds* of grievances tend to be different from one industry to another. In the oil industry for example grievances over lay-offs occur less frequently than in the automobile industry. This is because employment in the oil industry is not subject to the same seasonal fluctuations as it is in the automobile industry. To compare these two industries again, the *total number of grievances* in the oil industry is less than in the automobile industry. This is because the oil industry is based on production processes which allow for exceptional stability in work organization, job content and job activities. The nature of automobile manufacturing on the other

hand is such that jobs are constantly being created, modified or destroyed because of changes in models, styles, production methods and so on. This constant and frequent change in job content, production organization and the like creates a large number of human problems.

Looking then at foreman-steward grievance contacts in these two industries, it is found that greater interaction in one case than in the other. Moreover, the kinds of grievances discussed in these contacts also tend to be different. The subject of differences among industries is large and complicated in itself as the two examples only served to suggest. Numerous other comparisons between industries could be made which would dramatize the important fact that it is difficult to generalize too much about foreman-steward grievances contacts. These comparisons would make it clear that the frequency and the content of these contacts vary greatly from one industry to another.

DIFFERENCES AMONG ENTREPRISES

Stepping down one level lower in the analysis, comparisons can be made between one enterprise and another in the same industry. It will usually be possible to find two enterprises in the same industry with one having perhaps ten times as many grievances as the other. It is also possible to find two enterprises where in one the relations between most foremen and most stewards are on good terms and in the other where they are coloured by sharp conflicts and bitter antagonisms. These differences do not result from such tangible matters as production techniques and the economics of the market because these are the same, or at least similar, for both enterprises. The sources of the differences are of a more intangible nature. They arise from differences in labour relations policies, in methods of management and administration, in union leadership and in the individual personalities of key people on either side.

If labour-management relations in an enterprise are full of friction, hostility, mistrust and violent conflicts, the contacts and the relationships between foremen and stewards will tend to bear the same stamp. It becomes difficult for the individual foreman and steward to develop attitudes toward one another in a way which is independent of their more general views on the union and the management in their enterprise. The foreman tends to perceive the steward not only as an individual but as a member of the union. He will tend to attribute to the steward some of the same intentions and attitudes that he attributes to

the union and its higher executives. The steward on his part will tend to attribute to the foreman the same attitudes and intentions that he attributes to higher management executives. Both foreman and steward have psychological commitments to the organizations in which they hold official office. They are subject to powerful influence by the climate of opinions, attitudes and relationships which surround them. Finally, their respective organizations expect them to behave toward one another in certain ways and these expectations exert an influence upon the way they do behave.

If labour-management relations in an enterprise are characterized by a reasonable degree of working harmony, arising from mutual trust and confidence, relations between foreman and steward will be influenced in this direction too. The logic for his argument has already been given in discussing the opposite case of conflict, antagonism and mistrust. It seems clear that it is in the case where labour-management relations in the enterprise are harmonious that the greatest possibility exists for foreman-steward contacts to extend over the legal boundary lines of the contract.

DIFFERENCES AMONG DEPARTMENTS

In the case of both types of labour-management relations, it is still important to recognize that foreman and steward are rarely, except in the more extreme cases, completely governed by the influence of forces from above. It still happens that relations between foreman and steward in one department in an enterprise will be relatively harmonious and cooperative even though the over-all pattern of labour-relations above them and along side them in other departments is quite the opposite. It also does happen that in the one enterprise there can be a department where few grievances occur and another where the frequency of formal grievances is very high. The personal attitudes, abilities and personalities of the foreman and the steward are among the most important factors responsible for such variations within the enterprise.

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

The introduction of the union and the steward brings about a change in the role of the foreman to which he may have difficulties in adjusting. The steward as watch-dog of the contract is called upon to challenge the foreman's authority in the sense of observing that it is exercised in ways the contract requires. The foreman has to accommo-

date himself emotionally to this new fact. Moreover in place of the simpler two-person relationship between foreman-and-worker the foreman finds that he is now involved in a more complex relationship which has the form of a triangle with himself, the worker and the steward as the three apexes. The foreman may have become used to, even if he cannot happily accept changes in the *structure* of his authority brought about by his superiors. He has found that there are fewer and fewer matters upon which he can make final decisions independently of other management groups and levels. But the union affects his authority in a quite different sense. It controls the actual *exercise* of his authority.

In probing into the underlying factors which cause labour relations at all levels — at the level of the enterprise and the level of the shop — to move either in the direction of working harmony or of antagonistic conflict, an important factor seems to be the belief which management and union have concerning their respective role in the enterprise. It is this question of “authority in the enterprise” which appears to be one root of the basic issue of conflict and cooperation. In the eyes of both labour and management this issue has a shape which is more than simply logical or technical. It involves deep-rooted sentiments, basic beliefs, and strongly held personal values.

The vocabulary of terms used in discussing this issue reveals its more-than-technical or administrative character. Such terms as “managerial prerogatives”, “management’s responsibilities”, “industrial democracy”, and “labour’s rights” are loaded with overtones of belief, sentiments, and ethics. The basic beliefs and attitudes held by management and union with regard to the proper place of each in the enterprise are important in relation to the question of foreman-steward contacts because they set the pattern of union-management relations in the enterprise and because this pattern then reaches down into shop society to influence the relations between foreman and steward. The role of these beliefs and attitudes in the labour-management relationship was the object of research in a recent study.

In 1947 under the chairmanship of Clinton Golden, elder statesman of the American labour movement, the National Planning Association in the United States established a Committee on the Causes of Industrial Peace to carry out research into the factors responsible for industrial harmony. During the succeeding six years research studies were carried out by eminent American scholars who thoroughly examined a large number of actual cases of labour-relationships which were regarded by

managers, scholars and labour leaders as examples of wholesomeness and health both from the management and the labour point of view.

The final report on this research¹, published in 1935, contains a chapter regarding the beliefs and attitudes management has toward the union and the beliefs and attitudes the union has toward management. The author of this chapter, Professor Douglas McGregor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, reported that in examining all of the cases studied over the six years it was possible to identify certain attitudes and beliefs which were common to all these relationships. At the risk of distorting McGregor's conclusions through over-simplification they were essentially as follows:

On management's part there was an attitude not only of acceptance or recognition of the union but of seeing positive advantages in bargaining with a strong and well-disciplined union, an attitude which was carried to the extent of encouraging the workers to join and to support the union. Secondly, these managements accepted the fact that unions were political as well as business organizations in the sense that the leaders were dependent on the support of their membership. Thirdly, was a management practice of charging the line officials with responsibility for good human relations with enterprise. Fourthly, were management's attitudes toward the employees as people. These managerial attitudes included respect, carried out in practice, for the dignity and value of the individual in the enterprise.

On labor's side certain complementary beliefs and attitudes were to be found. Union leaders viewed the union not as a *protest organization* on the one hand nor as a *partner in management* on the other but as an organization whose essential function was "*to police*" or "*regulate*" the actions of management. The unions in these cases accepted and supported management's responsibility to run the enterprise efficiently and profitably. To quote McGregor":

"From our studies there is clear-cut evidence that the unions involved were concerned with the economic welfare of the companies. Yet their acceptance of the necessity for profitable operations is not vaguely grounded in a mere belief in a system of private enterprise. It seems to stem much more realistically from a hard-boiled recognition that the union as

(1) *Fundamentals of Labor Peace — A Final Report*, National Planning Association, Washington, D.C.

an institution and the job interests of its membership are dependent upon the economic success of the business. . .”

In summary in these National Planning Association cases studies it was seen that management and union share mutually compatible beliefs concerning the proper function of each other, that mutual trust, respect and confidence exists, and that management exercises its authority in day-to-day administration in a way that takes proper account of the employees interests as sensitive beings of dignity and stature. In such a climate of over-all relationships, the individual steward and foreman are under an influence which supports more amicable and cooperative dealings free from excessive legalisms or animosities.

Under the best of relationships in an imperfect world, there will still always remain problems of interpreting the application of a contract to specific cases as well as errors in administration which will generate grievances. It seems obvious that the foreman and the steward will be quicker to take a business-like approach to the adjudication of grievances, to contact each other more spontaneously and discuss more easily, when they are in a climate of organizational human relations which is relatively free of basic and deep-seated antagonisms.

NON-CONTRACTUAL PROBLEMS

LEGALISM AND LABOUR RELATIONS

Grievance negotiation as a quasi-judicial process invites a legalism, a scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law, which may exercise a positive attraction to both management and union because it proposes to solve human problems on a logical and factual basis. It is not impossible for management and union to succumb to the alluring temptation to place all their eggs in the basket of a strict system of industrial jurisprudence and legalism, particularly when its accomplishments have been shown to be so manifest. Hence the temptation exists both for higher levels of management and union and for the foremen and steward to regard as “real” only those grievances which are clearly “legitimate” under the terms of the contract. Other discontents of the worker can then be dispensed with by the simple device of labelling them as “illegitimate grievances”, “complaints”, “imaginary grievances”, or “beefs”.

The National Planning Association case studies revealed a definite picture in regard to the relation between legalism and the basic labour-

management relationship. In all of the N.P.A. cases it was found that the union and management regarded grievances as more than simple problems for adjudication in terms of legal rights and wrongs. Important grievances were regarded as manifestations of some underlying cause which should be corrected so that future grievances would not arise from it. The spirit of management and labour in these cases is described in the following quotation from the final N.P.A. report: ²

“In practically all of our cases, both management and labour were primarily interested in solving specific problems rather than in defining rights and prerogatives. Both parties seemed to avoid talking about “management’s right to do this” or “the union’s power to do that”, rather, the approach of both sides was, “here is a problem; what will it take to get it settled?” Inherent in this problem-oriented approach was the absence of legalism in settling disputes and handling grievances.”

Let us take a look at these human problems in industry which fall outside the scope of the contract and of the formal grievance procedure and, secondly, ask the question whether they are of concern to management and to union and, if so, whether they can be a matter for foreman-steward contacts.

THE NEEDS AND WANTS OF THE WORKER

Let us begin by looking at the needs of the worker simply as a human being who happens to be a member of an industrial enterprise. It is these needs which require him to place certain demands upon the enterprise. The frustration or blocking of these demands creates a problem for the worker, that is a dissatisfaction which may activate the steward-foreman relationship.

In discussing these demands of the worker it is necessary to take the point of view that they originate not solely or even predominantly out of processes of logical or rational calculation on the worker’s part. Their origins are much more profound, much more basic. They lie deep within the nature of the worker as a human being, as a biological entity who requires certain personal and psychological satisfactions, and as a

(2) FREDERICK H. HARBISON and JOHN R. COLEMAN, in *Fundamentals of Labor Peace — A Final Report*, National Planning Association, Washington, D.C., 1953, Pages 84-85.

spiritual being with spiritual needs. It is these demands rooted in human nature which must be considered, which have an imperative source, and whose existence depends not on a personal choice on the worker's part but on powerful forces from within his being.

Some of the needs of the worker as a human being find their expression in the terms of the contract; others, however, do not. The clauses on wages, hours, promotion and lay-off policies, vacations and pensions represent the worker's demands upon the enterprise for satisfaction in the main only of his needs for income, security and leisure. The procedures established through the grievance clause consequently exist for the purpose essentially of adjusting those dissatisfactions he has concerning his contractual rights on the issues of pay, promotion, demotion, lay-off, and disciplinary action which affect his income and security. While everyone is aware of the over-whelming importance to the worker of these basic needs and demands, the force which lies behind them, and their compelling nature, there is an easy danger of forgetting that the worker has the other needs too which cannot easily be expressed in such tangible forms as wages, hours, vacations and the like.

In order to get the roots of the problems which can give rise to foreman-steward contacts, it is therefore imperative to direct attention to these non-material needs and problems. As national income has risen during the century resulting in increase in real wages, as unemployment insurance and old-age pensions have appeared to temper — even if just partially — the problem of insecurity, and as unions have brought what the Harvard economist, Slichter, has christened “a system of industrial jurisprudence and civil rights” into shop society, the other non-economic needs of the work have gained a relatively more demanding character. Where it would be foolish to suggest that the economic and security problems of the worker in modern industrial society are anywhere near solved, it would be a form of blindness to reality to see *only* these problems. As problems of income and security become progressively alleviated, the demands for the satisfaction of the non-economic needs are likely to become more forceful. This is indeed one of the most important currents of development in the modern social and economic order.

Since 1927, when Harvard University began its now world-famous studies of the patterns of activity sentiments and relations at the grass-roots level in shop society, and as this type of research expanded in many directions over the last 28 years in enterprises of all descriptions, busi-

ness and union leadership have acquired a sharper — if not a new — vision of the importance of the worker's needs in the work situation and the ways in which they are expressed or frustrated by the human, technical and organizational environment which surrounds him while he is at work. Human needs, wants, desires and frustrations run a far larger gamut than those which gain formalized character in the contract. Neither the worker, the steward, nor the foreman leave parts of their human personality at home in the morning when they depart for work. When they enter shop society they do not become abruptly a new species which we might call "economic man" or "organizational man". They carry with them throughout the whole of the day's activities all the motives and sentiments which make them human beings.

The needs and wants which control human behaviour and emotional reactions in the industrial enterprise include the desires for status, for recognition, for dignity, for self-expression, for self-determination and for participation. In shop society these needs are fulfilled or frustrated through specific and concrete events, activities, relationships and arrangements. They can be traced down and pin-pointed in specific detail. As concrete and specific matters, they must be dealt with as such. They are not vague abstractions but are part of the processes that go on in shop society and are as "real" as physical actions, materials or machinery. They require practical and analytical consideration.

SHOP SOCIETY

Shop society, where the worker seeks expression of his human needs, has both a dynamics and a structure. It is dynamic in that it is a system of motion, change and activity. People are working, moving, talking, acting and doing things. But it also has a structure in that each job is related to every other not only in monetary terms but in terms of prestige and status. It has a structure in that there are definite relationships between who gives orders and who receives orders. It has a structure in terms of physical layout of equipment and work-places. It has a structure in terms of disciplinary rules, personnel procedures, grievance mechanisms, systems and techniques of production. There are well-marked patterns of human relationships, informal groupings, social contacts and work contacts. Both the dynamics and the structure are exceedingly, even fantastically complex. To complicate the picture more the structure is always changing. In a very important sense every shop is unique, different from any other, just as every individual in every shop is unique and different from any other.

In the face of the complex interplay between complex human beings and a complex shop society — between all the human, physical and procedural elements — it is imperative to recognize that the possible scope and variety of human problems defy any simple efforts at pigeon-holing. What may be more important is that both foreman and steward accept the fact that this complexity is there. The grievance procedure and its legal mechanisms can not anticipate more than a portion of them.

From the psychological and social angle one of the more important sources of potential problems in the shop lies in the relation between the foreman and the worker and specifically, in the interplay of activities, contacts and feelings between foreman and worker. Essentially these are problems which have to do with the way authority is exercised and with the reactions of the worker to it. The large number of research studies already made on foreman-worker relations allows us to recognize clearly certain patterns.

Here are some of the ways in which the exercise of authority may do violence to some important human needs of the worker.

1. The foreman humiliates and embarrasses the employee by criticizing him in front of his fellows.
2. Orders are given without explanation or discussion as to their reason and with a spirit of arrogance.
3. The foreman discourages, or does not invite, suggestions from workers.
4. The foreman supervises too closely by specifying in too much detail how the worker is to carry out his job.
5. The foreman checks too frequently on the employee's work.

In one way or another all of these activities do damage to the worker's pride, respect, dignity, self-esteem, desire for participation and need for reasonable autonomy and self-direction. It is not unusual to find where the number of formal grievances in a shop is unusually high and unrest is known to exist that it is the result of such poor supervision. Generally the employees are not reacting to the authority of the foreman, which they usually accept as legitimate. They are reacting to the manner in which he exercises it.

The fact that a large bulk of the human problems in the enterprise come from the exercise of supervisory actions, from the foreman, raises

peculiar implications for the foreman-steward relationship. How can the steward approach the foreman about a problem which in effect amounts to a criticism of the foreman, a criticism which the contract does not entitle the steward to make? What would be the emotional reaction of a foreman to such implied criticism coming from the steward? Is the foreman's immediate superior or the personnel department the proper source of such criticism?

First of all it is necessary to recognize that supervision need not be *either* good or bad but may be somewhere in between. Secondly, it is necessary to recognize that even the best supervisor is aware that he can cause human problems. He accepts the fact that he is a fallible being and that it is humanly impossible for him, or anyone else, to be constantly and fully abreast of the currents of individual and group sentiments in shop society. He may even be aware that his particular role and position in the shop society makes it (a) impossible ever to see any situation exactly from the worker's viewpoint (b) difficult for the employees to express to him all of their feelings and anxieties, simply because he is a supervisor. He can, theoretically, recognize these facts about his relations to the workers and, if he does, he may perceive the steward, as a source of help to him. The steward, because he is a worker, can see and anticipate their problems more easily. Secondly, employees may be glad to use the indirect procedure of having the steward relay their personal sentiments to the foreman.

This may sound like a hopelessly idealistic and utopian pattern of relationship to expect to find in any foreman-steward relation. But the fact that such patterns do exist occasionally means that it is a practical possibility. Obviously its successful operation requires not only good intentions but also (a) an appreciation of the role of psychological and social problems in shop society (b) the ability to properly analyse and solve these problems.

A CASE OF MEDIATION

A case example may serve to illustrate both the nature of some of the problems in shop society which are not solvable by legalistic means and how it is possible for the foreman-steward-worker triangle to operate when a sound relation exists between foreman and steward.

The worker in question, a truck-driver, was being repeatedly tardy to the extent that an eventual dismissal seemed possible. The relations

between the foreman and the truck-driver had become so strained that discussions between the two had become a virtual impossibility. The steward having noticed that both the tardiness and the tension had been building up to an impending climax over several weeks made it a point to chat with the worker. The steward listened to the truck-driver's story without agreeing, disagreeing, or offering his opinions and advice. The steward knew the driver to be a shy and self-conscious person and he kept this in mind as he listened.

One day, a month before, the driver had been standing by his truck while it was being unloaded in the terminal. Nearby were a group of terminal workers whom he knew quite well. The foreman came up and criticized him loudly and openly before these men, complaining in strong terms that the driver had just been smoking a cigarette a few minutes previously which was a strict violation of the rules against fire hazards. He was warned strongly about future violations and with this the foreman strode angrily away. The driver told the steward that he was angry, outraged, indignant and hurt because not only had he not been smoking but, as everyone knew, he was one of the most conscientious persons in the terminal on all matters having to do with safety. What had hurt even more, he said, was that the foreman and he were good friends and, secondly, that the group had watched and heard the entire episode. The steward, listening, imagined how extremely indignant and hurt the worker had been by this episode, being to begin with a sensitive and shy person. The driver explained that he had become so thoroughly disgusted as a result, that he lost interest in his work and began to come late to work in the mornings. When he came late the foreman instead of speaking to him, ridiculed and joked at him about it instead of speaking seriously as he did with the other men. Furthermore, he complained, the foreman was now giving all the dirty jobs and also forcing him to work over-time. He explained that it was obvious the foreman was "riding" him and that he no longer cared whether he stayed with the company under these circumstances. He also explained that in the last week he had tried to come to work on time and as far as he was concerned he didn't care if he were fired because he no longer wished to have anything to do with the Company.

After hearing the worker's story the steward went to the foreman. He didn't protest or complain but instead listened to the foreman. This is the story he received from the foreman.

One day, a month before, the superintendent of the Terminal had strode up angrily to say that he had just seen this driver smoking in the

terminal. The superintendent was extremely indignant and explained that since he had just complained about the smoking problem a few days previously that the foreman had either done nothing about it or else was obviously incapable of preserving proper safety discipline among his men. The foreman, remembering that he had spoken already to the men once before about smoking and feeling humiliated by the severe dressing-down he had just received, went immediately out of his office, over to the driver and angrily gave him a thorough dressing-down.

A few days later he noticed that the driver was coming in late. Feeling a little guilty about having disciplined the driver so thoroughly already about the smoking and remembering — now that he was in a cooler temper — that the driver had a kind of inferiority complex, he tried to handle the lateness by joking with the driver about it rather than speaking harshly. However the lateness continued and he was at a loss to know why the driver had suddenly changed from a reliable worker to one who violated the smoking rules and came in late. Remembering that the driver had always looked for over-time work he started to put him on jobs as often as possible that were bound to go over-time. At this point, the tension had become greater and he did not discuss these over-time assignments with the worker. Knowing that this driver had had financial problems in the recent past, the foreman assumed that the driver's attitudes and behaviour on the job were the result of more financial worries. Despite this, he explained to the steward the driver was coming late more and more often. He added that he had heard just the day before that the driver was telling everyone that he intended to quit because he couldn't stand the foreman. The foreman added that he would be glad to see the driver go because he was unreliable, ungrateful and couldn't be helped.

Faced by this monumental misunderstanding between the two, the steward spent the next three days working with both individually. He discovered that apparently the worker had not been smoking but had been holding an unlit cigaret when the superintendent had seen him. The superintendent had jumped to the conclusion that the man was smoking and this was what he had told the foreman. The steward explained this to the foreman who believed it. He also explained how the driver was reacting to the foreman's jokes about lateness and to the overtime. He explained to the driver that the foreman had been told that the worker had been smoking, that the foreman was not trying to ridicule him, and that the foreman had actually been trying to help him

by the overtime assignments. As a result of a great deal of patience and skill the steward in a series of discussions succeeded in clearing up the misunderstanding. A week later the worker was coming in punctually everyday, and was in good spirits. Relations between foreman and driver were back on their previous good terms.

THE DEMANDS OF THE ENTERPRISE

Given the existence of a foreman-steward relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence and a problem-solving rather legalistic viewpoint, there is a further area of human problems which may activate contacts between them. Not only does the worker have problems arising from all his demands on the enterprise but also the enterprise may have problems arising from the employee's failures to meet the demands of the enterprise.

Where cases arise as they frequently do that a worker cannot meet the requirements as to production, or quality of workmanship, or attendance or punctuality or shop rules the foreman has a problem. So has the worker, since events may appear to be developing steadily in a direction which may automatically necessitate formal discipline or discharge. Again there is an immense variety of possible reasons why a worker may not be meeting these requirements. Personality problems, financial worries, domestic worries, poor health, inadequate ability, poor training are all possible causes. These may be regarded as problems to be solved in a human and analytic manner as well as by methods of formal discipline and grievance appeal. A case example may serve to illustrate.

A CASE OF COOPERATION

The worker in question, a young man in his late twenties and unmarried, began to create difficulties in the work situation. He was getting too little work done, making many errors and creating safety hazards. When spoken to, he was always penitent and seemed to be genuinely concerned with the fact that he was not meeting minimum expectations. He was frequently late or absent from work. On the job, he gave the impression of being bored and uninterested.

When the foreman questioned him about his health, the worker maintained that it was perfect and refused to have a medical examination saying he had had one a year previously. The foreman and steward

foresaw that the situation if continued would lead to a dismissal from employment. The steward and foreman, while not sure, felt it was a health problem even though they had no concrete evidence to support their opinion. After considerable patience and persuasion, in the face of the employee's apparent absent of practical concern about the impending consequences of his behaviour, they succeeded in getting him to pay a reluctant visit to the doctor. The diagnosis turned out to be tuberculosis and the employee had to resign. The foreman and steward were then faced with two new problems: 1) a desire to help the employee find ways and means of getting prolonged treatment in sanatorium and 2) dealing with the complete depression, melancholy and hopelessness of the employee. Without going into details, it may be sufficient to say that with much patience, attention and sympathy they succeeded in both purposes. One year later the employee was back in the work situation doing light duties in the open air pending his fuller and complete recuperation.

This particular foreman-steward relationship has been characterized by a long history of such constructive achievements. Contacts between the two men are frequent and they pride themselves on the fact that they deal with twenty-five times as many informal complaints as formal grievances and particularly on the fact that by frequent advance consultation they are in a position to avoid creating many times more. There is no doubt that the relation this foreman and steward enjoy is unusual nor about the fact that it is due to their own personal characters and administrative abilities. It should be pointed out that the union in question is strong and well-established with a reputation for its vigorous protection of employee interests.

Conclusion

Foreman-steward relations are an immense and important aspect of industrial relations. Their frequency, content and tone are influenced by the over-all climate of relations in the enterprise. Although their basic function is in connection with the grievance procedure, they may extend beyond the contract boundaries to embrace other problems of human relations in shop society. These problems include the endless variety of tensions, conflicts, frustrations, misunderstandings and difficulties that can arise when complex human beings act and interact with the changing, shifting and multi-faceted patterns of shop variety. The approach taken by foreman and steward in developing a working rela-

tionship, whether contractual or more than contractual in coverage, is shaped by beliefs and attitudes toward the question of distribution of authority in the enterprise between union and management; and many of the problems they have to solve, singly or jointly, arise out of the ways in which managerial authority is exercised in everyday shop relations.

SOMMAIRE

CONTACTS ET CONFLITS ENTRE CONTREMAITRE ET DELEGUE D'ATELIER

Lorsque l'on parle de contacts entre contremaître et délégué d'atelier, la question de la procédure de grief est la première chose qui vient à l'esprit. C'est en raison de sa gigantesque étendue, de son rôle dans le système de jurisprudence industrielle, de son intervention incessante dans le cours d'une année, que la procédure de grief est considérée comme la clef de voûte des relations ouvrières dans la société industrielle moderne.

CONTACTS CONTRACTUELS

Les principales catégories de griefs contractuels ont trait aux questions d'ancienneté, de volume de travail, de tarifs, de classification des tâches et de discipline; la *fréquence* et les *types* de griefs ont tendance à varier d'une industrie à l'autre. De plus, les différences de griefs à l'intérieur d'entreprises d'une même industrie sont le résultat de politiques de relations ouvrières différentes, de méthodes de direction et d'administration différentes, de différences d'attitude de la part des dirigeants syndicaux, de conflits, de personnalités entre les hommes clés qui s'affrontent de part et d'autre. Il arrive aussi que dans une même entreprise peu de griefs soient présentés dans une certaine section, tandis que dans une autre section les griefs contractuels sont extrêmement fréquents.

Les relations entre contremaître et délégué auront une plus grande chance de s'étendre en dehors des limites légales du contrat dans une atmosphère où les relations entre le syndicat et la direction sont harmonieuses.

En 1947, sous la présidence de Clinton Golden, un des plus anciens dirigeants du mouvement ouvrier américain, la National Planning Association a institué un comité pour l'étude des causes de la paix industrielle (Committee on the Causes of Industrial Peace); ce comité a été chargé d'effectuer des recherches sur les conditions nécessaires à la bonne entente dans les industries.

En résumé, l'étude de cette association montre que la direction et le syndicat partagent des idées compatibles concernant les devoirs de chacun, que la confiance et le respect mutuel existent, et que la direction exerce son autorité administrative quotidienne en respectant la sensibilité et la dignité des employés.

PROBLÈMES NON-CONTRACTUELS

Les besoins et aspirations qui contrôlent le comportement de l'individu et ses réactions émotives dans l'entreprise industrielle comprennent entre autres, son désir de voir respecter son rang, de recevoir la considération qu'il mérite, de voir respecter sa dignité, sa liberté de parler, son libre-arbitre et son besoin de participer à l'action commune.

Au point de vue psychologique et social, une des plus importantes sources de problèmes dans l'atelier repose sur les rapports entre le contremaître et l'ouvrier, et plus spécialement sur le jeu des activités, des contacts et des sentiments entre ces deux individus. Essentiellement, ces problèmes ont trait à la manière suivant laquelle l'autorité est exercée et aux réactions de l'ouvrier devant cette autorité. Les employés ne réagissent pas contre l'autorité du contremaître, qu'ils considèrent habituellement comme une autorité légitime. Ils réagissent contre la manière suivant laquelle cette autorité est exercée.

En admettant que les rapports entre le contremaître et le délégué soient empreints de respect et de confiance mutuels, il existe toute une nouvelle série de problèmes humains qui peuvent être à l'origine de contacts contremaître-délégué. L'ouvrier a des problèmes qui résultent de toutes ses exigences vis-à-vis de l'entreprise, mais la direction, de son côté, peut avoir des problèmes qui proviennent du fait que l'employé ne répond pas aux exigences de l'entreprise.

On peut distinguer parmi les causes possibles: des problèmes de personnalité, des soucis financiers, des problèmes personnels, une mauvaise santé, des aptitudes qui laissent à désirer, ou une instruction insuffisante. On peut considérer que ces problèmes peuvent être résolus sur le plan humain et par l'analyse autant que par l'usage de mesures disciplinaires et de la procédure de griefs.

CONCLUSION

Les relations entre contremaître et délégué, qu'elles portent strictement sur les griefs contractuels ou qu'elles s'étendent à d'autres problèmes, sont fortement influencées par les opinions et attitudes de chacun sur la question de la répartition de l'autorité dans l'entreprise entre le syndicat et la direction. Enfin, un grand nombre des problèmes qu'ils ont à résoudre séparément ou en commun résultent de la manière suivant laquelle la direction exerce son autorité dans les relations quotidiennes de l'atelier.
