

Career Possibilities in Industrial Relations

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Career Possibilities in Industrial Relations *

When an activity crystallizes into a profession, clear evidence points to the fact. Universities concern themselves more intensively with its subject matter, principles and ethical standards develop, journals are devoted to the subject, it develops its own peculiar language or jargon. All this is today true of "industrial relations", which over the past thirty years have developed from a vague activity, despised or ignored as unnecessary by many, into a wide and important professional field offering a career to those who enter it.

Why have "industrial relations", or to be more precise, the subject of employment relationships, attained such vogue and standing as a vocation, and why is the subject so important today?

Basically, the answer is that our vastly complex North American civilization has as its reason for being the countless wants of our people, the measure of which is our high standard of living and the total of which is ever increasing. But the desires of our people can be satisfied only if the rules or laws which regulate our complex economic system are properly administered and enforced by officers of the public service. As our wants grow and the increasing tempo and complexity of our civilization results, more and more laws are needed for the proper regulation of society and, consequently, more and more public service officers are enrolled. The mechanization of industry and the increasing

emphasis on higher production standards, give rise to problems requiring the services of Industrial Relations Officers.

Certainly there is no field of social or economic activity where there has been so much legislation enacted as in the field of industrial relations. There has been a vast flow of labour legislation during the past twenty-five years and the flow is not diminishing, the result being an ever-expanding demand for industrial relations officers of all grades to administer this legislation. It is not misplaced emphasis to reiterate that by oiling the wheels of industry, by being an "industrial doctor" or "social engineer", the Industrial Relations Officer in the public service makes a material contribution toward the efficiency of our society, to the satisfaction of our wants and our higher standard of living.

It is desirable, before proceeding to a consideration of employment opportunities in industrial relations in the Public Service, to first clarify the meaning of the rather general term "industrial relations" as a field of law and activity which calls for the specialized attention of public service officers. As a field of law it is perhaps more usually known as "labour law" and as such it regulates the industrial relations or employment relationships between management and labour, i.e., between employers and employees. In addition, it regulates the relations between employers and employees as individuals, and between employees and fellow-employees. To give only a few examples, labour law embras-

* Article prepared in the Federal Department of Labour, Ottawa.

ces such widely different subjects as child labour, accident prevention, wages, hours, workmen's compensation and also strikes, picketing, trade union organization and representation, collective bargaining, unfair labour practices, boycotts, injunctions. The field is very broad indeed, so broad that specialized areas have developed which require like specialization on the part of industrial relations officers. For instance, "labour relations" legislation as distinct from the broad area of "labour law", has come to mean those laws which concern concerted, collective activity by employees organized into trade unions and the relations of such employees and trade unions between themselves and with employers.

Though space does not permit an elaboration of the point, it must be set forth here that the need and demand for Industrial Relations Officers is not confined to the public service field of federal, provincial and municipal governments. Industry has absorbed a great number and will continue to do so. The universities, to satisfy the demand for courses in labour problems and economics, have established industrial relations institutes, divisions, or sections and have staffed them with labour economists, i.e., Industrial Relations Specialists. In fact, industry and educational institutions to some extent compete with the Public Service for competent personnel.

Of late years, trade unions and trade union central organizations, as well as similar organizations of employers, have offered employment to labour economists in their research bureaus and activities.

Above, we spoke of industrial relations as a field of law and *activity* and it should be made clear that not all persons engaged in the Public Service as Industrial Relations Officers are engaged in enforcing laws

and regulations. Many forms of industrial relations activity have nothing to do with law but are concerned with the propagation of ideal practices for the better development of human relations, individual welfare, or industrial efficiency. In this category, to give only one example, would be placed those Industrial Relations Officers who are charged with the encouragement of labour-management production committees — a voluntary activity entirely in Canada at the present time.

Turning now to a more direct consideration of our subject, there is ample opportunity for men — and women to a lesser degree — who are properly trained and educated, to make a career as Industrial Relations Officers in the Public Service. This is said having in mind both immediate needs and future needs engendered by expanding areas of present legislation and the development of new legislation. For instance, a greater coverage of classes of employees can emerge in unemployment insurance and workmen's accident compensation and these, by new enactments, can develop into sickness or disability insurance. The only limit to the scope of industrial relations work is the ability of the public exchequer to engage upon the work which might be done.

The particular degree of training or education required will vary, as is obvious, with the particular type of industrial relations work undertaken. The inspection and investigation of wage rates will require a good deal of prior practical training and experience as opposed to formal education and this order will be reversed where the officer is required to make complex and technical statistical analyses of industrial relations data. It cannot be denied, however, that persons having practical experience, for instance as trade union

officials or management personnel officials, have a decided advantage in certain lines of industrial relations work over persons having only academic qualifications. This is especially true in regard to the more responsible positions in industrial relations, and public service advertisements invariably specify some degree of practical experience.

Another important factor is the maturity of age and experience which normally would accompany a significant period of practical training. A young university graduate, no matter how well qualified academically, could not hope to successfully act as a government Conciliation Officer in a complicated industrial dispute where he would be required to reconcile the inflexible and divergent views of men many years his senior in age and experience.

A combination of both formal education and practical experience would make for an ideally qualified Industrial Relations Officer. These qualifications plus the experience gained on the job in the Public Service should ensure rapid advancement.

So wide is the range of industrial relations work, some types of which are mentioned below, that the personal qualities of those seeking appointment as officers may have a corresponding variation. While a wage analyst could well be without harm to his work, of the type described as introverted, an officer engaged in work requiring contact with employers and employees can be of an opposite type.

However, so wide is the industrial relations field that specialization in one area of work is the rule. The man with practical training only will usually gravitate to related work but the university graduate who has specialized in labour problems and economics will find that his courses pro-

vide a general springboard. His courses in statistics, labour organization, collective bargaining, labour legislation, government intervention in labour disputes, social insurance, industrial management, sociology, psychology (social, applied or industrial), personnel problems, vocational guidance and placement, etc., will provide for more flexibility in his choice of work.

Employment opportunities for Industrial Relations Officers will usually be found in Departments of Labour, Labour Relations Boards, social insurance commissions, compensation boards, etc., but other Departments of Government carrying on inspection (Transport) or sanitation (Health and Welfare) also require a quota of officers, who, under a general title, carry out industrial relations work in the sense discussed above. But wherever employed, the Officer will find himself given one of a bewildering array of titles, doing work which may be approximately and generally classified as follows: personnel administration, employment selection and placement, vocational training, wages and hours, vacations with pay, health and safety, research and statistics, labour relations, legislative interpretation and administration, social insurance, mediation and arbitration, labour and employer organization, labour reporting and journalism. The far greater proportion of this work will be external in application, directed toward private employers and employees but it must not be forgotten that governments themselves are the largest of employers and public service employees are equally in need of the service of Industrial Relations Officers.

Men who have made a career of Industrial Relations work, whether in public or private service, point to the personal satisfaction experienced in following the profession, the sense of achievement, the opportunity for

planning and exercise of judgment, and, above all, the good feeling which comes from the knowledge that industrial relations work makes

a most important contribution to personal, social, industrial and national welfare.

ARBITRATION STATISTICS

Arbitration Boards in the Province of Quebec

From January 1st, 1950 to December 31, 1950, 73 Arbitration Boards have been established by the Quebec Minister of Labour. On January 1st, 1950, 22 boards were already in action. They had been formed in 1949. This brings the total of Arbitration Boards to 95 for 1950; the number of employees concerned is 29,036. 80, of the 95 Boards, rendered their award during the year 1950 and 15 were still in function on January 1st, 1951.

The parties, by their respective arbitrator, have recommended voluntarily the President of the Board in 64.2% of the cases. One can certainly consider this fact as an expression of the desire of both parties to come to an agreement even when appealing to arbitration.

Of the 95 Arbitration Boards mentioned here, 87 were constituted for private enterprises, 4 for public services, and 4 for health services.

According to trade union affiliation, these Boards are divided as follows: CCCL, 34;

CCL (CIO), 20; TLC (AFL), 38; CLA Inc. 2 and Independent, 1. The Industry Group distribution and employees concerned are the following: Manufacturing: 73 Boards covering 18,359 employees. Building Construction: 2 Boards for 3,800 employees. Transports and Communications: 7 Boards concerning 5,511 employees. Trade: 7 Boards for 745 employees. Services: 6 Boards and 621 employees.

As can be readily seen, the Manufacturing Group, covering the greatest number of workers has required the most boards of arbitration. It is also in this Group that the main labour organizations count the greatest number of members in as much as the arbitration cases for 1950 are concerned.

It is interesting to note that 73 of these Boards concerning 18,359 employees have been formed for Manufacturing Industries, when only 22 covering 10,677 employees have been formed for the other groups.

Clauses submitted to arbitration during the fiscal year 1949-50

From April 1, 1949, to April 1, 1950, the official statistics of the Department of Labour show that there had been 131 arbitration cases.

Here are the different clauses submitted to arbitration in these cases:

Jurisdiction 1; rights of management 2; after a strike 2; union security 42; grievance procedure 10; seniority clauses 16; promotion, lay-off 5; duration of labour 35; guaranteed minimum conditions 5; overtime 21;

paid holidays 34; vacation with pay 46; statutory holidays 16; safety 5; social security 18; pension plans 5; apprenticeship 4; wages 91; job classification 11; duration and renewal of agreement 12; the whole collective agreement 30.

It is easy to see that clauses dealing with wages are more numerous. Union security, vacation with pay, paid holidays, grievance procedure and the duration of labour are actually with salary provisions the main clauses brought to arbitration.