

Solidarity demands that people work together

By JOHN SOMMER

Whenever there is a public sector strike in this country, the beautiful word (and concept) "solidarity" gets an awful beating.

What does "solidarity" mean, for instance, if it is demanded by a young postal worker from an old single woman who is barely making it on her pension cheque from one month to another?

What the word "solidarity" means is that you put your own interest aside for the time being to help somebody who is in a worse position than you are. Looked at it that way, we have to admit that the old woman is hardly in a position to help anybody. She is lucky if she manages to the next cheque, right?

What a strike is all about is not solidarity but power.

As humans we are engaged in power games all the time, and often these games become bloody wars.

Unions did not come about because workers had it so good. The early effects of the Industrial Revolution were comparable to enslavement. When the old trades were replaced with industrial mass production, thousands of starving craftsmen and women flooded to the cities, where the lucky ones found employment in factories very different from our factories today, and at wages so low that we today cannot even imagine how these miserable work-slaves stayed alive, and, of course many of them didn't.

You only have to read the novels of Charles Dickens to get an idea what it was like.

The single worker was totally helpless against the financial power of the factory owner. By banding together, and by striking, they hoped to better their lot. These early strikes were illegal strikes and they were brought to an end by replacing the strikers with other starving wretches, or by killing most of them (the army in those days was always on the side of the factory owner), or by bringing them around by starving their families.

This was not a pretty picture, in particular not in countries that prided themselves on being Christian. But already in those days people in power could be found who were willing to share their enormous wealth with the people who had made that wealth possible in the first place. And besides, the workers in the 19th century had nothing to lose. Their lives were so little worth living that they again and again put them on the line, until they won the right of strike and to do so without having to endanger their lives.

That was a great and proud fight, and winning it established democracy and made our present high living standard possible.

The poverty in Eastern Europe, by comparison, is due to the fact, that there, one absolute power (the power of the Tsar) was replaced by another absolute power, (the power of the party), with the result that the people



Ideas and The Arts by John Sommer

who create the wealth were never able to become partners in negotiating their wages.

He who has absolute power has a monopoly on power, therefore monopolies have absolute power or at least more power than anybody or anything should have. Our whole system rests on a constantly adjusted balance and sharing of power. The adjusting has to be done by us, not by a heavenly force or by the government. WE are the arbiters of our actions.

Which brings me back to where I started.

Of course, government employees have to be partners in their wage settlements, they cannot just be dictated to. But in order to become equal to the workers in private industries, who are at the mercy of the market and might lose their jobs at any time, postal workers and government employees of all kinds have to be willing to shoulder some risks.

There should not be a monopoly

attached to any of these so-called essential services. If they are essential they have to be available at ALL times. If they are not really essential, if we can do without them during a strike, then let us abolish them and use the money for more important things.

Jobs cannot be for life. If we want them to be for life we will have to make them so for everybody, in which case we are talking about a different system altogether.

Two Halton Hills artists have moved their creations into the Gallery of the Halton Hills Cultural Centre in Georgetown,

where they will be on show for the remainder of the month.

Shirley Brambley exhibits very nice and luminous floral watercolors. Her landscapes are less good - in particular a few oil paintings that look to me unnecessarily drab, at least in comparison with her watercolors.

Beverley Didur exhibits several series of delightful monochromes that are veritable fireworks of invention. She also includes some collages, bits of paper and other materials encased in plastic boxes, that are joyous and experimental. It's the kind of exhibition that will tempt me to go back for more than one visit.

Folk art painting offered in the "Hills"

Folk art painting is based on thousands of years of traditional techniques used to decorate useful objects and gifts. Basic patterns are transferred onto wood, tin or other material and painted with acrylics. Anyone with a desire to learn decorative painting can master the techniques.

The Credit Valley Artisans are offering a six week course in Tole and Folk Art Painting on Tuesday evenings starting September 24. Acton resident Brenda LaRose will be the instructor. Brenda learned the painting technique of folk art four years ago and has taught for three years from her home studio "Forget-Me-Not Folk Art." She is a member of the National Society

of Tole and Decorative Painters.

This beginner's course is designed for those who have little or no painting or drawing skills. Students will be introduced to the basic brush strokes and techniques. One item will be completed in each class including a marbelized box and duck serviette holder. A generalized instructional handbook and full written step-by-step instructions for all class pieces will be provided. The course will be held at Cedarvale Cottage in Cedarvale Park, Georgetown.

For further information contact E.S. Nielsen, Course Coordinator, at 877-7042 between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Deadline for registration in this course is Wednesday, September 18, 1991.

Prices effective thru Saturday September 21, 1991

We reserve the right to limit quantities to normal family requirements. Coupon items limited to two.



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