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Successful Handling of Labor Grievances

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BOOK REVIEW

SUCCESSFUL HANDLING OF LABOR GRIEVANCES. By Bertram R. Crane and Roger M. Hoffman. New York, Central Book Company, Inc. 1956.

Leaders of both labor and management, and the attorneys for both, will find this analysis of labor grievance problems and procedures an objective guide to sensible, just and humane handling of grievances which arise throughout industry. The authors have isolated and spotlighted the labor grievance problem, and treated it in distinction from collective bargaining problems generally encountered in the collective bargaining processes of labor-management relations.

The book is divided into three major parts, the first being devoted to an explanation of the objectives of grievance procedures and the definition of a labor grievance. A major difficulty in arriving at a concise definition of what constitutes a labor grievance is first pointed out and alternative definitions are presented and analyzed. The authors demonstrate that the most realistic definition of a labor grievance consists of a synthesis of the very narrow legalistic contractual definition frequently insisted upon by management on the one hand, and the very broad and all inclusive definition often insisted upon by labor, on the other. Labor grievances are not strictly confined to violations of the precise and express terms of the collective bargaining agreement spelled out in writing therein, nor should the term "grievance" include every conceivable difficulty arising out of the relations between employer and employee. It is concluded that a middle-of-the-road approach, which takes into account both the "human relations" factor, and the limitations of the contractual obligation, is the most conducive to mature and effective handling of the labor grievance.

A definition of the labor grievance and a statement of the objectives of grievance machinery are treated as prerequisites to the further discussion, in Part II, of the detailed operation of the grievance machinery itself in labor agreements. The various steps involved in grievance procedure are stated, beginning with the individual worker's complaint at the foreman's level. It is pointed out that many grievances may be disposed of informally and orally at this level, where common sense and ordinary fairness on both sides will often operate to dispose of problems at the outset if supervisory personnel display proper understanding and leadership abil-

ity in shop administration. Additional steps involving more formalized procedures are then discussed, including the advantages and disadvantages of an oral or written procedure, adaptations to the size of the plant, time limitations, retroactivity, and questions concerning the persons qualified to handle grievance problems at the various administrative steps in the grievance procedure. Treatment is given to the merits and dangers involved in the handling of grievances by representatives of unions on behalf of individual workers on one hand, and by representatives of management, often removed from the scene of the grievance, on the other. The terminology of various specific contract clauses dealing with these factors are set forth and contrasted.

The detailed statement of the mechanics of grievance machinery in Part II is the foundation for the third and final part of the discussion which is concerned with the attitudes, practices and policies of both management and union, as such attitudes and policies influence the actual operation of grievance machinery. Management obstruction to grievance settlement consisting of indifference, poor company organization, and the influence of economic conditions are cited, as well as union blockades to grievance settlement consisting of top union adamancy, union propaganda and union organizational defects.

Having pinpointed these factors detrimental to the mature handling of grievances, the authors then set forth specific affirmative policies and practices which, if resorted to by both parties, should be most certainly conducive to the prevention, as well as the expeditious settlement of grievances. A determined effort by management in locating and controlling the causes of grievances, through the use of turn-over analyses, suggestion systems, attitude surveys, placement policies, and work evaluation policies, is recognized as a basic need. The control of grievances by workable personnel practices is given considerable emphasis and a detailed treatment of such practices is set forth. The foreman's job in grievance control and in the settling of grievances is then recognized for its focal importance. The selection and training of foremen, as well as the delegation of responsibility and authority to them, as such factors bear upon their ability to prevent, control and settle grievances, are discussed with candor. As a corollary to management practices, grievance handling from the union side is then recognized as requiring good union relations with foremen involving worker and union ability to get all the facts, test the validity

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of a grievance before making a case of it, preparing the grievance case for presentation to a foreman, and dealing with "phony" grievances. Grievance codes of policy and procedure for both foremen and union stewards are set forth as efficient and honorable guides, a fitting conclusion for a book which commendably demonstrates the necessity for ethical and humane standards for both employer and employee in the peaceable and efficient conduct of industrial relations.

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