

Collectively Bargained Length-of-Service Benefits

Status attained owing to length of service is a prized asset to the average worker, as it may govern his claim to a job in the event of reduction in force, or his chances for promotion to a better job. Length of vacation or sick leave, eligibility for a pension, or selection for work on the day or the "lobster" or "graveyard" shift are other important benefits determined or based on seniority.

To determine the prevalence of various length-of-service benefits which make workers reluctant to transfer to new jobs, 330 current collective-bargaining agreements covering over 4 million workers were analyzed by the bureau of labor statistics.

In the minds of many workers, the rights and benefits acquired through length of service serve as a strong deterrent to changing jobs.

At a time of national emergency, however, worker reluctance to lose seniority by moving to other jobs — while understandable from the individual worker's standpoint — may prevent the most effective allocation of manpower. This is especially true currently, when increasing defense production at some plants and decreasing civilian goods production at others call for a considerable degree of labor mobility. Payment of higher wage rates in defense industries tends to overcome the reluctance of workers to give up their old jobs, but this in turn increases the difficulty of stabilizing wages and preventing inflationary trends.

Rights and benefits based on length of service may be classified in two categories: (1) Benefits or privileges earned by an employee's length of service without reference to length of service of other employees; these include paid vacation, sick leave, and automatic increases under a wage progression plan. (2) Rights and benefits which are determined by seniority

(i.e., employee's length of service relative to each other); examples are claims to jobs in event of lay-offs, promotions, or transfers, and choice of shift.

Unions generally favor seniority as the governing factor in selecting employees for lay-off, promotions, etc. They maintain that a reasonably close correlation exists between length of service and efficiency and that merit and other factors are too difficult to measure objectively. A disadvantage of seniority, from the union standpoint, is the possibility that it may cause dissension among members. Younger workers sometimes feel that strict application of the seniority principle favors older workers at their expense.

Many employers, on the other hand, assert that to give seniority more weight than merit tends to reduce ef-

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