

The Honorable Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr.
City of Atlanta
City Hall
Atlanta, Georgia

*Admittedly
Receipt & Thank him for
his suggestions*

Sir:

As an economics professor (Georgia Tech), I have a ~~more~~ than casual interest in the present firemen's dispute, but let me emphasize that I am writing this as a private citizen. Thus, I hope you will respect my position by maintaining complete confidence. Also, please understand that my remarks, while admittedly blunt at times, are offered in good faith.

I note that you have said that you would not talk to the firemen until the court order is obeyed. While I agree completely, I think your original mistake was in recognizing the union as the bargaining agent for wages and hours. True, you have not granted formal recognition, as the term is used in Federal laws. But you have tacitly sanctioned collective action by the mere fact that you attempted a settlement on those issues.

On the other hand, to compound your folly, you have refused to recognize the firemen on non-economic issues. There is virtually unanimous agreement among those who have studied worker attitudes that the one thing heading their list of desires is freedom from arbitrary action. And I strongly suspect that if you had really delved into the situation, you would have found that what the rank-and-file firemen really want is the assurance of some voice in determining their working conditions and other non-economic items. (The American Bar Association, as early as 1955, went on record as favoring the granting of such privileges to public employees.)

Your mock "mediation" was a farce, again reflecting a short-run, short-sighted, holding action. (And the consulting firm's report will not likely get to the bottom of the issue, since such reports seldom study the human relations aspect.) You apparently did not even know the difference between mediation and fact-finding, since you appointed a fact-finder, but called him a mediator, yet did not allow him to mediate. If the outside neutral had really been allowed to mediate, he very possibly could have settled the problem amicably, and without dealing with economic issues.

As a long-time student of the subject, I would say that our attitudes toward labor problems have gone through three stages: First, the purely arbitrary approach, which means fire any one who raises a protest. Second, one of appeasement, which was reflected in the days of paternalism, which prevailed especially from the turn of this century to the late 1930's. Finally, recognition was granted to worker groups, and it is only since then that we have had reasonably calm industrial relations.

In my opinion, appeasement is the worst of the three, yet this was your original approach. Now, you have taken the second worst approach - that of arbitrariness. And I am highly afraid that discharging and replacing the firemen, while it may close the wound immediately, may cause a continuing festering underneath, breaking out elsewhere in time. That is, if the City gains the reputation of being an Iron Hand-type of employer, recruiting will in time become difficult, especially when we went so wild with public funds to obtain a stadium, inter alia.

In addition, even in the short run, it would seem that replacing the firmen will be cumbersome and terribly expensive. Thus, I am wondering if the matter might not be settled by taking a conciliatory approach (which you have not done at any time). If the recognition of a union as the representative of public employees is prohibited by state law, why not promise to support legislation accordingly (some sixteen states have such legislation, usually permitting municipalities to grant recognition on non-economic items). Presidential Executive Order 10988, signed by the late President Kennedy in 1962, could serve as a guide; it permits advisory arbitration, but again, prohibits strikes; also, negotiations over wages and other economic issues is not permitted, and virtually all experts agree that collective bargaining over wages is simply not compatible with public employment.

Now in closing, let me point out that if you insist on following your present approach, it behooves you to fire every salvo available; otherwise, we may have a general strike of the type Britain, et al, is noted. I would suggest that you inform the public of the facts of the situation. Toward that end, I have put together ~~some~~ items for your perusal. Since I am trying to get this letter in the morning mail, it is rather disjointed, but you can get the content.

Again, I would much prefer a conciliatory approach, even at this late hour.

Sincerely,

Mack A. Moore

Mack A. Moore

670 Edgewater Trail, N.W. (Sandy Springs)

Phone: home, 255-4172; office, 873-4211, X5543

P.S. There is no suggestion intended that you will want to contact me. The above information is only in case you might.

Note: I am fairly well acquainted among union circles (and am president of the Georgia Chapter of the Student Relations Research Association. If you would like for me to do some informal, undercover "feeling out" of the firmen's real position, I should be happy to do so.