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Manager's Memo: A New Look at Unionism, 1985

Leonard C. Scott

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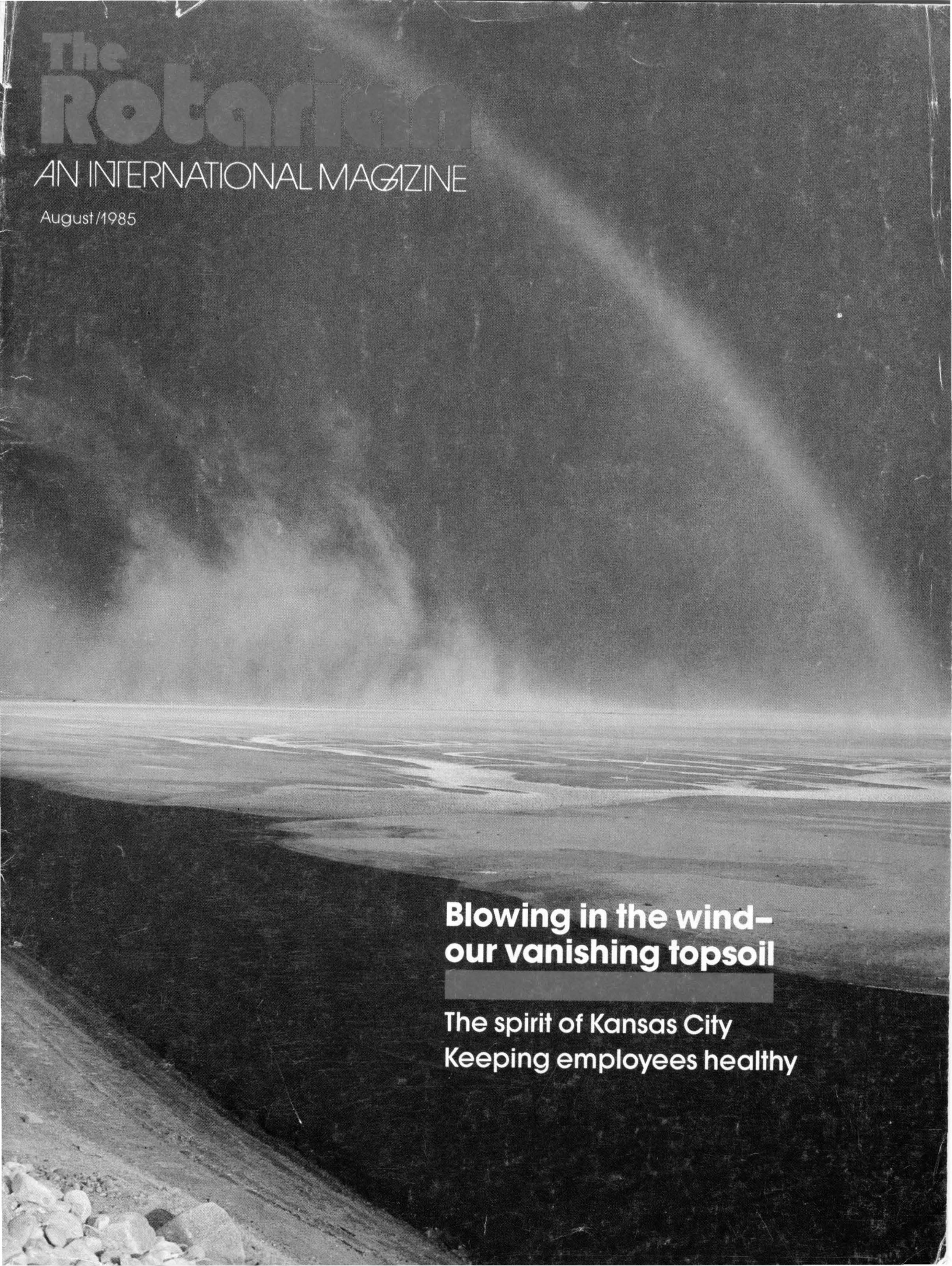
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Manager's Memo: A New Look at Unionism, 1985



The
Rotarian

AN INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

August 1985

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Published monthly by Rotary International, 1600 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201, U.S.A. Telex number: 4330058, Evanston, Ill. Cable: Interotary. Telephone: (312) 328-0100. Subscription rates: \$8.00 a year; single copies 75 cents. Subscription to REVISTA ROTARIA (Spanish edition) \$8. For information on airmail rates for both editions, write Circulation Dept. When ordering change of address, enclose old address label; include your postal code; also state your Rotary club—without it change cannot be made. As the official publication of Rotary International, this magazine carries authoritative notices and articles about Rotary International. Otherwise no responsibility is assumed for statements of authors. Any use of fictionalized names that correspond to the names of actual persons is unintentional and is to be regarded as a coincidence. Manuscripts or art submitted to THE ROTARIAN should be accompanied by addressed envelopes and return postage. No responsibility is assumed for return of unsolicited manuscripts or art. THE ROTARIAN is registered in the United States Patent Office. Contents © 1985 by Rotary International. All rights reserved. Second Class Postage paid at Glasgow, Kentucky, U.S.A., and at Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A.

This is the August 1985 issue, volume 147, number 2 of THE ROTARIAN (ISSN 0035-838X). Publication number: USPS 548-810 POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE ROTARIAN, 1600 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201.



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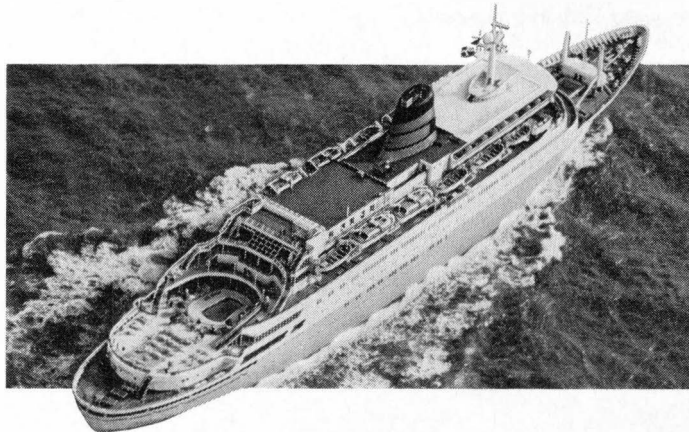
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A new look at unionism

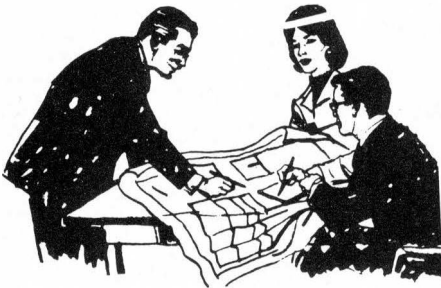
BY LEONARD C. SCOTT

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* contained some interesting findings regarding the attitudes of U.S. employers and workers toward unionism. Virtually all employers surveyed were anti-union. This was not surprising. However, a wide majority of workers polled also were against unions. Yet, these same workers indicated they think unions can bring about higher wages and better working conditions.



How did this seemingly paradoxical situation arise and what does it mean?

First, workers now identify higher wages and benefits with higher prices, as a result of the wage-price spiral which they experienced in the late 1960's and throughout the



1970's. Second, workers just don't want the problems connected with employer-resisted representation elections, picketing, strikes, lock-outs, grievances, arbitrations hearings, and other contentious labor-management activities. Workers clearly want to avoid the stress that adversarial labor-management relations bring to their workplaces. Third, they realize that higher wages and prices often lead to the loss of jobs to other countries. This knowledge plus the uneasiness generated by continuing high unemployment



reinforces their attitude of shunning unions.

The meaning of this ambivalent attitude toward unions is clear. Workers seem to be ready to team up with bosses to do what needs to be done to increase job security and improve wages and working conditions. All they need is a little encouragement.

Employers can either revert to the indifference and negativity toward workers that existed in pre-World War II days or they can view this situation as a golden opportunity to develop a synergistic relationship with their employees. If workers now look to employers more strongly than ever to improve their economic conditions, why not establish communication and education programs that build solid employee trust, cement labor-management cooperation, and tap the creative energies of workers and managers for the achievement of organization-wide objectives? The time appears to be ripe for employers to take all workers into the fold and fix in them a pride of employment, loyalty to the firm, respect for top quality, cost control, high productivity, and a competitive spirit *vis-a-vis* both foreign and domestic producers in their industry.

What kind of communication and education programs are needed?

The programs should explain the new market system that is entrenching itself in the world. Workers need to be told about benefits and risks



and how they can minimize these risks as they relate to their jobs. The programs should also explain the relationship between wages, prices, and profits. For example, workers must understand that if wages go up without a corresponding increase in productivity, prices must rise or profits and the ability to grow must decline. Workers need to be told what foreign competition is all about and how it affects their company, their jobs, and the prices they pay for products. The general economic concept of comparative advantage should be covered. Finally, programs should explain terms like market share, return on investment, strength of the dollar [and the national currency], foreign trade deficit, prime rate, and national debt.



In reality all it will take to capture this golden opportunity is a positive attitude toward human resources, a minimum expenditure of time and money, and a continuing belief that an organization that pulls together is more effective than one that doesn't. As more and more employers reach out to grasp this opportunity, the economy as a whole will clearly grow in strength.

• Leonard C. Scott, a principal of The Evans Group in Dallas, Texas, is a consultant in worker education and human resources management to a number of top U.S. firms.