

Private Members' Business

an ongoing labour dispute. Is that the kind of labour relations the federal government is prepared to accept? Of course we did hear various arguments, such as: "Look, this is not going far enough, the minister wields too much power when it comes to defining essential services; this should be enlarged, covering government employees and all employers coming under a federal charter."

We agree of course, but we are only on second reading. Members who stand up to vote later today will be telling us whether, in principle, they agree or disagree that time has come to inject some civility into labour relations in Canada. And then if they want to move amendments, as we might ourselves, they will have an opportunity to appear before the legislative committee and propose any amendment they deem relevant or necessary. Should they feel dissatisfied about the way their proposed amendments have been dealt with on third reading they will still have the option to vote against the bill.

Claiming that one does not agree because the measure goes too far or not far enough smacks of hypocrisy, because we all know that the parliamentary process gives us a further opportunity to do some fine tuning so the bill will more closely reflect our point of view. For now we are debating the principle and members will be asked whether they think Quebec was right 13 years ago to set up a tolerant system which restored real balance between opposing forces, which is exactly what they were, Mr. Speaker.

As management representative for many years I had to deal with strikes and I know very well that if we want to maintain proper balance between opposing parties there can be no question as to what is a strike and what is a lockout. Mr. Speaker, a labour dispute involving scabs simply cannot be called a strike, it is a subversive and hypocritical denial of the right to strike. One is either in favour of or against the right to strike—a basic right in social relations in this country. If you are in favour you do not want to lessen or indirectly undermine the worker's sacred right to strike, a right which Canadian employers have learned to live with.

Canada is not a Middle-Age country, Mr. Speaker. Employers have long since learned what a strike or a lockout is and they are quite prepared to negotiate.

Quebecers have been living in this enlightened labour climate for 13 years now, Mr. Speaker, and I submit that this House would be undignified if it were to refuse to bring the federal government into the democratic context of the 20th century.

[English]

Mr. Terry Clifford (London—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I rise to join the debate on Bill C-201, a proposed amendment to the Canadian Labour Code which, if passed, would prohibit the hiring of replacement workers by a federal Crown corporation whose employees were on a legal strike or locked out by the employer. The bill also contains provisions which are intended to ensure that essential services are maintained in the event of a strike or a lockout in a Crown corporation.

I wish to commend the hon. member for Richelieu for the initiative which he has shown in bringing this particular subject to the attention of hon. members. There is no doubt that the employment of replacement workers during work stoppages is an issue which deserves careful consideration in this House. Whether or not the situation in federal Crown corporations dictates the need for legislation, such as is proposed in the bill, is a matter which individual members will have to weigh carefully based on the arguments put forward during the course of this debate.

[Translation]

As far as I know, Mr. Speaker, Quebec is the only province that has legislative provisions banning the hiring of scabs. The law was first adopted in 1977 and amended in 1983 so as to cover outside consultants and subcontractors.

[English]

Several jurisdictions, including the federal realm under Part I of the Canada Labour Code, protects an employee's right to return to work following a work stoppage, in preference to a person hired as a replacement, and prohibit the disciplining of an employee for having taken part in a legal work stoppage.

In Quebec, two objectives of the legislation prohibiting the use of replacement workers were stated as the reduction of the incidence of violence in labour disputes and a decline in the duration of the work stoppage.