

*Government Orders*

how we are bribing the professional workers to keep on working—these people who support the hospital service workers, who support their work, who provide meals, cleaning, personal care, love and attention to the veterans in that hospital—and how it is costing us millions of dollars a day to keep these people away from work. They are providing special meals and are being provided extra pay. They are using the word of these professional workers who say: “Yes, conditions in the hospital are deteriorating”. Then they are taking those words and twisting them, something which seems to be a speciality of the government with seniors as well, and saying: “That is why we need back to work legislation”. That is not what those professionals are saying. They resent their words being used in that way.

I said that this demonstrates the arrogance and the willingness of this government to use its power instead of using good management and good labour negotiation techniques to reach a mutually amicable settlement to send people back to work with some sense of dignity, some pride in the work they do and some sense that their government appreciates the work they do. What this clause does is stack the negotiations, stack the conciliation process against them.

I want to remind the House that the conciliation process will be binding. These people will have to accept whatever comes out of that. That is what this government is imposing on them. It is stacking the deck against them by not following the normal procedure whereby each party to a negotiation names its representative and then those people agree on a mutually acceptable chair. It is instead appointing two out of three members of the conciliation board. What possible chance does the other side have when the government, with all its power, is saying: “We have got the majority on the board before it ever starts”? They are particularly concerned because the government has chosen in the conciliation of the hospital service workers’ contract to bring in a new chair. This is not the person who throughout October listened to the arguments of both parties and was acceptable to both parties, who knows the issues, the situation, the status of the negotiations and might be able to proceed reasonably quickly to reach a settlement. They have

chosen to bring in a new person, unfamiliar with the situation, somebody who has not been previously agreed to by both parties to the negotiations.

Is it any wonder that the hospital service workers think the government is deliberately bringing in a chair of this board who is favourable to the government’s position, or likely to be?

The government could quite easily accept this amendment and put in place a fair process. It might give some remote hope to these people who are being forced back to work because the government has failed and neglected to fulfil its duty as an employer to reach an agreement with them and that they could go back with some optimism that this might be settled fairly. With the government stacking the deck against them this way they are going to go back to work bitter, defeated, and convinced that this government has no concept of the value of their work. Their patients do, and I think that is what has sustained them throughout.

The veterans in those hospitals and the Armed Forces personnel who they look after support these people. The volunteers in the hospital issued a press release just yesterday in support of the work they do and urging the government to be fair with them. The Human Rights Commission supports them. The Human Rights Commission has said: “Yes, since 1981 these people have been working for far less than they are worth and because of the inaction of this government they are still working for far less than they are worth.”

Don’t give me words about pay equity, equal pay for work of equal value, respecting the work of women as well as we respect the work of men, respecting the work of people at all levels. You have the chance to put in place a reasonably fair process, even in the context of this legislation. If the government members stand up and vote against this motion, don’t ever say nice words in this House again because nobody will believe you.

I urge the government members to acknowledge that this is a fair amendment, that it gives the conciliation boards a reasonable chance of succeeding in the difficult work before them, and that it gives the workers a chance to go back in the two weeks before Christmas in a