

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

this bill to allow the parties involved, that is the employer and employees, to agree on a measure which everyone would find satisfactory.

Unfortunately, this suggestion was not accepted, and we are now at the third reading stage of Bill C-45, which I find abusive and which will not have the support of the Members of the Official Opposition.

We regret the inflexibility of the Government in this case since this is the first opportunity for Parliament to act generously with its employees on Parliament Hill. However, the Government, through the Government House Leader, recently published a communiqué to explain the context of the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Bill. This release says: "The issue of the right to collective bargaining for parliamentary employees has been debated at least since 1967. Since then, there had been many reports and studies, but no Government legislation had been proposed before."

In the fall of 1983 began a series of certification applications presented under the Canadian Labour Code by unions wanting to be recognized as the bargaining agents for certain parliamentary employees. The Canada Labour Relations Board said that it was asserted qualified to hear them, but until now, it has published no certification order.

The Canada Labour Code is the act which governs collective bargaining for private sector workers under the jurisdiction of Parliament. Some fear that certification under the Code accompanied with the full right to strike might seriously jeopardize the efficient operation of Parliament. This is why the Government introduced this bill which, in a manner of speaking, takes away the full right to strike from our parliamentary employees.

I find the attitude of the Government somewhat strange in this case. Indeed, would the fact that the messengers of the House of Commons and certain employees of the Parliamentary Library were on strike at a given time seriously compromise the efficient operation of Parliament? I ask this question seriously.

Our colleague for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom) who spoke before me in this debate pointed out quite rightly that the employees of other parliaments in the world have the right to strike. However, the mother of Parliaments in Great Britain has never been perturbed in its operation because some of its employees had the right to strike.

I have to ask myself whether the Government is not judging hastily and overly severely employees who have been working on Parliament Hill for many years, who have done their jobs as well as they could and who have never done anything to disturb the proper operation of this Parliament.

I find it somewhat strange that, while action is being taken before the Canada Labour Relations Board to have certain unions duly certified, the Government would disturb the normal process of this certification by introducing legislation which goes in the opposite direction and that it would continue

to harass its employees by taking legal action. I have already said so and I now say it again: The problem of labour relations with the parliamentary employees will not be solved before the courts. The best proof of this is the fact that the recent decision of the Federal Appeal Court will be challenged by the Public Service Alliance. One of the representatives of the Alliance, Mr. Jean Bergeron, pointed out immediately after this ruling by the Federal Court that he would take the issue to the Supreme Court itself. It is obviously a very bad beginning for this new system of staff relations with the parliamentary employees if the parties involved continue to bicker before the courts. We, of the Liberal Party, would have much preferred that the Government come to a negotiated agreement with the representatives of these employees.

It seems to me that it would have been possible to do so if the Government had been willing to grant clearly and specifically to the representatives of the employees a clarification in the legislation about what Mr. Jacques Audette, president of the Public Service Alliance local and responsible for the parliamentary employees, said in a public letter dated May 7, 1985, the contents of which have been known for a number of months. This letter addressed to all Members of Parliament and Senators said the following:

The issues which we were—and still are—most concerned about are classifications, job descriptions, competitions, promotions, transfers, as well as the fear to be laid off or dismissed.

However, I feel that the compulsory arbitration provided for under Bill C-45 is not a valid alternative, because employees who do not have the right to strike legally will, very often, strike illegally. The number of strikes which occur in Canada every year show to what extent workers, in order to make a point or get public opinion on their side, have often no other choice but to strike illegally. In my opinion, they have a poor knowledge of labour relations if they think that, through legislation, one can stop employees from going on strike when these employees feel that they have valid grounds to disrupt the normal order of things to convince their employer to show a little more understanding and compassion.

Therefore, I say to Government Members that if they think that by going ahead and imposing Bill C-45 on Parliament employees we will avoid strikes on the Hill, they are mistaken. It is not with strong-arm tactics that one can establish good labour relations.

I am quite disappointed with the uncompromising attitude the Government is showing with this Bill.

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I made a speech on this Bill on Friday of last week in which I pointed out the historical master/slave relationship which has existed on this Hill since Parliament was established. As a matter of fact, when I first arrived here I was absolutely amazed at the subservience of the staff, brought on by what is known as parliamentary privilege. Members of Parliament are served,