

Government Orders

this case, to have the right to have an impartial third party ensure that job classifications were looked at and that pay equity would be treated fairly.

I was particularly upset when some Liberal members, especially some from Atlantic Canada, went to the media and attacked us for our position. This can be seen in the Atlantic newspapers and particularly those of Nova Scotia.

I think it is important, if the Liberal Party members want to say that they oppose the legislation, they should say the same thing in Atlantic Canada as they are saying in Ottawa and on the west coast of Canada. It is not acceptable to have some Liberals say one thing and other Liberals say something else.

If you believe that pay equity is important, and that workers have a right to negotiate job classification, then that should be the position you put in the House of Commons and it should be the position that your members put in other parts of the country as well.

We will support the Liberal amendments and we obviously will be supporting the amendments put forward by the New Democratic Party caucus. We will be consistent in what we say and what we do.

Mr. Howard Crosby (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that on December 6, 1989, when Bill C-49 was presented to the House, the President of the Treasury Board made it very clear in this House that he was prepared on behalf of the government and on behalf of the Treasury Board to continue negotiations with the representative of the two labour groups involved in the bill at all times, through day and night, whenever the Public Service Alliance was willing to meet to negotiate.

This negotiation could be taking place right now. There are no barriers to negotiations. If the union representatives have anything to present, any offers to make, they can put those offers on the table and they will be considered. Negotiations have never been terminated as far as the President of the Treasury Board is concerned. I want hon. member to keep that in mind so that we do not poison the atmosphere, do not prevent

settlements from being reached by rhetoric in the House of Commons.

Even at this moment, the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Veterans Affairs are meeting with the leadership the hospital workers group to discuss matters of common interest. The atmosphere of good feeling, if it is retained, will eventually lead to settlement. I want everybody to understand that.

It is not my intention in rising in the House to speak to Bill C-49 to do anything that would poison the atmosphere and prevent a settlement from being reached because we all realize that that is the resolution to any dispute but particularly to a labour-management dispute.

No one takes any solace in Bill C-49 or in any kind of back to work legislation. Back to work legislation is only introduced when the system has failed, when the parties who are responsible for negotiating a settlement of a labour-management dispute have failed to come to an agreement. They have not been able to bring together the demands of the workforce and the needs of the government to produce a settlement.

In those circumstances, Parliament must act in the public interest. It then becomes the duty of the Parliament of Canada to act in the interests of all Canadians. The labour-management dispute has to be put aside. We recognize the value of the collective bargaining system. We recognize the value of settlement of disputes. But those values have to be put aside in the common interests of all Canadians.

What is that common interest? There are ships in distress on the high seas. There are ships locked up in the St. Lawrence Seaway system at great cost and expense, not to ship owners, as has been said, but to the people of Canada, the people who will be paying for the goods carried on those vessels, the farmers whose grain must get to market, or else. They will suffer at home.

I do not have to tell that to hon. members. They should know about the emergencies, the difficulties, the distress that a strike will cause in both the hospital sector and in the transportation sector. It is because of those interests that we are here today legislating back to work legislation, not because of any malice or animosity to the workers involved. It is fully recognized that their contri-