

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

is what sort of accommodation are we going to come to with labour in this country in the future. Everyone in this country feels threatened at present. There is opportunity ahead. We are presently coming to grips with such things as trade, economic development, restructuring, retooling and refinancing of industry. However, we can only come to a reasonable accommodation if we have some sort of pact with labour from now on. That has to happen. I believe the Government should lead the way in making agreements with its own employees.

In my own Province of Newfoundland we are still going through a very disruptive strike with provincial government employees. Those employees brought the province to a virtual standstill because of inequities in their contract with the provincial Government. Some workers were not making the same rate of pay as others in equal positions. The other issue was the ability of the Government to designate those employees who would not be allowed to strike. The support of the people of that province was, by and large, behind the union. The Government had to make important concessions and negotiations are still going on.

I raise that to illustrate the need for Governments, provincial and federal, to show the way to an accommodation with the working people of this country. If that does not happen, I do not believe we can have a sound economy or build a sound economic base. We can do all we like about financing. We can get our economic house in order. Yet if we are not prepared to come to a reasonable agreement with the workers of this country, then I do not believe Canada can look forward to a healthy economy in the future.

In this present instance there is an opportunity for the Government to show the way by agreeing to this very reasonable amendment put forward by the Hon. Member for Hamilton East. In that way, some accommodation can be arrived at. The workers on the Hill have asked us to do this. They do not want this legislation to go forward. They want some time to either appeal the judgment or deal with Treasury Board to try and come up with a fair and equitable working agreement.

This has been a long battle for them. On November 4, 1985, the Canada Labour Relations Board certified four bargaining units of employees of the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament. Since that time an additional bargaining unit has been certified. Over 1,000 House of Commons and Library of Parliament employees are certified and have entered into negotiations with their employer. Indeed, a conciliator was appointed. Now the courts have made a decision and that process is in jeopardy. That is exactly why we need the time. The House of Commons, the Senate and the Library of Parliament have fought the recognition of collective bargaining rights every step of the way. They have used every means of delay, including court action. Now we have Bill C-45. It is regressive legislation, and the alternative is simply to allow those workers to bargain in a just and fair manner with Treasury Board to try and come up with some fair and just conclusions. Because of the efforts those workers have put into

this, and because of the wider issue concerning coming to accommodation with labour all across this country, I hope this House will accede to the amendment of my colleague from Hamilton East and agree to the 30-day period in which some reasonable and just accommodation can be worked out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Hon. Member for Grand Falls—White Bay—Labrador (Mr. Rompkey).

• (1220)

The Hon. Member has had a unique experience in the Province of Newfoundland regarding the labour dispute that is going on there at the moment. The court has just come down with a decision on the application of the Canada Labour Code as it relates to the certification of employees on the Hill. Does the Hon. Member think that in the interests of making a decision and undertaking some negotiations in good faith it might not be best simply to delay the whole process approximately 30 days, which would give us a chance to see what the impact of the court judgment is, whether it is going to be appealed or whether the Government is going to modify its position? We have seen what the hardening of positions has done, for example, in Newfoundland in certain circumstances. It seems to me a delay at this time would be effective in potentially diffusing any problems that might result if the legislation we put forth does not take into consideration all of the elements of the court judgment as well as the potential for appeal.

Mr. Rompkey: I think the key phrase is the “hardening of positions”; that is exactly what happened in the province. As a matter of fact the situation in Newfoundland threatened to become very, very ugly, indeed. I think we were on the brink of not only a disruptive strike but a very serious situation in our province. Public opinion was on the side of the workers. The two sides were very strongly entrenched, and the situation only began to be resolved when the head of the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees and the Premier happened, as a matter of chance, to be on a radio open line program, and through their statements on that program they were able to bring the two sides together.

That strike is still not settled, and that threat is still there. At least there is time and they are at the table and talking. What threatened to become a very ugly situation has been diffused, and that is exactly what is being asked for here. We are asking for time so that people can sit down together and attempt to come to a compromise, a framework for working out the rights we all enjoy across this country. All of us enjoy certain rights and privileges. All workers across Canada, those in the Public Service, those in Crown corporations have certain privileges, and what this amendment asks for is simply time to work out a framework whereby those employees can start to enjoy the same kind of benefits that most of us do, and most of us want for the workers all across this country.