

employees and we urge that the Commons administration give informal recognition of union representatives for those employee groups where a majority of the employees had signed union cards.

That was the position we took at that time. But what really angers and upsets me is the fact that the legal and procedural road-blocks which have been put in the way of unionization of the House of Commons employees have come from the Government. I would say before my friend, the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps), leaves, that it has come as much from the Liberals prior to last September as from the Progressive Conservatives. However, the delays have also come from the House of Commons. You, Mr. Speaker, stated publicly that you supported unionization, and the chief administrator of the House stated, at least to me, that he would like to see a union here so that there would be a better way to deal with House of Commons staff. Nonetheless, the House of Commons continued to either go along with the Government or the administration itself put up legal road-blocks to the route of certification which is the only route those employees had to follow. It is noteworthy that today the Canada Labour Relations Board has reviewed and reconsidered the position it took in June when its panel decided that, pending legislation, it was not appropriate to proceed. The panel decided on Friday that it had made a technical mistake, that it was wrong and it should not take cognizance of legislation which to this point was just a proposal and had no guarantee of being passed. Today, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the Board has decided to grant recognition to some 960 House of Commons employees in the bargaining units.

I regret the decision of the CLRB to reject the certification of the staff of Hon. Members, just as I regret the proposal of the Government to reject that certification. However, it is noteworthy that the CLRB has now certified something like half of the staff in the House of Commons, including those who work for Hon. Members. That is quite a lot of people. That certification has taken place because of the determination of those employees to try and get union recognition against some pretty overwhelming odds.

What will happen now? The workers are caught in their reaction to Bill C-45. Although they won certification, the comments of the Government House Leader in opening this debate on Friday were really quite unequivocal. He said it is conceivable "after lengthy and costly legal proceedings that owing to the particular situation of Parliament, parliamentary employees might have no right to join a union". He said that by "eliminating disputes before the courts with respect to the jurisdiction of the CLRB, the ultimate effect of this measure will be to speed up the efforts of the employees concerned to form a union". The Government House Leader was talking as though there was some alien force out there who keeps on taking these employees before the courts, but that is not the case at all. It is the Government which has been taking these employees to the courts. The Liberal Government and now the Progressive Conservative Government have systematically put legal road-blocks in the way of these employees to form a

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union. The new Government is no better than the old Government. At this time there are no legal cases pending. There is a certificate which would allow the bulk of the employees who filed to have a union to have bargaining units which could now sit down, effective within a couple of weeks, and start bargaining for a first contract, a deal with question like the terms and conditions of work, pay, holidays and the other things which form the subject of collective agreements. However, the Government is not prepared to play by those rules and is going to change them. If this measure is too long delayed in the House of Commons and the Government has to proceed on the basis of the CLRB decision having effect, then it is threatening to appeal. The appeal will be costly, could take another year or two, and those employees are damn tired of having to wait while the Government delays and obfuscates. The Government, on the other hand, is saying we should trust it and it will give us legislation which I am sure the Government itself must recognize is inadequate and falls far short of what the employees have been seeking. In particular, it fails to address the grievances of greatest concern to these employees.

● (1720)

I have no doubt that some House of Commons employees are underpaid. However, the concerns they have raised in particular concern arbitrary actions by the employer, the failure to have a fair system of classification, and actions which appear to them to smack of nepotism, patronage and favouritism, as well as being arbitrary. I will just cite one with which I was very closely connected, the treatment handed out to Prudence Dallaire. She was the employee assistance counsellor in the House of Commons and had been for a very long time. A few months ago she was fired, her position abolished and her responsibilities turned over to the nursing staff. As recently as one week ago some of those nurses went to a conference on that particular subject. They were told that they needed training which they have not had, and independence to carry out the job. Employee assistance requires sufficient independence that the person responsible can act as an advocate for employees who have personal problems such as alcoholism, family problems or perhaps mental problems, things which lead to their having difficulty at work. The employee assistance counsellor has to be able to intervene with management. You cannot do that if you are reporting to management day by day, as do the nursing staff here in Parliament Hill. An appeal was made to the Speaker asking that Madam Dallaire be reappointed. The appeal was denied. Two petitions signed by 1,500 Hill employees were ignored.

That is but one of many examples of how the present administration of the House of Commons has ignored the needs of employees working here. Yet they are now told they have no choice, you have to take what is here. It is not appropriate that the CLRB should govern employees of the House of Commons. I ask: Why not? After all, Privy Council Office employees are unionized, as are those of the Governor General. Therefore, what is wrong with House employees having full union rights? I do not see what the fuss is all about. It has been pointed out in other jurisdictions that legislative