

Speaker, compared to the ideal climate we enjoy in Toronto. But, my object is not to talk about the climate.

A number of themes came across from the public during the course of that program. Some people felt that all strikes should be illegal, that they were a throwback to feudal times, that they were wasteful, and that nobody benefited from them.

Another group felt that all public service strikes should be illegal. They argue that the treasury of Canada is a bottomless pit and there is no end to the payments the federal government can make in order to settle a dispute.

The third group felt that strikes in essential public services should be illegal—a narrower group than the total public service, but an important and sizeable one.

The fourth and final group felt that even if strikes are legal parliament should act at once, as soon as things begin to warm up, to end the strikes and send people back to work.

I want to talk tonight about the institution of collective bargaining. This is an institution to which the government and the Liberal party of Canada are very much attached and for which we have a great deal of respect, while many others in the country and in this House want to see it rejected. I will concede that collective bargaining is in trouble right now. Forgetting for the moment about the illegal strikes that are taking place to which collective bargaining does not fully apply, even when you look at legal strikes there are too many going on right now.

It is true that collective bargaining is in trouble, Mr. Speaker, but these days a lot of our economic institutions are in trouble. In fact, which ones are not? The stock market is in trouble, the International Monetary Fund is in trouble, the international private banking system is in trouble, and so are our foreign exchange markets. Why are all these things happening? Is the IMF in trouble, as the Social Credit Party wants to imply, because of the management of the Canadian economy—an economy which represents 6 per cent of the whole of the International Monetary Fund countries?

These institutions are in trouble not because they themselves are not working but because of unprecedented inflation which is undermining so many of our institutions. It is not the other way around. It is inflation that is the cause of these things.

When you listen to what the strikers have to say, Mr. Speaker, you can understand very well why they go on strike. Inflation is hard on wage earners. Men and women who have been on contracts for two or three years, and whose contracts are coming up for renewal, just want to make sure that they will not come out at the end of the next two or three year period with the short end of the stick. They want to be protected, and it is clear that inflation is the threat from which they want to be protected.

In this connection one of the new ideas that is compatible with collective bargaining and that I support is the cost of living adjustment. I think the government should be very receptive to the idea of accepting COLA in a contract. COLA may take wages up if the cost of living goes up, but it is the only way I know of that can also moderate wages if the cost of living tends to go down.

Inflation

Most experts seem to think that is going to happen, that inflation is going to recede.

I do not think there is anything wrong with collective bargaining as an institution, Mr. Speaker. It is just that, like all the others, it is suffering from inflation. I would assert that collective bargaining needs to be supported now by this House, by the public and opposition parties, instead of being undermined. This is not the time to tell the labour force, or any part of it, that this parliament wants to take away their right to strike, which is the main tool they have to protect themselves with when they feel their interests are at stake.

I have been speaking about legal strikes, Mr. Speaker, but there is another side to the coin. I mentioned before that there had been too many illegal strikes. Collective bargaining is undermined by illegal strikes as much as it is undermined by other forms of opposition. I want to deal with some examples.

There is a category of designated jobs in which employees of the public service are not allowed to strike. One example of such an essential service is shovelling the airport runways clear of snow. Those employees cannot legally go on strike. I have talked to men on those jobs and I know it is very hard to go to work when your fellow employees are striking. It is difficult to cross a picket line to shovel a runway in a snow storm. They feel like scabs even though they are doing something the law compels them to do. But it is extremely important that unions recognize that essential service maintenance is a very important safeguard in the collective bargaining process.

While I was in Vancouver there was another example when air traffic controllers in the east threatened to call a nation-wide walkout because several members of their union had been laid off—wrongfully in the opinion of the union leadership. That was no ground for a strike. There is a grievance clause in the collective agreement which tells the union what its rights are in cases when it considers it has been wronged by management. If there is a grievance, the union can grieve and get the wrong examined. All kinds of rights are available to the union, but it cannot go on strike while the collective agreement is in force.

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If we want to preserve the idea of the collective agreement it will be in everybody's best interests to make sure that the type of violation I just mentioned is not allowed to take place. When it does take place, management, in this case the Treasury Board, should exercise all rights available to it. These should be strong rights and the government should not be afraid to invoke them for the sake of any collective agreement. The government should not sit on those rights.

I now want to deal with parliament's involvement in strikes when strikes are in progress. It is easy for people to run to parliament and say, "We want you to settle the strike." I agree that parliament has a role to play in settling strikes, but parliament should not act while the collective agreement has a chance of working.

A small unit in the Toronto post office has made what many consider outrageous demands. It has demanded that the Post Office be turned into a Crown corporation before negotiations take place. That is a totally unrealistic kind