

Oral Questions

LABOUR CONDITIONS

PROPOSED SINGLE BARGAINING AGENT FOR PUBLIC SERVICE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I was going to say that I thought the hon. member had not read the papers carefully, but I have just been reading them and I understand his being utterly confused as, depending on the paper you read, the outcome of the conference was a success or a failure. I might tell him though that I do not agree personally, after attending the whole meeting and even presiding over it, that an impasse was reached. I regret the province of Quebec decided to withdraw, but we did take a positive step in agreeing to establish the Council of Communications ministers of Canada. There will be an empty seat, and as I said I regret that, but eight and even very probably nine of those seats will be occupied, so that our discussions can progress. The province of Quebec decided to remain outside the council and to go its own way. Unfortunately, I cannot help that, and I can barely take it as a fact. As to the suggestions at the conference, I would tell the hon. member that the ones which were put forward by the federal government have been deemed acceptable, at least for further discussion, by nine out of ten provinces, which in baseball would be a fairly satisfactory batting average.

Mr. Allard: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

I am grateful to the minister for his explanations. However, considering that the province of Quebec may have withdrawn sort of banging the door, which I do not know, are we to infer that in spite of the absence of Quebec, the people of the Rimouski area and its vicinity will not be deprived of the service they have been seeking for many years?

Mr. Pelletier: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize first of all that Quebec withdrew quite civilly and without banging any door. I want to assure the hon. member that the Rimouski area will not be deprived of anything by the federal government. As to the steps which may be taken in this respect by my Quebec counterpart, because I decided long ago not to try any longer to predict what they will be from one week to the next, I cannot assure the hon. member of anything. He will have to seek any such assurance from the Quebec minister of communications.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. A few days ago the hon. member for High Park-Humber Valley attempted to put a question to the Minister of Labour about a single bargaining agent. I indicated that he ought not to be allowed to put the question because he had put the question at another time and that it had been answered. He has contended that all he had done the previous day was to put those remarks pursuant to a motion under Standing Order 43. Upon checking the record it turns out that he is absolutely right and I was wrong. He ought, therefore, to be allowed to put the question.

Mr. Otto Jelinek (High Park-Humber Valley): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am happy that the minister has had time to study the question and I hope he will come up with a good answer. In view of the fact that there has been an unprecedented record number of lost man-days in productivity in recent months due to strikes and walk-outs—as a matter of fact nearly two million man-days were lost—and because the existing fragmentation of union power within the public service and other federal agencies is partially responsible for this drastic loss in productivity, could the minister advise the House whether the government intends to look at the possibility of having union groups in a single public service sector bargaining with the government simultaneously in order to avoid the fragmentation of union power and, if so, when can this House expect an announcement?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated to the House and to the hon. member before that there was a good deal of sympathy for this type of approach in terms of consultation and rationalization. I might indicate also there have been discussions toward this end, not only with the chairman of the Canada Labour Relations Board but with the business community and the labour movement itself. There is a general disposition to try to achieve this type of objective. I might say we have achieved something along these lines already. I have indicated in this House before that Mr. Joe Morris, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, has already met with people in the grain handling area to achieve this type of consultation.

Mr. Jelinek: A supplementary question. In view of the minister's answer and his obvious interest in this suggestion—which, by the way, I made in this House over six months ago—could he advise if he intends to take all appropriate steps to assure the passage of my own bill dealing precisely with this subject?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I, of course, welcome the hon. member's enthusiasm for this approach but I would say that the success toward this type of objective is such that I believe it requires a good deal of co-operation from all parties concerned. I am talking in terms of the labour movement and their rights, rights which have the support of all members of the House, and I am talking about employers. I do not necessarily believe that coercive type legislation will help to achieve this objective and I make this plea to hon. members and others: let us see whether it cannot be achieved through co-operative effort, as opposed to legislation.