

Canada Labour Code

enough new mechanisms to avoid a greater number of these strikes which are so costly and which have unfavourable effects either on prices or on productivity or on the climate which prevails in certain industries or groups of workers? We are well aware that people do need the public services which are in fact essential services. There have been many problems, not only in Quebec, but throughout the country, in the area of labour relations, and this has caused strikes.

Like many others, I believe that the time is past when the government could give the right to strike with one hand and withdraw it with the other because of the difficulty or the impossibility of coming to an understanding concerning collective agreements or collective bargaining. This legislation therefore aims at improving or facilitating labour relations. I believe it is our duty to wish that the government may meet its objectives, and even urge it to do so.

I am among those who have been always fascinated by—and I do not know if this would be possible—the development of a permanent bargaining mechanism which could perhaps bring to this process the clearheadedness and foresight wished for by all members of the House. Could such a mechanism be invented to enable the people concerned to avoid those strikes which, once again, have been so costly and so unfavourable to our economy? Of course, as the minister said, this legislation aims at improving the labour relations system and, hopefully, the competitive position of Canada on an economic level.

Several observations have been made since last September with regard to the economy, especially to the effect that productivity, labour disputes and the like have had the tendency of making us less competitive for the sale of our products abroad. I would not put the whole burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the workers alone. Of course, I think that we have the responsibility of trying to arrange and modify the existing mechanism of negotiations between labour and management. If we at the federal level could engineer a device which could increasingly prevent these strikes, which I insist have had a very negative effect on the economic development of Canada, I think indeed that if we could work out a sufficiently efficient mechanism, we could perhaps draw the attention of the provinces to what is happening here and prompt them into imitating this newly created mechanism so that they would also be able to prevent so many strikes from breaking out.

I mentioned a province which has known difficult times because of strikes. I could refer to my own riding where we have also experienced serious difficulties because of strikes which caused enormous problems to certain people. Given the circumstances, I repeat, even if this legislation concerns only some 10 per cent of Canadian workers, I do hope that these amendments will all bring the desired results, and will anyway make union spokesmen, representatives from our industry and our provincial heads of government, but particularly union leaders, reflect and perhaps analyse these new mechanisms which could serve them and particularly their members.

I think that this legislation aims particularly at protecting the interests of our unionized workers because the interests or

the success of our industries are also directly related to the interests of the workers. These were some of the comments I wanted to make and I hope the minister responsible for this legislation gets the results he expects. Inasmuch as this legislation serves the interests of the workers and the economic development of Canada, I think that as far as our side of this House is concerned we will not hesitate a minute in supporting any good legislation of this kind.

● (1712)

[English]

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues have indicated, we support most of this bill. The minister is to be congratulated for removing the pregnancy clause which allowed certain industries to dismiss members of their female force because of that condition. Also, some additional holidays have been provided. Why did the minister choose six years as being the time necessary to qualify for three weeks' holiday? He could have chosen three years or some other appropriate time span.

When the original one week and 1 per cent vacation pay program was developed, it was on the basis of 2 per cent for one year and 4 per cent after the second year. Many plans contained a provision, after six years, for a 6 per cent vacation pay program, and now the six years' requirement is being proposed in the bill before us. I think that proposal could have been more generous.

Some hon. members have been blaming the problem of strikes on labour. I suggest it is like dancing: it takes two to tango. It is not always the organized employees who cause a problem; quite often the employers are to blame. This has never been more evident than in the case of the postal employees. These employees have had no employer with whom to bargain or to present their grievances. They are unsure whether they are dealing with the Department of Public Works, Treasury Board, or the Postmaster General. As I understand it, they come under the Public Service Staff Relations Act, which is similar to the Canada Labour Relations Act.

It is very difficult to blame those employees, because they do not know who to negotiate with. That is a problem which must be looked at. I am sure those workers would like to come under the Canada Labour Relations Act. They are attempting to have the idea of a Crown corporation accepted by the country in order to come under that act. One of the reasons is their inadequate grievance procedure. Not only must a bona fide union negotiate, arrange working conditions and hours, but it must arrange an orderly method for handling grievances. Under the Public Service Staff Relations Act, grievances take months and months to be settled, and thus the act fails. This causes wildcat strikes and arrangements which are unsatisfactory to the public, to the employees and to the employers. Perhaps more than 10 per cent of the population should come under the Canada Labour Relations Act.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle). They reminded me