

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): This is not a point of order, although we should always take great care to make our remarks relevant. The rule of relevancy is interpreted with a great deal of flexibility on both sides of the House.

I will now ask the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Boudria: I have finished, Mr. Speaker.

• (1830)

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will try to make my remarks strictly relevant to Bill C-317, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code. On page 1a of this bill, it says, and I will read very slowly so that everybody can understand:

The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the hiring of persons to replace employees of an employer under the Canada Labour Code or of the Public Service who are on strike or locked out.

This is what the bill is all about. This bill was carefully prepared by my colleague from Manicouagan, who carried out a study and who is sort of making a new attempt to remind the House that we must do something in this area. Another purpose of this bill is to ensure that essential services are maintained in the event of a strike or lockout in a crown corporation and in the public service.

Bill C-317 was introduced by the hon. member for Manicouagan, whom I want to congratulate again for his insight. He was able to come up with this piece of legislation by relying on his work experience. The purpose of this bill is to expand on what we already have in Quebec. It tries to influence this Parliament, even though we are in the middle of a referendum, because a lot of the federal provisions included in the Canada Labour Code affect workers in Quebec. This is why my hon. colleague introduced this bill.

May I remind you that it is not the first time that such an initiative is undertaken and that such a bill is introduced in the House. Without going into details, I want to mention as an example that, in November 1992, the Conservative member for Abitibi had brought forward Bill C-376 that had essentially the same intent as the introductory paragraph of the bill introduced by the member for Manicouagan.

Before that, during the postal strike, the present member for Richelieu, who was then a Conservative, tried twice to get the House to adopt legislation to prohibit the hiring of scabs by crown corporations. The first time was in February 1988 with Bill C-282 and the second time was in April 1989 with Bill C-201. That last bill was defeated by 18 votes only, which means that the member for Manicouagan has a good reason for trying again today, having seen that a good number of members from different parties in the House supported such a bill at that time.

The Liberal Party, then in opposition, expressed its support for the bill. Many Liberal members were in favour of the bill at that time. If we go back a little further, in 1980, Ed Broadbent, then leader of the NDP, introduced an antiscab bill. Since that time, several unions have asked various federal governments to pass a similar act. So, this is nothing new.

In October 1994, the present Minister of Human Resources Development promised that an anti-scab bill would be introduced in the spring of 1995. We all know what happened. A part of the responsibilities of the Minister of Human Resources Development were transferred to the present Minister of Labour, who seems to be too busy with the referendum because she has not yet introduced such a bill. Yet, the minister had made a priority of that issue after her appointment in February 1995. We are in October and nothing has been done.

I would like to remind the House that in Quebec, provincial anti-scab legislation was passed in 1977 and became part of the Labour Code. Since then, Ontario and British Columbia have passed similar legislation.

• (1835)

The preventive, dissuasive and indicative role of the Quebec act has resulted in a 35 per cent decrease in the average number of labour conflicts since 1979. And 35 per cent is not a figure to be sneezed at.

There is agreement between the partners in the Quebec labour market on the beneficial effects of the Quebec legislation on scab labour. Even the strongly federalist and strongly pro-business Conseil du patronat du Québec has abandoned its challenge against these acts before the Supreme Court, saying that there have been improvements in labour relations in Quebec over the years since its passage.

And yet, as you know, there is a new government in Ontario and the new Mike Harris government, which is chummier with business than with workers, has promised to do away with Ontario's Bill 40 by the end of this year. It is noteworthy that Chrysler Canada has publicly advised the Harris government not to move too hastily on this change and to weigh the consequences. The auto maker fears that precipitous action might upset labour relations in Ontario. This is a very recent happening and right in Ontario. Chrysler Corporation is not just any company, it is a huge company, an important one, and it is warning the Government of Ontario not to take away the legislation.

In Quebec, 10 per cent of workers are governed by the Canada Labour Code, or about 217,000 people.

Now I will speak to you about one example of a labour conflict in Quebec which dragged on because Quebec's scab legislation was not enforced. That example is Ogilvie Mills Limited. Ogilvie processes grain, and somewhere in the Constitution, in Canadian constitutional law, it says that grain comes