

*Government Orders*

state of war? No. But the government was eager to fulfil its commitments to its friends in the railway companies.

• (1330)

The government wanted to do a job on the CN collective agreements, in order to be able to sell the company for less. This is the goal it was aiming for and that is why, throughout last week, the government did things I really did not like. One of our hon. colleagues, the government whip, even stated yesterday that the Bloc was costing the taxpayers \$17,000 a hour, all for nothing. We, in the official opposition, were blamed for having these sittings. We, in the official opposition, in a democracy, were blamed for making Parliament work. Here was someone complaining because we have a Parliament. With this kind of arguments, we will soon be without a Parliament at all, we will just have to close shop.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Bouchard:** What are we debating here this weekend? I understand that the government is very unhappy to be working on Saturday and Sunday—maybe not as unhappy as NDP members, our allies in the defence of social causes, who have not shown up at all during these two days—but are we not dealing with some important issues? We did not come here this weekend to talk about trivial things. We came here to talk about Canadian democracy. We came here to try and find a way to reconcile two fundamental rights, namely the right of citizens to have access to public services, in this case rail transport, and the right of unions and workers to negotiate their own working conditions instead of having these conditions imposed on them by the government or by an arbitration commission.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the Bloc Quebecois is proud of the way it has defended the rights of workers in this dispute. Even if we were the last party left in this House to defend the rights of workers, and it seems to be the case, we would be proud to do so. It is a tribute to Canadian democracy and I think that we should be recognized for doing this job for and in the place of the Liberals who have abandoned their traditional creed and who, just like the New Democrats, frightened by the right wing wind that has been blowing in this House since the arrival of the Reform Party, have caved in to the pressure in a situation which, normally, would not have warranted this course of action.

All the Liberals who are here have made speeches in the House in the past to defend the very same viewpoint that we are defending today. I am sure that they feel bad and that they regret giving in to the pressure from the Reform Party because soon there will be only one party in Canada apart from the Bloc, and it will be the Reform Party and what it stands for.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Of course, there will be consequences. The government may have conducted fifteen polls over the last week—a government has money to conduct polls—and these polls may have shown that people in English Canada support the Liberals' position, but it has to be careful not to be shortsighted. This situation will have far-reaching effects and the government, having chosen to have working conditions imposed by a third party, will find itself in an awkward situation when it is all over.

I wonder how the government will be able to sell CN if the labour relations climate in that company is what it could become after this move by the government. I hope not, but the climate may not be very good. When employees are legislated back to work and, especially, when they know that their terms and conditions of employment will be determined by a third party, that nothing will be up to them to decide and that vested rights will be dropped, the climate may not be very conducive to efficient privatization.

Furthermore, this government feels it made a tremendous concession by promising, and in fact this is in the bill, to have judges chair the arbitration commissions. I have every respect for judges. I am a lawyer, and I know we have the best judges anyone could wish. The integrity of our judicial system is beyond question, and I am glad to have an opportunity to say this, but because of that integrity, our judges will act according to the mandate they are given.

What will that mandate be? If we look at clause 12, we see that the arbitrators will have an extremely narrow mandate to work with. The arbitrators have no flexibility because they will have to make their decisions strictly on the basis of economic viability and competitiveness in the short and longer term. This means, and I refer to the people who accept these appointments, that their hands are tied, and I know several people who will refuse to sit on these commissions. There are decent people who will refuse to sit under those conditions because they do not have enough latitude to hand down a fair judgment. I am not saying that those who do accept are any less decent, and I have every respect for them, but they will be working within a very restrictive framework where they will have no flexibility and will have to more or less accept the employers' arguments, one by one.

• (1335)

They are going to change the role of the arbitrators as well, or at least try, by turning them into the employers' allies. The Minister of Transport probably had something to do with that as well.

I wish the Minister of Labour, in her initial performance as minister, had been more impervious to the power-hungry demands of the Department of Transport's appetite for power.