In this instance we have a clause in the legislation that was introduced without any consultation. It is not so much the merit of the clause but the failure to discuss and the sort of high-handed—I am sure the minister was not high-handed; we have our suspicions about where this clause came from—introduction of legislation without so much as indicating that they were planning on doing it and it being forwarded to the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Federation of Labour and CCU unions.

It is important to remember that if the same level of discussions had gone into part I amendments we would have had a much better bill. It would have been worded in such a way that it would have met the needs of employers and met the needs of the labour movement.

Much like the amendments proposed by his colleague, the minister of employment, with respect to UI, we have a clause that is flawed. The Liberal labour critic has suggested that clause be amended by changing, and correct me if I am wrong, lines 18 and 19 to remove "in a public interest" and include "interest of the affected bargaining unit".

Now we are talking about allowing an employer not only to bully and frighten workers. We are now saying that the test will be those frightened and possibly harassed workers and their desire, whether they think it is in their interest to have a look at that collective agreement and not the test of the public interest. Anyone who has been at the bargaining table knows that those at the bargaining table are not likely to be intimidated either way. For those who do not know what is going on at the bargaining table, some employers have been known from time to time to intimidate workers.

• (1620)

While I look forward to this bill going to committee and the opportunity to discuss amendments, I would think my colleague could come up with an explanation of why he thinks his amendment is not flawed. I am most concerned about it.

Getting back to the part I amendment, the amendment to the Public Service Staff Relations Act, it is very evident that this amendment did not come from a demand of the employer's group. It leaves one to wonder therefore whose agenda is being served by this amendment.

The federal government abandoned negotiations with its own workers with the passage of Bill C-29 one and a half years ago. We now have before the House Bill C-113 that would end the government's obligation to bargain with its workers and impose a two-year wage freeze. This is not collective bargaining. This measure gives the employer the upper hand. It need only put out the pretence of bargaining and then sit back and wait for the legislation to go into effect.

This does not improve the collective bargaining relationship. It only adds to the distrust of the motives of the employer by the workers. At a time when morale is at an all-time low in the federal public sector, one would hope that the government would be looking at ways to increase productivity and to improve and create an effective collective bargaining relationship rather than make a bad situation worse.

Unions are an integral part of the collective bargaining process, particularly in the case of the amendment to the PSSR act. The amendment we find in the bill serves notice to that employer that the government through Treasury Board does not trust or respect the bargaining agents of its workers.

To me there seems to be a major conflict of interest when the employer can set the parameters of collective bargaining in law and at the bargaining table. The situation will be one where cabinet will determine the best offer it is going to present and then call on a minister of the Crown to order a vote of the union membership on the offer.

This provision is open to great abuse particularly in the public sector, but it is not confined to the public sector. When this bill was introduced the minister said that he would not abuse it, and I believe him. However the Minister of Labour is not the minister responsible for Treasury Board and the Minister of Labour may not always be the Minister of Labour. Some time in the not so far distant future the Minister of Labour may go on to be the Deputy Prime Minister and somebody else will take his place. This is a cause for concern.

By permitting these types of votes, the government will be giving the employer yet another weapon to break the union and avoid its obligation to bargain with its workers. That is where the greatest concern is in introducing this amendment under the Public Service Staff Relations Act. One can easily imagine the type of public relations campaign an employer could mount to persuade that its last offer was the best it could do. We certainly saw that last week with Nationair. It was the best it could do. The union was being unreasonable; the bargaining committee did not truly represent the interests of the membership; and in fact when push came to shove Nationair was able to come to an agreement.