

bargaining process even getting started. We are not the ones who sit in a legislative committee and say: "We do not have time to take seriously the representations and the motions put forward by the union that represents over 160,000 people who work for the Government of Canada". This is a shameful example for the largest employer in this country to be setting for other employers.

I want to read a letter I received, because I think this kind of letter speaks far more eloquently than I can. It comes from a person in Atlantic Canada who writes on behalf of herself and her family. She is the wife of a ships' crew worker who is on strike. She writes, "Your speech warmed my heart, to see that someone in government cares about us. The so-called leaders of our country feel that we are the little people and should be paid and kept the little people".

I will just read a few of the more poignant sentences from this letter. "My wish is that the government members who are against us would have to spend a month on strike, especially at Christmas, with no pay and children wondering if they will have a Christmas. This is the time of the year for goodwill, something the Progressive Conservatives do not have, or even know what it is". She says, "I am ashamed that the member of Parliament for the region I live in is a government member and after talking to us voted against us". That is the feeling of the people in Atlantic Canada. I think the parliamentary secretary would know that better than anyone.

I have accused the government of stalling, and I think it is important that I expand on that statement so the members of the caucus can judge for themselves whether they think their ministers, in particular those involved in this whole negotiating process, have acted fairly. I urge them to listen carefully, because if they do not think this is a fair process, they have an obligation on behalf of their own constituents to urge the President of the Treasury Board or through him, the parliamentary secretary, or the Minister of Transport, or the Minister of Veterans Affairs or the Minister of Public Works, or the Minister of National Defence and the ministers of several other departments for whom these people work, to get to the bargaining table to deal fairly with people, to settle this strike in the way a good, responsible

### *Government Orders*

employer settles it, by negotiating, not by forcing people to work.

If the government does feel people's services are essential to the safety and security of Canadians, it has the legal tool to ensure that those essential public services continue. That tool is called designating people. The government has the ability to designate people as "essential". But in its arrogance, in its sloppiness, in what was called by the Public Service Staff Relations Board its own administrative negligence—and the Public Service Staff Relations Board had a few other choice words—this government failed to do that. Now, that is irresponsible.

The government knows when a contract with its employees is going to end. Most contracts are for four years, so from the moment a contract is signed it knows when that contract is going to end. The government knows that after the end of that contract, when the union has given notice that it wishes to begin bargaining a new contract, it has 20 days in which to designate those employees it wishes to have declared as "essential" employees. That is a tool the government has to keep people from going on strike and to keep them from withdrawing their services as a bargaining tool. Every department involved with essential services employees failed to meet that deadline. Treasury Board and the President of the Treasury Board failed to make sure that that legal requirement was met.

Once you realize that you have goofed, you admit it and say, "Okay, now what can we do to deal with the situation?" The thing to do is recognize that negotiations have started. And having bungled, you had better darn well sit down at the bargaining table and try to solve your problem another way. In early 1987 the government knew that it had failed to use the one tool it had to stop these people from going on strike. It knew that it had broken the law, that the winter of 1989 was coming, that negotiations were coming and that it had a couple of options.

At that point the government could have said, "Okay, we have goofed. What contingency plans can we put in place to make sure that those essential services continue if we do not reach a successful conclusion, if we do not manage to settle with these people and if they do exercise their legal rights, which we have left them, to go on strike?" That, it seems to me, would be a responsible approach by the government. The government should