

● (1610)

The judgment was delivered today by Mr. Justice Pratte and I believe it is a major new development that we must now take into account. What is essential in my view is that the motion to delay for one month the reading of this legislation, which was put forward by my colleague for Hamilton East (Ms. Coppins), becomes that much more relevant.

It is absolutely vital in my view that, if we are to legislate a new status for employees of the House of Commons, the Senate and the Library, we should have a minimum of employee support and satisfaction.

I think one of the basic questions which the Government was concerned about and which prevented it from drafting legislation that would subject those parliamentary employees to the Canada Labour Code, is that under the Canada Labour Code they would have the right to strike. And I do not think I am being unfair to the Conservative Government when I say that the idea, the possibility that parliamentary employees might some day go on strike has sent such a shiver down our Government friends' backs that they have decided to have parliamentary employees subjected to the Public Service Staff Relations Act rather than to the Canada Labour Code.

Do we have a quorum, Mr. Speaker? I am looking all over the place because I wonder whether we do have a quorum.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall count the members.

And the count having been taken:

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Indeed, there is no quorum. Ring the bells.

And the bells having rung:

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is now a quorum. Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet) has the floor.

Mr. Ouellet: It gives me pleasure to welcome my colleagues from the Government. In my opinion—

Mr. Gauthier: We are here! We want you to listen to him and to listen properly!

Mr. Ouellet: In my opinion, this Bill, which will change the system that governs Parliamentary employees, deserves the special attention and interest of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn), and I am happy to see him back in the House.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the wish not to provide the right to strike probably brought the Government to introduce a Bill which does not meet in its present form the hopes and expectations of Parliamentary employees.

[English]

I want to read here a note that has been given to me that I believe is one that could be a happy compromise. Bill C-45 does not allow Hill employees the right to strike, a right they

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

would enjoy under the Canada Labour Code, but it is believed that representatives of the employees on the Hill have said that they are willing to forfeit their right to strike if Bill C-45 included strong binding arbitration procedures, which at present it does not.

[Translation]

It is quite clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that the concerns expressed by Mr. Audette, especially about classification, promotion and lay-offs, are points which we cannot take lightly and which deserve our attention. I therefore felt that I had to rise at this time to tell the Government Members that they should, in this first piece of legislation governing Parliamentary employees, show much more trust in these hundred of employees who have been working on the Hill for years faithfully and conscientiously and who have never caused any trouble. No one can say that these employees are trouble makers or that they have provoked many labour conflicts. I think that their past performance is a guarantee for the future and I would like the Government to show them a bit more compassion and understanding. The possibilities for an agreement between the employer and employees of Parliament are obvious. When I was myself Minister of Labour, I invited Parliament to legislate as soon as possible to give to the employees of the House of Commons the union and the legal status that they wished to have, and to do so before the case was referred to the Canada Labour Relations Board. I have to say that both this Government and the previous one took too long to realize that the employees of Parliament had every reason to want to organize and defend themselves better. The previous Government should have introduced a Bill well before this issue was submitted to the Canada Labour Relations Board, and the present Government should have negotiated with the representatives of Parliament employees and introduced a Bill more acceptable than Bill C-45 well before this case had to be heard by the Federal Court and the Appeal Division of the Federal Court.

● (1620)

I especially deplore some aspects of the Bill before us, and I must say that if we could obtain from the Government the assurance that it will introduce the appropriate amendments to give Parliament employees the guarantees they are seeking—I suggest, quite rightfully so—as to classification, job descriptions, promotions, transfers and dismissals, I am sure that on this side of the House, both my colleagues of the Liberal party and the members of the New Democratic Party would be more inclined to proceed quickly with this Bill. But neither the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn) nor the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) have given us clear and definite indications that this Bill could be amended along the lines of the Parliament employees representatives' legitimate claims. As members of the Liberal party, we find that this Bill is not going in the direction we would have given it had we still been in the Government. I can tell you certainly that as a former Minister of Labour, if I were still Minister of Labour, I would make pressing representations to the