

Government Orders

If the Liberals want to talk about changing one's views, that is fine with us. Remember when they lambasted the previous Conservative government for making cuts to the UI program. Canadians and Quebecers are not stupid. The Liberals blasted the Conservative government regarding these changes to the UI program. Yet, as soon as they took office, the Liberals set out to do twice as much damage as the previous government had done.

Before adjourning, let us remember how hard these Liberals fought to protect social housing in Canada. Now that they form the government, they cut all the budgets for social housing. These are the people we are dealing with, across the floor.

We, as well as Canadian and Quebec workers, will remember the Minister of Labour and her government, which imposed four special motions to suspend the normal rules of Parliament. The first one, on Wednesday, March 22, 1995, was a time allocation motion limiting to one hour the debate at second reading. For those who are listening to us, the debate at second reading consists in examining the principle underlying the bill.

• (1440)

When we are preparing to change the rules of the labour relations game, following the conciliator's report, it seems rather presumptuous to us, to say the least, not to allow Parliament to speak for at least a few hours on the principle of this bill. Only one hour to discuss the principle of the bill.

Secondly, on March 22 as well, a second motion on the allocation of time, unheard of in Canadian Parliament, limiting the work of the committee to four hours. Why? Why not allow the committee a few hours to discuss the bill as a whole? It had only four hours and was obliged to stop its deliberations at 9 p.m., when it could easily have carried on until 10 p.m. or 11 p.m.

This is the strongest evidence that the government and the Minister of Labour never had the intention of listening to what the opposition had to say.

At 10 a.m., on Thursday March 23, even before the House began its proceedings, with no discussion between the government and the office of the Opposition House Leader and without any prior negotiations, the government decided, by tabling a particular motion here in this House, that we would sit Saturday and Sunday. It was not the opposition that decided this. It was at the government's request, and it is in the Hansard.

A fourth time allocation motion, on Saturday, March 26, again limited the work of the House, this time to three hours. How in all seriousness can they have so little respect for workers' rights? How can they not want to listen for one second to what duly elected members want to say to the government? At no time, it must be said, did the opposition take a stand outside the rules of Parliament. We simply refused to suspend the rules

of this House. We wanted the debate to take place in the same way as most, if not all, parliamentary debates, that is, through the normal process of discussion.

At no time did I ever say to the government, to the press or to the electronic media that we wanted to filibuster this bill. On the contrary, I have always reminded the government and citizens that the opposition realizes that we have to resolve the railway dispute quickly yet responsibly and without contravening parliamentary rules, in order to avoid the economic problems associated with a lingering dispute.

Although there was no indication whatsoever that we wanted to delay the work, no indication whatsoever that we wanted to put the bill off until later, the government decided to introduce no less than four special motions, one of which, need I remind the House, was to sit Saturday and Sunday.

I was surprised. I was disappointed yesterday when the hon. government whip said that this was something absolutely unusual and wrong, and that we should not be sitting Saturday and Sunday, because it costs \$17,000 an hour to run Parliament, and a little more to do it on Sunday. As if democracy did not warrant Parliament's decision to run as long as it sees fit, as long as it takes to solve problems affecting the citizens of this country.

It is utterly unacceptable that a debate on a point as basic as the right to strike or the right of workers to have their say on the issue comes down to a question of how many thousands of dollars it costs an hour.

• (1445)

As for the Deputy Prime Minister, she called members of the opposition stupid—what gall—because we talked about workers' rights. I have never seen such a thing. In the eight and a half years that I have been a parliamentarian, this is the first time that I have seen a Deputy Prime Minister stoop to so low an insult in describing the attitude of the opposition, which never did any filibustering, but merely wanted to ensure that parliamentary rules, the rules imposed on us by members opposite, were respected.

Mr. Loubier: Insult is the weapon of the people.

Mr. Gauthier: Before agreeing to let the House adjourn, I just wish to remind you and the population that, during the debate on this matter, the Minister of Labour refused to make the slightest concession allowing the workers not to disrupt rail transportation but to return to work and be heard. As even the conciliator admitted, the workers were not given the opportunity to be heard.

We asked the government to give the workers a chance to be heard by imposing a return to work. We agree that they should go back to work, but they should be given a chance to be heard without the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. The Minister of Labour rejected this minimum demand by the