

I would just like to add that, before going to the Senate, the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve had the floor in the debate on Bill C-41 at third reading, and we will return to this debate following Private Members' Business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ) moved:

That Bill C-317, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Public Service Staff Relations Act (scabs and essential services), be read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise in this House today to speak on Bill C-317, anti-scab legislation. This bill, which will amend the Canada Labour Code and the Public Service Staff Relations Act is aimed at preventing the hiring of scabs to replace employees on strike against or locked out by an employer covered by the Canada Labour Code and employees on strike in the federal public service.

• (1740)

The bill is also aimed at maintaining essential services during a strike or lockout at a crown corporation or in the public service.

As you know, the workers' cause is very important to me. That is why I tabled this bill in this House on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. This bill would provide adequate protection to workers currently victimized by their employers' disloyal practices.

In Canada, more than 10 per cent of the labour force is subject to the provisions of the Canada Labour Code. This amounts to 217,600 workers in Quebec and over 1,083,000 in Canada.

The debate on the adoption by the federal Parliament of anti-scab legislation that would apply to organizations under its jurisdiction is nothing new. In 1980, the hon. Ed Broadbent, then leader of the NDP, tabled a private member's bill aimed at banning replacement workers. From 1981 to 1992, several unions called one after the other on the federal government to introduce an anti-scab bill.

Finally, in 1990, the Bloc Québécois tabled, through my colleague, the hon. member for Richelieu, a bill aimed at prohibiting the hiring of persons to replace Crown corporation employees who are on strike or locked out. Unfortunately, this bill was defeated at second reading by only 18 votes.

Private Members' Business

In 1977, Quebec legislators passed what is commonly referred to as the Quebec anti-scab bill, which went into effect on February 1, 1978.

To understand the reasons behind this bill, we must go back to the early 1960s. In that era of great reforms, relations between the federal government and unions made possible a review of labour laws that led to a sharp rise in union membership. Unions gradually hardened their positions. In the early 1970s, in reaction to the Liberals' election and the imposition of their War Measures Act—as you will recall—, unions openly dissociated themselves from government actions. A strike by the coalition of public sector workers gave rise to a new union solidarity. Within a very short time, this solidarity moved into the private sector.

Afterwards, around the mid-seventies, there were some extremely turbulent strikes. I would point out the Firestone strike, the Canadian Gypsum strike and, particularly, the infamous United Aircraft strike.

It is the Parti Québécois which introduced the concept of prohibiting the use of scabs.

A significant event happened a week before the bill was passed. During a strike at Robin Hood, a federally regulated company in Montreal, security guards opened fire on strikers and injured eight of them. The person who gave the order to fire was Robert Grynszpan. I am giving his name because, later, he suddenly reappears in the news.

In Quebec, since the anti-scab provisions were adopted, studies have revealed that disputes have indeed been shorter.

It is obvious that the Quebec legislation was not well received by employers. The Conseil du patronat, which was vehemently opposed to this legislation, received in 1991 permission to challenge it before the Supreme Court. However, it later decided to drop proceedings, considering that the climate of labour relations had changed since the provisions of the legislation had been applied. And this last part should really dictate the conduct of the present federal government.

The aim of this bill is not to impose on the rest of Canada legislation that is essentially Quebec's.

• (1745)

In Canada, the tendency seems to be to integrate the principle of prohibition of strikebreakers in labour relations practices.

Recent laws in Ontario, British-Columbia and at the federal level confirm that tendency. These two provinces and Quebec total more de 75 per cent of the population of Canada. Therefore, the majority of workers and employers are regulated by laws which prohibit the use of strikebreakers. Of course, the level of prohibition can vary but the principle remains the same and seems to be accepted by management as well as by labour unions.