

If the government's motive is to try to designate employees, as it tried to designate the air controllers' union, how can it then expect co-operation? Can the Public Service Alliance, the Canadian Labour Congress or the various public service unions be expected to work toward solving problems with a government that is attacking them inside and outside this House?

Mr. Jelinek: They support sector bargaining.

Mr. Murphy: A voice in the wilderness says the government supports sector bargaining. That is true to some extent. The government's submission to the inquiry into wider-based bargaining indicates that it wants a lot of other changes made at the same time. It has proven unwilling to make modifications in the present act which would affect its treatment of people here on the Hill or people affected by the occupational health and safety section, those who do not come under Part IV of the labour code or anything else.

The danger of this bill is that it would take protection away from unions; it would not give them protections that are necessary to make it work.

I have to oppose the bill, Mr. Speaker. It is not practical and it is not complete. Considering the government's present attitude toward workers, it could never be successful.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Jelinek) regarding his private member's bill which is now before us.

As I have stated on many occasions, I share with him and other members of this House, a deep concern for the disruptive effects of public sector strikes on the economy and well-being of this nation.

It has been self-evident for years that no one really wins in a strike situation. There are not even any runners-up. Victories are often claimed by either management or the unions, and sometimes by both. But both sides can be classified as losers, as can those not directly involved in the disputes.

What angers me is that the situation has been allowed to continue and that no effective corrective action has been implemented.

To this government's shame, it has allowed public sector strikes, like death and taxes, to be considered inevitable. I vehemently disagree. How can we possibly accept as inevitable the repeated disruption of essential services which are so costly to individual Canadians and to the nation as a whole?

There comes a time, and that time has long past, when we must take rational measures to ensure that the effect of strikes is minimized.

A step forward in this regard would be the passage of this bill, an act to amend the existing Public Service Staff Relations Act and the Canada Labour Code to provide for the establishment of sector bargaining.

Sector Bargaining

Madam Speaker, this makes a great deal of sense. As the hon. member for Halton has stated, the purpose of this bill is to require union groups in a single public service sector to bargain with the Treasury Board simultaneously and to negotiate contracts which would run for three years and expire at the same time.

This would assure the taxpaying public that each essential public service sector would be strike free, except for the possibility of a walkout every three years. Such a move would force bargaining units, which represent different job categories in a common service, to resolve their disputes with management at the same time.

This would effectively eliminate successive strikes in a particular sector, strikes that obviously disrupt the work of the entire common service. Thus, a small number of people would be prevented from using the power of intermittent and vitally-timed strikes to hold up for ransom the government and the country because an essential service is being denied. This is what is happening now and this is what must be stopped.

From 1975 to 1980 there were more than 1,200 strikes in the public sector in Canada. Almost one million people were directly involved in the strikes, with millions more affected, and these strikes resulted in about ten million lost working days. And, as the record shows, things are definitely not improving. The figures for 1980 were the highest for the previous six years. I repeat, this has to be stopped.

It would have been reasonable to assume that after the major postal strike in 1975, this government would have been seriously working to prevent these situations. That infamous strike involving the Post Office ran from October to December, a total of 45 days, involved nearly 1,800 workers, and cost the department a loss of 700,000 work days.

I am quite sure that instead of 1,800 workers, the figure involved was around 19,000, including the inside workers. Other postal workers had to give up their jobs because of the strike.

No one has ever been able to come up with that strike cost in real dollars to everyone of us not directly involved, but you can be sure it was in the millions of dollars. I think a ballpark figure was \$50 million, and that probably was too low. A great many small businesses suffered seriously and some went bankrupt. That was the result of only one of the bargaining units within the common service. The others each had their day, and again Canadians were the ones to pay.

As I have said before in this House, I am not against the right of the labour force to strike. What I am opposed to is allowing a group of people working in essential services the right to tie up this country every few weeks or months in order to force their employers to award them sometimes unreasonable and excessive increases in pay and benefits. Through this bill, such blackmail would cease. By containing public sector bargaining within a specified three-year period, the issues could be resolved on a more stable pattern, and all at the same time.