

*Government Orders*

discussions on their demands. It was a take it or leave it proposition.

So, of course, this lead to a conflict. Barely 12 hours into this conflict—and this illustrates what I just said—the Minister of Labour, who is new to the issue, sets in motion a process to break the strike through special legislation. The Minister of Labour is therefore a major player in this issue. We must recognize however that there was not much she could do because, as the saying goes, the scene was set. All she now had to do was follow the script. The scene was set thanks to the great producing abilities of the Minister of Transport.

What could she do except become the employer herself and ensure that the strike could be quashed immediately, while at the same time setting the working conditions? I think that a Minister of Labour worthy of the name would have borne in mind that she or he has a job to do and is not accountable to the Minister of Finance—who wants to privatize CN—but is responsible for social peace and to the parties. Her role involved trust and confidence.

The Minister of Labour should tell her colleague for transport that, while he had been able to reach the agreements he wanted with his friends, the employers, she, as Minister of Labour, could not take sides, that she was responsible for social justice and fairness. What should she have done then?

• (1325)

I am not saying that the government should tolerate the negative effects of a strike indefinitely. It would have been appropriate to table this special legislation on Monday and get the parties back to work. It is at this level that the Minister of Labour could have played an important part in cabinet. She could have enlightened her cabinet colleagues and told them: "Yes, we will get these people back to work to avoid the negative effects of the strike, but we will also ensure that the parties can negotiate without interference, while it is still time to do so. For the first time in this conflict, we will put in place conditions such that the parties involved can negotiate in good faith and find a solution to their problems. We will force the employer to negotiate by not giving it the assurance that the government will impose back-to-work legislation and thus serve its interests".

The Minister of Labour knew what to do very well. She was very familiar with the usual solution in such a conflict. This is something that people involved in labour relations learn quickly. The minister knew what to do: go to mediation. She knew it so well that she did so in another conflict, in Montreal, which had persisted for 25 months. In this case, it has been 18 months, but in Montreal, it had been 25 months. So what did she do? Following the wise counsel of her senior officials, and assuming her responsibility as Minister of Labour, she decided that there

would be mediation in the Port of Montreal conflict, to force the parties to conduct true negotiations under appropriate conditions, so that a negotiated solution might be reached. The process proved to be successful in the days that followed. Considering that the solution is known and that it gave very positive results in Montreal, why does the Minister of Labour decide to go all out in the case of the railway work stoppage and pass a piece of legislation imposing working conditions?

I want to be clear. We are not opposed to back-to-work legislation. We believe it is legitimate to resort to such legislation and we would have agreed to do so as early as tomorrow, so that by Monday evening the act would have been passed in this House. However, we do not accept the fact that this situation be used as a smoke screen. After all, what do you think is the goal of the government in this issue?

**Some hon. members:** Hear. Hear.

**Mr. Bouchard:** The comments I just made raise a question. Those who may be listening to us on this lovely Sunday afternoon may ask themselves: What did he just say? Why would the government do such a thing? Why would a decent and responsible government do that? Why would a government team up with the employers to distort the conflict resolution process? This is a good question, but we have the answer.

The answer was provided by the Minister of Transport. The Minister of Transport himself told us in this House last week, I think it was on Thursday, but I could be wrong, any way he told us on Wednesday or Thursday in answer to a question put to him: "Yes, but the truth is that our goal is to get rid of some provisions in the collective agreements". They do not like these collective agreements, so they are going to change them, to do a hatchet job, to scrap them.

Once this is done, they will be able to soothe the employers and sell the CN. They will sell the CN and make a lot of money out of it, because they will do so at the expense of the workers and of their rights and entitlements. They will shave down the collective agreements and then hand a very nice package to the private companies interested in buying the CN. This is the goal sought by the minister. He has said so in this House. We thought that was what he was trying to achieve, in fact, we were quite sure of it, but now he has admitted it.

**An hon. member:** Shame!

**Mr. Bouchard:** I think the government was swayed by the interests of the employers in this issue. You can tell just by the way it has handled it, if only at the parliamentary level. Will people not find it strange how eager the government was to muzzle the opposition, to use tactics which had never been used before in this House? For the first time ever, a gag was put on committee proceedings. That is really something. Was there an emergency? Was there an imminent political crisis? Was there a