

Instead, the government presents a broad sweep putting all these workers back to work. They have not been declared essential by the government. They are entitled under the law of this country, under international convention, to free collective bargaining. Why will the government not give to these workers the rights that it asks the governments of eastern Europe to give to its workers?

Mr. Merrithew: In response to the question of the hon. member for Victoria, I might mention he was again asking about the principle of pay equity. I do not know how much clearer I can be as to the government's position.

The President of the Treasury Board has indicated publicly and in responses to questions in this House that he is prepared to deal with it. We have been dealing with it. We have not tried to escape from our responsibilities with regard to dealing with pay equity. He has done that. He is willing to do so again. We chose, personally, not to try to put any aspects of the points in dispute in the bill.

The bill does three things. It orders the workers to return to work immediately. It sets up, rather than tries to legislate, a settlement of the outstanding issues. I think the bill is very fair in that it sets up the process by which we can bring in binding conciliation in which to deal with the outstanding issues. They will go back to the table and try to deal with those outstanding issues, assuming that is a very fair way of trying to deal with the issues. It was not that we forced or legislated the solution to the problem. We just legislated the process by which those solutions might be achieved.

The second issue the hon. member mentioned was as to why we did not legislate back the essential workers. In my remarks I indicated that when we met with the bargaining unit concerned—and of course Treasury Board deals with bargaining units which in this case are the HSs from my department, the Department of National Defence and National Health and Welfare bargaining as a unit—we said that in order to run Ste. Anne's Hospital and our two nursing homes for veterans in an adequate fashion and without putting at risk the lives, health, safety and security of our veterans, obviously we had to have a very large percentage of the employees. We indicated very clearly that this figure would be in the vicinity of 90 per cent. They offered 8 per cent.

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Obviously 8 per cent would not do. There is a difference of opinion there as to what they perceive as being essential and what the Government of Canada and my employees perceive to be essential around Ste. Anne de Bellevue Hospital. Obviously 8 per cent or 45 employees cannot run a hospital with 726 veterans, most of whom are bedridden or in wheelchairs. Obviously one could not do that.

There was not going to be a meeting of the minds on that particular issue. It was deemed impossible, especially because of the two conditions attached to that term "essential employees" and their offer of putting some of the employees back to work on an essential basis. There was no meeting of the minds. It was not doable so we dealt with the bargaining unit as Treasury Board normally does.

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Madam Speaker, I join in the debate today with a great deal of trepidation because I never quite thought that I would have to participate in a debate in the House of Commons, a place for which I have a great deal of respect, on a piece of legislation that is a vivid example of the complete disdain and contempt of the men and women who work in the Public Service of Canada as this government has currently been showing.

This particular piece of legislation is nothing short of sledge hammer legislation forced upon members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada for the ship crews on the east and west coasts of Canada and along the St. Lawrence Seaway, as well as hospital workers right across this country.

This particular legislation really smells of the rot and deceit of this government in dealing with thousands and thousands of Canadians who are members of the Public Service. I firmly believe—and I know that a lot of people in the Public Service and a lot of unionists believe the same as I do—that it has been a very long time since staff relations or union management relations between the Public Service of Canada and the government of this country have ever been this bad.

This government has set about since 1984 systematically to dismantle the Public Service. It has set about to try to undercut the union movement, the trade union movement. The government set about to do it so that it could do things like privatize Canada Post.