

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

employee relations, I was very impressed with her approach to the subject matter before us. In the name of all of us who have a deep interest in employer-employee relations, I wish to thank her for her remarks.

I would like to ask her if she recognizes that the House of Commons is an essential service and that as such we should designate certain services as essential to the safety and security of the operation of Parliament. I believe she was in the House when I asked a question of the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse). I asked him what he would do if the House of Commons in its wisdom, and the employees in theirs, accepted to include the right to strike, as is the case with public servants. In my speech, I think I made it clear that the employees themselves have said that they could forgo that right if meaningful negotiations were forthcoming on binding, third-party arbitration.

● (1820)

Perhaps what I am putting forward is hypothetical. I prefaced my remarks by saying that I know the Hon. Member's commitment to employer-employee relations, and I also understand how she has worked with people over the years. How would she feel if there was a strike and a picket line was set up on Parliament Hill? Would she adopt the position taken by the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria), for example, who has said publicly that, indeed, the work of the House of Commons is essential, and he has given warning that he would see fit to enter the House to do what he has to do as a Member of Parliament in order to represent his electorate?

I know the position of certain members of the NDP who spoke today. They said that they would never cross a picket line for whatever reason. However, the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre said that in certain circumstances, he might cross a picket line if he judged that the matter at hand was of such importance to warrant his explaining to those who were picketing that he was crossing so that he could do his job as a Member of Parliament.

I wonder how the Hon. Member for Trinity feels about this. Perhaps this is unfair to her because I did not discuss this matter with her before. Perhaps I should ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister—

Mr. Murphy: They have to make a speech before you can do that.

Mr. Gauthier: Yes, I may have to ask that question of the Parliamentary Secretary to the House Leader. Perhaps the Hon. Member for Gatineau (Mrs. Maily) wishes to make a speech and to tell us how she would act. However, I am asking the question of the Hon. Member for Trinity who has made public her views on this Bill. We do not yet know the views of the Hon. Member for Gatineau, but we may find out about them some day.

What would the Hon. Member for Trinity do if faced with a picket line of bus drivers, messengers or security guards who were saying: "We do not believe that you should go to your workplace because we are openly protesting a conflict in employer-employee relations"? What would the Hon. Member say in response to the comments I have just made?

Miss Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, first, I do think it is logical to regard Parliament as an essential service in which strikes would not be permitted. I think that way because of how important it is for citizens to be able to have access to their elected representatives to redress grievances. If Parliament was not able to operate, the Government and the executive level would operate without any checks and balances, and that would be most undesirable in a democracy. That kind of situation would be fraught with all kinds of possibilities for arbitrary decisions against citizens who would not have any means of redress. For those reasons, I think it is reasonable to withhold the right to strike from Hill employees. However, having said that, workers who are deprived of that particular right, which is a blunt and very powerful weapon, must be protected in other ways. They must have—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I regret to inform the Hon. Member that there is not enough time left today. When we resume the debate, the Hon. Member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) will have the floor for another four minutes for questions and comments.

● (1830)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 66 deemed to have been moved.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES—ASSISTANCE FOR OFFICIAL LANGUAGE
MINORITY GROUPS (A) GOVERNMENT POSITION. (B) INQUIRY
WHEN GOVERNMENT WILL ACT.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, on April 8, I put a question to the Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard), which I actually wanted to direct to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), and he refused to answer. I read some comments in the press that the Government was rather slow and hesitant about implementing official languages programs and policies. I read some headlines, such as: "La Fédération des francophones hors Québec and Alliance Québec say these petty reforms are unacceptable." Another headline: "Exasperation a result of Ottawa's hesitations", and another headline in an English newspaper, I think it was the Gazette: "Ottawa has failed to consult us on reform: language minorities", and it goes on: "Alliance Québec and francophones outside Quebec blame Ottawa for inaction".