

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—BILLS

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed from Thursday, May 31, consideration of the motion of Mr. Plamondon that Bill C-201, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code (scabs and essential services), be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

Mr. Felix Holtmann (Portage—Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to participate in debate on the Private Member's proposed legislation, Bill C-201, this evening.

I would like to congratulate the member who introduced this bill for discussion. Labour legislation, I suspect, is of interest and concern to all members of Parliament, not just those who claim to represent labour. Our New Democratic friends so often claim that they, alone, represent labour, and possibly some of my Liberal colleagues believe that they are the ones who represent labour and the unions of the country. The fact is that that cannot be the case. If that were so, they would be in government today.

An hon. member: Cheap shot.

Mr. Holtmann: The hon. member calls it a cheap shot, but if all labour supported the New Democratic Party, it would be in government today. In fact, we do have a lot of labour who support the Conservative government. I still commend the member who brought forth this bill for discussion concerning the use of scab labour and the term "scab labour" during labour disputes or strikes which occur in the Public Service and in Crown corporations.

When these disruptions occur, members of Parliament from all sides probably have an interest in their effects on the country. These disruptions are caused by an inability to come to a new consensus in respect of working agreements. Herein lies the debate.

It is Quebec which has adopted such legislation and it is the only province which has adopted such legislation. In fact, to this date, Quebec has no conclusive evidence that this has worked as it should have.

Private Members' Business

Let us analyse this particular legislation. If it goes through, as is, one would have to wonder what ramification or effect it would really have in terms of how we determine what is essential work in the workforce. Members on all sides of the House know what it has done to Canada when we have had disruptions because of strikes by civil servants and in our Crown corporations.

There are times when I believe all workers should have the right to ask for more benefits, more funding for their hourly wages, and better conditions. I speak as a westerner, a prairie farmer, and one who has experienced so many disruptions by our national railways and the private rail companies. In the case of the national railways, I can tell you that the plight of the farmer was never considered, in my view, by those who implemented such a strike by a Crown corporation.

• (1820)

Looking at our record as a nation in terms of strikes—whether against the Post Office or other Crown corporations such as the national railroad, or even against non-governmental corporations—which have put a tremendous hardship on the economy of the country, there may have been times when some of us in the House would accept that the insecurity of an extended period without a contract is not acceptable to anybody in the workforce.

All too often I have seen a strike hit at a time when the very services of commerce was too disruptive, and we have seen this happen. We have seen the shipping on the St. Lawrence brought to its heels.

An hon. member: That is the purpose.

Mr. Holtmann: A member of the New Democratic Party says the purpose of the strike is to disrupt national commerce. This may be so to some individuals, but I thought the purpose was to gain a better contract for the worker. To disrupt so many people in the commerce across the nation without the consideration of the pride and the national unity of this country could jeopardize the very thing that holds us together. The very thought of that scares me.

There is no argument that there are times that a strike may be warranted. But when it disrupts so many other innocent people in the chain of the economy, I have a lot of difficulty in saying such a strike should be sustained.