

*Oral Questions*

of this type. But for the time being, we have reached a dead end and major issues are still on the table. We are faced in one case with demands for yearly increases of 17.4 per cent, and in the other, 14.3 per cent.

In this conflict the interest of medium term public safety and public health must be resolved. That is why we will introduce later today a bill to set up a process for reaching a settlement. Mr. Speaker, I can say that we will not legislate an agreement per se, but rather a means to achieve a settlement.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Catterall:** Mr. Speaker, the workers have been providing emergency services. The Minister of Transport told the House yesterday that there is no problem with safety on the St. Lawrence River. Where was the minister's concern for safety last month when 1,700 lobster fishermen put out to sea? Is not the real reason for the sledgehammer of back-to-work legislation protecting the profits of the friends of government in the shipping business?

**Mr. de Cotret:** Mr. Speaker, the real reason for the legislation is to break an impasse that does not seem to be able to be resolved through negotiations. I have said it before and I will say it again. I am willing to sit down at the table. Informal negotiations have been continuing throughout. The situation is at a point now where the two parties are so far apart, with demands of 17 and 14 per cent annual wage increases compared to 4.1 per cent for the rest of the 155,000 public servants, that we feel we have to move.

I would like to quote from a letter I received from Iris Craig, President of PIPS, who says: "The current and anticipated labour disruptions will undoubtedly have an egregious impact on the health and safety of government clients. Furthermore, any extended inoperation of federal government ships will jeopardize research activities in which significant time, energy and money has been invested. It will also jeopardize the Maritime economy of our country."

She is saying: "do something", and that is exactly what we are doing.

**Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants):** Mr. Speaker, my question also is directed to the President of the Treasury Board and it is twofold. It was partly covered in his last answer.

If it is necessary to introduce legislation, is he still prepared to negotiate, even with the legislation introduced? And in view of his answer yesterday about pay equity when he said that if there was a settlement there would be pay equity, which has been a longstanding problem in these trades, how does he intend to implement pay equity where the contracts are staggered and overlapping?

**Mr. de Cotret:** Mr. Speaker, first, even with the legislation introduced, I would be willing to negotiate at any time. I will repeat that commitment. I am available and I will be willing to negotiate.

In terms of the other part of my hon. colleague's question with regard to pay equity between the east coast workers and the west coast workers, the offer on the table at the moment is that as of the date of signing of the new bargaining agreement the east coast workers would get exactly the same compensation as the west coast workers so they would have parity.

**Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough):** Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Yesterday he informed this House that wage parity was offered to the unions. What he did not say was that he would only agree to it if the unions dropped all the other issues.

Will he today, rather than introduce this legislation—legislation which indeed we will not support—continue to support this wage parity and at the same time return to the negotiating table and negotiate separately the outstanding issues that are there?

**Hon. Robert de Cotret (President of the Treasury Board):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the premise of the question. I indicated yesterday and I indicated again today that wage parity was very much on the table and up-front on the day of signing. I would just like to assure my hon. colleague that there was never any question about this offer being conditional on dropping all of the demands.