

Private Members' Business

I am very surprised that the Canada Labour Code did not take its cue from the Government of Quebec, especially since this concerns a large number of employees in Quebec. There are more than 200,000 employees in crown corporations, corporations regulated by the Canada Labour Code, out the public service. In Canada, there are more than one million. I think that the House of Commons should act responsibly and realize there is a major problem which should be dealt with as soon as possible.

• (1815)

Why is this still a problem? I think there are two reasons. The first, obviously, is negligence. The official opposition has put a number of questions to the Minister of Labour since her arrival in the House. We asked her if the Canadian government was going to introduce legislation. Her replies have always been evasive. The questions put to her by the official opposition concerned a labour dispute which still today, in 1995, poisons labour relations at a flour mill in Montreal. The employees came and demonstrated outside Parliament; they came to hear us in the House galleries. The dispute has lasted a very long time.

What is odd is that this dispute involved the same company and the same people who were on the management side in a dispute that, a few years or months before the Parti Québécois enacted the legislation in Quebec, forced the government to take immediate action because one man had been killed. Somebody was shot at on the picket lines, and a worker died. The government assumed its responsibilities at that point.

Today we realize that the Government of Canada, with a minister whose arrival was a bit strange and whose role was rather vague—

Mr. Boudria: She was elected.

Mr. Caron: She was elected and a department was found for her. It could have been the department of the Canadian near north, it could have been the department of Canadian rain, or the department of the Rocky Mountains. It was simply a matter of finding her a department so she would have some credibility when she toured Quebec defending the option she is currently defending.

I am not saying this to criticize her work, but simply to point out that she did not do what she had to do as Minister of Labour. We do not feel there is a Minister of Labour in Canada in this case.

The second reason the Government of Canada is putting off passing legislation like this is one of ideology. You know that there was a law like this in Ontario. If I am not mistaken, it was passed by the NDP government. The new Harris government—I might say the harass government, but it is the Harris government—has announced that this law will be repealed.

I have not heard that the legislation in question had caused any more trouble in Ontario than in Quebec. It is being challenged for only one reason, an ideological one, which is to allow employers the freedom to do what they want with their property.

I thought that way of thinking was out of fashion in Canada today. I thought that the Canadian state had taken certain steps to oversee the action of employers in order to ensure a certain balance between the law of the market place, the law of might makes right, the law of the jungle, whatever you want to call it, and basic public interest. I believe that the attitude adopted by the Government of Ontario in this instance is a purely ideological one.

Nothing in Ontario labour relations in recent years has proven that the legislation was not working. In Quebec, on the contrary, it can be said that since 1978, in other words for 17 years now, there has been unanimous agreement that the act is working well. Even the Conseil de patronat du Québec gave up its Supreme Court challenge by the late 1980s.

I hope that this House will examine the bill of our colleague from Manicouagan with care, and will once and for all settle this pressing problem of justice in labour relations for all Canadian workers, and no doubt for a few months more for Quebec workers as well.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to be able to say that I was pleased to rise today on Bill C-317. Unfortunately, earlier incidents prevent me from doing so.

• (1820)

However, today, I will take a few moments to deal with it, and then I will talk about related issues. They are indeed related because, to a large extent, they have to do with remarks we heard today and I want to spend some more time dealing with those.

The bill sponsored by the member for Manicouagan is aimed at amending the Canada Labour Code with respect to public service staff relations. As it stands, this piece of legislation respecting the Canada Labour Code is relevant; unfortunately, I cannot support it. I believe that the proposals cannot be examined independently from the federal government's general approach to industrial relations.

[English]

Prohibiting the use of replacement workers and maintenance of essential services must be considered in the context of a comprehensive review of the Canada Labour Code.

[Translation]

Indeed, amending only one aspect of the Canada Labour Code is the wrong way to proceed; a certain balance must be struck when considering changes to labour laws. I am sure that this is what the government will be seeking when it eventually chooses to amend the Canada Labour Code.

Mr. Nunez: When? When?

Mr. Boudria: The member opposite wants to know when. The Canadian Parliament will undoubtedly have the opportunity in the future, as it did in the past, to improve all the laws for the good of the Canadian people. I commend the member who asked me when for his concern for Canada's future. I know that when the constitutional issue will have been settled, when we will have voted no in a few days, he and I will continue to strive to