

*Private Members' Business*

I am surprised the member for Hamilton West so eloquently spoke against this issue, because the Liberal Party imposed this on a strike last year in the Vancouver docks. I am speaking in favour of this type of settlement, but I first want to explain where the Liberal government made two mistakes in the way it did it.

First, the government waited until there was already significant hardship being imposed, not just on a few people and a few on the sidelines who were involved in the strike, but on the whole economic well-being of Canada. Something that started in the port of Vancouver spread across to farmers on the prairies. It almost shut down mills in the interior of British Columbia that were on the edge. It affected hundreds of thousands of people. It is something we have to examine and decide whether there is a better way. As I said, the first problem was that the government took so long to do something about it.

The second mistake is that the employer and employees in that strike situation negotiated. They then took their strike option and were still considerably far apart.

If we are to impose a change of rules, we should give the people an opportunity to readjust to the new rules. The game was changed in midstream. The parties were not given the time to go back to the table to try and resolve it, to see if they could work together more closely.

That is what final offer selection arbitration is inclined to do. It is not a matter of picking and choosing a piece of this or a piece of that when arbitrating a settlement. The way this works is that the final offer is laid on the table by both sides and the arbitrator then picks either one side or the other. In labour negotiations this tends to move the two sides very close together. This is because if one makes an outlandish proposal and the other is being reasonable, the reasonable side's offer will be accepted virtually every time.

I suggest we look at this in terms of protecting the grain industry in Canada. As the member for Hamilton West said, by all means we should start looking at it in a broader sense.

For example, consider that a house is burning down. A fireman stands by on the sidewalk watching the house burn, perhaps while a young child is inside. He does so because the fire department is on strike. All of us accept that as being absolutely unthinkable. So does the fire department and it accepts this kind of responsibility.

Can we accept the concept of a police officer standing by watching someone get mugged or raped because the police department was on strike? We cannot accept this either.

However let us go to the other end of the scale to a small business with little impact on the community and no impact on the national economy. In that situation we say it is okay for it to be a battle of wills and an economic situation for the two forces

at work there. We will let the employer or the employee, depending on who comes out the victor, use their position of relative unimportance to negotiate a higher wage or to force the employee to take a lower wage.

The difference between the two is the degree of importance. We are saying that if you are important, we will not let you have the same rights as people who are unimportant. Not only for the sake of the grain industry, I suggest it is time we actually started to look at the whole concept of how we settle labour negotiations in this country.

Unlike what the Bloc member said, this is not an unfair type of action that will cause the relationships between employers and employees to deteriorate. If anything, it may turn it the other way and cause them to negotiate in much better faith and try to resolve the differences between them.

● (1755)

Employees will not be asking for a 100 per cent raise and the employer saying he wants them to take a 50 per cent cut. They are going to try to move to the most reasonable position possible, so that if it comes down to this final offer selection arbitration they are going to have a fairly reasonable offer on the table in the hopes it will be selected. If they are unreasonable, they are likely going to lose. That is the whole concept of this.

The member for Hamilton West talked about how the Public Service Staff Relations Act works. Let me give an example of how it works.

The air traffic control system in this country is not designated as an essential service. The air traffic control system has the right to go on strike, but if it does, it shuts down the entire air industry in Canada.

The government instead said it had the right to go on strike, but in the event of a strike the government has the right to designate a number of employees to maintain the essential service within the air traffic control system. The controllers said they certainly wanted to maintain the safety of this country, hospital flights, food flights to the north, emergencies and these types of things. They would deal with these, and so they said they had no problem with this concept of designating employees.

Then the government turned around and designated every single employee in the air traffic control system and said that the essential duties were everything that they did. It went to court and the court upheld it. A wonderful system. Now the air traffic controllers can go on strike, which means their contract is no longer valid. The government can pay them anything they want to and they still have to report for duty.

We have to find another system. Without getting into the budget argument right now, we are in a very fragile situation