

*Government Orders*

Do not think it cannot happen because it happens all the time. It is central to our collective bargaining process that the government sets the parameters of the bargaining process and then leaves the two sides of that process by themselves to reach an agreement.

This measure of government interference into the process that we find in the proposed amendment to part I of the labour code tips the balance in favour of the employer. It puts the government, rather than in an impartial third party position, into the position of what amounts to an arbitrator. Depending on the circumstances in any given individual dispute, the government could perhaps be in the position of an arbitrator that loses its impartiality.

Let us think for a minute of any major labour dispute that has happened in this country in the last few years. For example, there was the Gainers dispute in Edmonton. I understand that Gainers was within provincial jurisdiction. I am just offering this as an example with which I am particularly familiar.

If the first offer from Peter Pocklington to the Gainers workers had not been rightly rejected, and with every last dram of justice we can imagine, those workers could have been compelled to sign a contract that not only would have been as bad as the one it was eventually able to salvage but it would have been far worse. The forcing of a first vote could have compelled that.

Within federal jurisdiction I think of the most recent strike at Canada Post. The compulsion of a first vote on the employer's first offer would have resulted in the workers at Canada Post accepting a contract far inferior to the one they were eventually able to get from that employer.

• (1640)

What is granted in the proposed amendments to part I of the code in Bill C-101 puts the government, in the person of its minister, in the position of potentially becoming an agent of the employer in labour relations.

This will be an invitation to employers within federal jurisdiction to harry and hound ministers of labour, seeking at every step of the way the compulsion of the vote on the first offer.

The inclusion of this amendment in the bill, if passed, will result in a situation in which, regardless of who that

minister of labour may be and regardless of the party that minister may serve, the minister is placed in the position, if she or he is to continue to be fair, of continually saying no to those petitioners within federal jurisdiction who will be coming to that poor minister and saying: "Well, we have this offer on the table and we want you to force it to a vote".

It may be difficult, oh it may indeed be difficult, for a minister of labour from time to time to say no to a company that has been generous to that minister's party in the past and that gives every indication of intending to continue to remain generous to that party, all other things being equal.

It may be very hard for a minister of labour to say no to a company that can marshal resources in that minister's riding or in the riding of friends of that minister for the purpose of making that minister's further political life much less comfortable than previously had been the case.

We are setting up a minister of the Crown for ongoing, unreasonable pressure from interests within federal jurisdiction which will want to use this new provision of the code as a stick with which to beat their workers further into line.

I suspect that the Minister of Labour in the current government will not find that a particularly difficult prospect. I suspect, given the actions of the government of the day, that the idea of this new element of the code being used to further subjugate Canadian workers causes no trouble whatsoever to the current labour minister or indeed any labour minister who may prove to be that hon. member's successor.

I suspect this because in truth these provisions seem little more than an extension, another instalment, in what has been a long and consistent record of anti-labour legislation and conduct by this government in its dealings with its own employees and in its dealings with workers generally in Canada. It has been so, right down to such things as the way it has refashioned the Canadian economy to a degree that has been, and bears the potential of being, a boon to Canadian employers but a positive disaster for Canadian working people. It has done so to the point that we are now talking in serious tones, even hushed excitement, about the grand coming economic recovery.