

*Government Orders*

They can use the force of law and they can do that all in the name, as the minister has just very recently done, of protecting the public.

Being called essential by this government really means that you have been given the kiss of death. It means that you have never been able to strike. It means that you have had to take whatever minimum wage-benefit package the government thought it could get away with without recourse to being able to bargain freely as most other Canadians are able to do and in a way which is set out by the International Labour Organization to which the Canadian government is a signatory, and thereby make the kind of living for yourself and your family which you should justifiably be able to make.

Speaking of the International Labour Organization, I think it would be rather interesting to read, in its entirety, a citation that has come down from the International Labour Organization, because it speaks so directly to the situation we find ourselves in. A committee of the International Labour Organization had this to say in relation to postal workers, and the issues are the same. I quote:

95. The Committee feels however compelled to state that the cause is basically this: the postal workers were legally on strike and the Government, through special legislation, ordered them back to work after seven days of work stoppage.

96. The Government points out, rightly so, that the Committee has recognised in the past that there are circumstances where restrictions and even prohibitions of strikes are justifiable. However, the Committee hastens to say that these are exceptions to the general rule and that the right to strike is one of the legitimate and essential means through which workers and their organisations may defend their economic and social interests. [*Digest of Decisions and Principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO*, third edition, paras. 362 and 363, and cases cited.]

97. It follows that these restrictions and even prohibitions of the right to strike can only be justified in a limited number of situations: civil servants and workers in essential services in the strict sense of the term, i.e. those services whose interruptions would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population—provided however these workers have access to adequate procedures, such as conciliation and arbitration, where the parties concerned can participate in all stages and in which the awards are binding on both parties and are fully and promptly implemented.

The “fully and promptly implemented” has some particular significance which I will get into shortly.

As a result of the government being heavy-handed and using the full force of its legislative power, we have two groups of people, the ships' crews and the hospital workers, who have become, quite literally, within the Public Service, the two lowest paid groups of employees of the Canadian government.

If we look at the history of these two disputes, there are two trains of activity which go on and, other than the fact that they have almost by accident become able to strike the specific situations because they do entirely different work, are not identical.

As far as the ships' crews are concerned, in the last round of negotiations for the ships' crews after having gone through the process of negotiation and after having gone through the process of conciliation and all the other things which are laid out by law and required of the parties, the conciliation board made a recommendation which, of course, was not binding. This recommendation awarded the ships' crews more benefits and higher rates of pay, in general, than the government wanted to pay and higher in percentage and so on than what had been arrived at in other general settlements of the Public Service. This was done for very good reasons. I have to repeat that they did that because they found themselves in the situation of being vulnerable, not many of them, with very little bargaining power, in addition to the fact that they are not even allowed to go on strike.

• (1230)

The conciliation board's decision was that these people should get a higher award than the rest of the settlements in the public service. The reason was quite simple; they were so far behind. In 1987, in the matter of the ships' crews, those working on the west coast were 28 per cent behind the general comparable wage in the public sector, and those on the east coast were 16 per cent behind. That was in 1987.

The government stated that it would not pay any attention to what the conciliation board had to say and refused to implement the suggestions of the board. Of course, as I have said, it did not have to because it was not binding. When the government did that to its employees, the employees admittedly and knowingly went on an illegal strike. They had no other recourse. As far as they were concerned, in this daily struggle which we as wage earners have, they had to draw to the