

Private Members' Business

Employees involved in customs and immigration control remained on the job. Included among these essential jobs were employees responsible for the primary inspection of meat and fish products imported to this country.

• (1745)

Not surprisingly, the provisions of the Public Service Staff Relations Act also precluded those involved with national security from striking. Included among those were the civilian federal employees who provide support to RCMP operations.

Of interest to my colleagues in this place, parliamentary operations were designated as an essential service. *Hansard* continued to be printed, along with committee reports and other parliamentary publications. Simultaneous translation services also continued to be offered.

These are some examples of the services considered as essential for the safety and security of the public and for which the public service employees could not withdraw services. The central theme throughout this list is: These services are essential for the safety and security of the Canadian public.

It is evident that the current provisions of the Public Service Staff Relations Act have by and large served the Canadian public well. By tinkering with these provisions and including the notion of economic hardship in the grain industry, are we trying to fix what ain't broke?

It is an unfortunate but accepted reality that strikes will cause inconvenience and maybe even economic hardship to some. However, if we are to accept that employees have the right to strike to put pressure on the employer, then we must accept the results. If it is our view that strikes should not cause hardship to anyone, then it is my suggestion that all strikes be declared illegal.

This bill starts along that road. It is headed in a direction that can only bring grief to employer-employee relations in this country. I would not argue that the movement of grain is not important to Canadians. Obviously it is, but I do not believe the production or movement of grain is essential for the safety or security of the public.

The movement of grain is, like other commercial activities, an important economic activity in this country. If we were to introduce the idea that there can be no strikes or lockouts in the grain industry, which sector would be next? Would it be the auto industry? The shipping industry? How about forestry services? In a certain section of the country, ore production is extremely important. Should we consider banning work stoppages there too?

If we are able to use economic criteria, I am confident that every member of this House could cite an enterprise worthy of

consideration for a bill such as this. I would like to remind members that in many jurisdictions police services are given the opportunity to withdraw from their jobs. Medical practitioners and teachers also have this ability.

As I mentioned, if we accept that employees have the right to strike and to exert pressure on their employer, then they must be permitted to do so. The introduction of a provision in the Public Service Staff Relations Act prohibiting strikes in any one specific area, be it grain handling or some other industry, begins to erode this right. Employees either have the right to strike or they do not. The provision restricting the right to strike in the federal public service to those performing services essential for the safety and security of the public is a restriction, but I think it can be reasonably argued.

In addition, this provision has been in place for almost 30 years and still allows the public service employees to withdraw services. As we saw during the last public service strike, employees still have the ability to exert considerable pressure on the employer.

Times, they are a-changing. We have to roll with change. I do not feel the way to begin a positive and co-operative renewal of labour relations is by introducing legislation which begins to erode what labour considers a basic right. If we are going to give labour the right to withdraw services in order to exert pressure in collective bargaining, then we must allow this withdrawal of service to have some effect.

I am sure the member for Lethbridge did not intend anything sinister but was simply advancing a proposal that would protect the interests of the grain industry. While the reasons for desiring protection from strikes or lockouts are noble in themselves, we must look at how we propose to do this and the results such a proposal would bring.

While I agree with the member that the grain industry is an important aspect of this country, as many other industries are, I cannot accept the notion that Parliament legislates protection at the expense of the rights of other Canadian citizens. Despite what I believe are good intentions, the results would be inappropriate and I cannot support this bill.

• (1750)

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and support Bill C-262. In the course of my speech I will probably deal with some of the things mentioned by the member for Hamilton West.

Going back to the speech by the Bloc Quebecois member, it seemed by the way he spoke that he misunderstood the difference between basic arbitration and being legislated back to work, and having compulsory arbitration and the concept of final offer selection arbitration.