

*Government Orders*

internal and external factors may affect a business' competitiveness, including such things as quality of management, efficient financial management and, in the case of railways, appropriate regulations, not to mention the economic environment the business is in.

There is another factor we must not forget, however, and that is labour costs. In the present case, we want both parties to come to terms with these facts. Accordingly, the legislator must express the commissions' mandate clearly. We are not requiring the commissions to achieve specific results in terms of job security clauses or any other working condition of the railway workers.

The unions and the companies will have ample time to tell the commissions what working conditions they consider consistent with economic viability and good union-management relations. No specific results must be achieved. We have simply indicated the factors the commissions are to take into consideration in their deliberations.

● (1310)

Moreover, it is only if the parties fail to reach an agreement on these matters during the mediation period, that the commissions will have to reach a final decision. All in all, this is a fair approach to resolving the disputes between the parties.

I would like it to be perfectly clear that the government remains firmly convinced that collective bargaining is a far better way to resolve disputes than emergency legislation. It is significant that nothing in the legislation prevents the parties from modifying any provision in the collective agreements, new or changed, except for the provision on the term of these agreements.

Furthermore, should the parties reach an interim agreement or concur on the approach to resolving the matters in dispute, the establishment of the mediation-arbitration commission could be deferred.

The facts speak for themselves. Considerable effort has gone into resolving the various disputes between the three railways and the various unions, but to no avail. The bill before us gives the parties one final chance to agree through mediation, before the outstanding issues are submitted to arbitration.

Since the start of negotiations, the parties have indicated that they were opposed to legislation to put an end to the dispute, and I agreed with them on this point. Unfortunately, they have not managed to reach an agreement and, as a result, have caused serious economic problems in the country by initiating work stoppages. As the government, we took the necessary steps and tabled the Maintenance of Railway Operations Act, 1995.

I therefore ask my hon. colleagues to support this measure so that it may be adopted.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, regarding this issue, the Bloc deplores the government's simplistic position and its extravagant if not biased speeches.

The government has always stressed the negative repercussions of the strike and its real economic impact, of which we all are aware, and really went overboard on the issue. It kept on repeating that factories were closing everywhere in Canada, coast to coast, particularly in Quebec, since the Bloc Quebecois was the government's main opponent in the House on the issue. Very few economic sectors in Quebec were spared the threat of imminent closures, yet nothing of the sort actually happened.

The government tried to terrorize and brainwash people by exaggerating the economic consequences. I do not want to minimize the consequences, but I think that a government dealing with such an extensive labour dispute, like the one currently affecting the country, should be more reserved, impartial and objective. The government should not upset people; it should reassure them while trying to find a solution. The government did the opposite. We were witness to an incredible demagogic offensive, we were bombarded with a slew of disastrous predictions, which did not turn out to be accurate.

We must nevertheless acknowledge that considerable economic interests and jobs are at stake, not only in the sector directly affected, but also in the sectors spinning off from it.

We are not oblivious to the economic impact of the strike. We proved this by proposing to the government, as early as last Monday, a classic solution of the sort normally used to settle this kind of dispute.

With such an important issue, it is not only necessary to look at the economic impact, but also to be nuanced. So, this is an example of the kind of issue debated in the Parliament of Canada where we need to examine all facets, if we are to debate it wisely and carefully, in the interest of all.

● (1315)

One of them is also, of course, that there are important issues and interests at stake that immediately call into question Canadian democracy, Quebec democracy and parliamentary democracy, and this has been forgotten in the debate.

What we in the Bloc Quebecois wanted to do was to situate the dispute, and the resolution mechanism, in the perspective of a balance to be achieved between the right to negotiate and peace on the labour front, for all of this was at stake. It is not true that because a strike has broken out that an illegal act has been committed. It is not true that because a strike has broken out that it is necessary to push the panic button, to bring out the big guns.