

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the members of committee of the whole that we must make a decision based on the best resolution of conflict formula, so as to enable these professionals to deal with such a situation in the future. Indeed past experience in this sector is not a very good guarantee for the future. Therefore, what is needed is a solution which will provide a guarantee for the future.

Finally, selecting the best offer means that there is a winner and a loser. Someone will be able to say afterwards: "It is your collective agreement. You are the one who got it from the government, so you have to live with it". By experience, after having gone through decrees on collective agreements in the public sector in 1982-83, I know that this is no fun, neither for the employer, nor for the union concerned. It is important that everyone be a winner in this exercise and, for that to happen, both sides must have the impression that they suffered and had to give something during the negotiation process. At the point where we are now, the only solution is to convince the two sides to submit proposals to the referee, and this referee must be able to decide what is best for both sides.

An important technical aspect is that in a single offer, there are always areas regarding which the party making the offer would have been willing to give more and to bargain with the other party, but did not do so because it tabled what was a global and comprehensive offer no individual aspects of which could be amended.

From this point of view, I do not think that the proposal will provide a solution that will make people as happy as possible afterwards and ensure them an adequate work environment. The worst thing which could happen, and which would prove that we are inefficient would be to find ourselves in the same committee of the whole in two or three years, following another breakdown in labour relations.

I believe it is important for us to find a solution which will lead to an improvement in labour relations in that sector, because right now both sides seem to think that "in the end, the government will decide". We must put the two sides in a situation where they have to take their responsibilities, and the best final offer formula is not the solution, because then the whole process becomes a gambling exercise.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Chairman, on the contrary, I tabled proposals using the final offer selection. Under the circumstances this is the best way to define the responsibilities of the two sides.

[English]

The hon. member and some others seem to assume that going back to the traditional operation, which in effect is what the hon. member for Mercier is proposing, is a perfect solution. There are winners and losers under arbitration as well.

The hon. member from Burnaby was just saying that if I appoint the arbitrator he is going to be biased and therefore he is automatically going to lose. I am trying to say I want to be fair. I want to say to both parties that they must decide what they think is the best solution, make the best offer and that becomes the basis for a decision; not cherry picking, not taking little bits and pieces, little fragments here and there. That is arbitration.

We are saying we are trying to develop a different process. I say this with great reservations to my friends in the Reform Party because so far they have been very supportive, but we have had two NDP governments bring forward proposals on final offer selection in those provinces. They felt it was a way of giving a fairer resolution and retaining—and this is what I do not understand, in particular members of the Bloc who have been involved in the union movement—principles of collective bargaining, the full right of the parties to the dispute to become involved in making the solution themselves, not having it imposed by government.

• (1705)

That is what this legislation does. Bring them back to work, set up a process in which both parties will still have to make a decision as to what is in their best interests and in the collective interest of the community. That is what this particular idea of fair offer selection will do. It will send out a message in other disputes down the way that we will expect them to recognize and act in their collective responsibility, not simply to look to government as a crutch or solution.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John): Mr. Chairman, as one who was involved with collective bargaining for over 12 years, I have to say that I tip my hat to the minister for the final offer selection. I want to say something to him.

I have been in this position many times. In final offer arbitration I have to say that management was always the loser, particularly in my municipality. Final offer selection we tried once and I also was the loser. The chairman we had nearly always came out in favour of the union. Nevertheless, we had to accept that. In this case I am not sure because I have a major concern from what I have heard from my colleague from out west.

Is it true that the chairman who is going to make this decision has made the comment that he is in favour of 65 cents?