

Government Orders

• (1620)

Madam Deputy Speaker: I see that the hon. member for Shefford has not lost his sense of humour over the summer. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg South.

[*English*]

Mrs. Dorothy Dobbie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture): Madam Speaker, it is with a great deal of concern that I rise in the House today to speak on the necessity for this bill.

I do not think that there is anybody in Canada who wishes that we were in this position, certainly not the government. I hear from the members across that they do not wish for this either. I am sure that government employees would rather be at work than out on the picket line and facing this legislation.

The government has been compelled to introduce this legislation simply to put an end to the strike. It is a very undesirable situation that nobody wishes they were in. This activity is threatening the livelihood of Canadians and it is disrupting many of the Canadian activities that we all wish to enjoy in perfect freedom.

The fact of the matter is that Canadians cannot get their wheat to market. The farmers are dumping their crops in the field. Whole shifts of auto workers and food industry workers are unable to go to work. They are being sent home because their products are caught in lines at the border. Air service has been disrupted, and people are having a difficult time getting passports to rejoin loved ones in other parts of the world because passport offices are closed and providing only essential services.

In addition to this, incidents continue to occur on the picket line and these are things that are very intimidating to the average Canadian. For example, government workers who are part of the essential service and who are supposed to go to work are intimidated from crossing the picket lines, and I think this is a matter of great stress to them.

As well, the elderly, the disabled and others who go out to do daily business and happen to have business in a building that may house government workers are intimidated when they see loud picketers carrying two-by-fours and waving signs angrily, forming a human barrier

between the individual and their goal. It is very intimidating for them.

These are things that I think nobody here wants to see continued. This bill will extend the collective agreements of the Public Service workers, and therefore eliminate the legal right to strike.

The bill will also provide fines for unions and those public workers who do not abide by the legislation. As well, this bill will enable the government to implement the wage restraint programs that it must implement since it was not able to negotiate these restraint programs in the collective bargaining process.

Indeed, the leaders of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which is the largest government union, have steadfastly rejected the government's budget decision. It has rejected all attempts to resolve the situation and to avoid a strike. The Alliance negotiators have refused to lower their earlier demands. These demands increase the cost to the taxpayer by about 40 per cent.

They have insisted that there cannot be any agreement on wages. They could not reach agreement on wages without major concessions concerning things that would very much affect the ability of taxpayers to bear the burden. They want full job security, for example, in their collective agreements. They want the elimination of regional rates of pay. They want capitulation to the union's idea of equal pay for work of equal value, for pay equity, and they want a permanent end to the government's ability to contract out and to have the flexibility to hire at peak times when that becomes necessary. In addition to all of this as you have heard, they want economic increases equivalent to the increase in the cost of living.

The additional demands and the costs associated with the demands of the Alliance are clearly right now not affordable to the Canadian taxpayer. I think that most members, if they were being very direct and very honest, would agree. Nevertheless the Alliance called a general strike. It is telling that their leader has vowed that he will disobey the law and that he is prepared to go to jail if this legislation is passed. There are, I believe, many law-abiding civil servants in the Public Service and clearly PSAC's leader does not represent that element.

The reasoning behind the wage restraints is very simple and very well founded. Right now, and recently during the height of the recent recession, the high interest rate period, many informed taxpayers, many economists and many members of the business community and general public have continually demanded that