

● (2010)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deans: I can well understand the political requirements. I can well appreciate the need to suck up long after the date for atonement has passed. I can well appreciate the desire on the part of the Official Opposition to make it appear that somehow or other, by virtue of some massive transformation, they now represent the best interests of the people who work for the Parliament of Canada. However, I find it unbelievable. I suspect that the overwhelming majority of people who asked the Liberal Government over the years for the right to organize, who for years sought from the Liberal Government a nod or even a wink which would have indicated some desire of some kind to allow them the right to bargain collectively, feel the same way.

It is not often that I find myself at odds with my good friend and colleague, the Hon. Member for Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe (Mr. Tobin). However, I must confess that this evening he has taken me beyond the pale. He has driven me to my feet, which as you can understand, Mr. Speaker, is no easy task. It is rare that I rise in the House of Commons. However, on this rare occasion I want to say that I find his arguments to be absolute and utter nonsense.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deans: Not the content, let me say, concerning the way his constituents are treated. I say to him that his constituents have been badly treated by Government for as long as they have been his constituents.

Mr. Tobin: Even before?

Mr. Deans: Even before. When we represented them it was bad even, let me tell you. However, for him to attempt to leave the impression here tonight that somehow or other, by virtue of the result of the September, 1984 election those constituents now within the Public Service, who were there before, are worse off than they were under the Liberal Government is total nonsense if one considers it in the collective bargaining context. I know he is a fair and honourable soul and will want to correct the record.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Deans: I know he will because I can see in his eyes that sense of shame he feels having made these extravagant statements which, no doubt, under normal circumstances he would never have made. He was driven to it. By what I am not sure but he was driven to it nevertheless.

What is contained in this legislation is unsatisfactory. On that count my friend from Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe is absolutely correct, as was his colleague.

Mr. Lewis: You are starting to lose me now.

Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act

Mr. Deans: The legislation is not nearly adequate. He is absolutely correct when he says that many of the problems confronted by people who work in the Public Service, particularly on Parliament Hill, and who up until this point in time, notwithstanding many years of Liberal Government, have not been given the opportunity to bargain collectively, are not dealt with within this legislation. It does not afford those people the opportunity to correct the ills perpetrated on them over many, many years by a regime, Liberal though it may have been, with minor interruptions by the Conservative Party, which did not recognize their rights or the obligation of Government to its employees. I can understand that. He is right in that regard. He is also right in saying that it may well be that the vast majority of those covered by this legislation could, under normal circumstances, be given that the right to withdraw their services, given from time to time that may be deemed necessary.

Maybe we should have spent more time or should now spend more time trying to determine if there are classifications of employees that fall within the general definition of essential services. We could do that. We should. I have said so before and I say it again. However, frankly, I find that when the now Official Opposition, the Liberal Party, represented by 39 or 40 people at the moment, barely more, I must admit, than us, when they sit there and pontificate on how, if they were only the Government, things would be different, I cannot believe it. My colleague from Beaches looks at me and, in his normal earnest Scottish way, says "Not true". You know something? He is right. If I were to ask my other colleagues, or my friend from the Conservative Party who is sitting here giving us advice on pensions, they and he would tell us, I am sure, that had he the opportunity he would alter the legislation to conform with what we believe is necessary. I can see it in his eyes.

What I am trying to get at is that enough is enough. We have the legislation before us. It is all we are going to get. We think it to be inadequate. We consider that it could be altered somewhat marginally to reflect the realities. I do not understand why both the Liberal and Conservative Members want to deny their staffs the right to belong to a bargaining unit. If the Liberal Party is so determined that more rights should be extended to those who work on Parliament Hill, I do not understand why they do not voluntarily extend that right, as we have, to their staff. Give them the right to bargain collectively now rather than say they cannot do so because it is not in the Bill.

We in this Party recognized many years ago the right of individuals to come together in a collective bargaining unit, whether by law or by choice. We recognized that you could sign a collective agreement with your employees and that collective agreement would afford them certain protections and benefits. We did it. We did not wait for the law to change. We did not sit back and say that the law does not permit it so we cannot do it. We did it voluntarily. I challenge the Liberal caucus to sign up their staffs in a collective agreement