

Government Orders

government has sought injunctions to prevent the picketing and now we have back-to-work legislation.

If these people are essential to the safety and security of the nation, as the minister contends with this legislation, then that should have been protected two years ago. It is not these workers who are responsible for the current situation. It is the Government of Canada and specifically the Treasury Board.

I think we are in a situation where it is more a question of winning and losing, and Treasury Board likes to win. That is fair if you have a fair situation, but it does not cost Treasury Board anything to sit back and wait. It does cost these people. It costs them wages, and at that level, you cannot afford to go without your full pay for very long.

That has been the pattern. First it was the clerical workers, again, the lowest paid, who were out on strike for months. The welfare program workers just settled. Then the ships' crews workers went out. It is always the lowest paid groups which seem to be the ones with which this government wants to take the hardest line.

At a time when most employers, particularly in the private sector and a lot in the public sector, are going more toward the idea of a co-operative management-labour relationship, of mutually resolving difficulties, going toward the idea of partnership as opposed to opponents, it seems this government wants to go the other way. It wants to force people to accept something that is not right and just.

It is particularly ironic when we see walls coming down all over the world in defence of freedom and democracy, in a growing move toward freedom and democracy and against state control, that we sit here in this Parliament today forcing people back to work.

It certainly is a strange turn of events, Madam Speaker, for a Prime Minister who came to Ottawa promising pink slips and running shoes to public servants to now be saying we cannot do without you, we need you back, we need you back so badly that we are prepared to pass a law to force you back to work.

Mr. Ron Fisher (Saskatoon—Dundurn): Madam Speaker, you would think it would be a compliment to be called essential. You would think it would be gratifying to

be needed. How gratifying it really is for most of us to feel that for someone with whom we have a degree of relationship, we are considered to be essential to the relationships.

• (1220)

Let us look at the two groups of employees of the government which are the subject of today's legislation. In the light of what I have just said about the feeling one would usually get when one is considered to be essential, you would think that they too would feel some kind of a glow of gratification from being so considered.

It seems, however, that in relation to the ships' crews and hospital services workers being designated essential by the government is the kiss of death. I, of course, have been speaking somewhat facetiously because I know very well how these people felt when the government designated these people or tried to designate them over the years.

In fact, ever since 1967 when the Public Service people were first given the ability to go on strike, there have always been many employees who have been designated essential. Of course, what that really meant was that their right to strike was taken away. When you were designated essential there really was no warm feeling of gratification because it was something to be avoided at all costs if at all possible because to be so designated meant that likely, over the long run any way, you would end up being much worse off than anyone who was not so designated. That is what has happened with the ships' crews and the hospital workers over the years.

In this round of negotiations, the government, for whatever reason and in whatever fashion, did not designate these two groups of people whom heretofore had always been designated as essential so to be. They found themselves, because of that situation, to be in a legal strike situation. As the course of time went on, they did exactly that and went on strike.

As I said: "essential to the government" means that you can negotiate with groups of people who are your employees but you do not really have to bargain seriously because you know that if you are not able to come to the kind of agreement with them which you think you would like to come to with them, they can force upon you whatever they want. They can use the force of the courts.