

Private Members' Business

We therefore need to create a different climate in this industry, a climate in which labour relations will lead to much more interesting results. An example of this is what happens in Canada's major ports. Labour relations there have often been difficult. In the smaller ports, however, agreements are reached because the parties talk to each other and succeed in reaching interesting conclusions.

This House must therefore reject this bill, not because of its intent, but because of the terms proposed in it, which will not improve the situation and which, before long, will require us to reconsider this sort of situation. In conclusion, I will describe the situation with the police force in Quebec, as one example. Compulsory arbitration was commonplace; decisions were made. In the end, the solutions did not permit the employer to assume its obligations satisfactorily. The reverse could have been true as well, with union members finding themselves in an unacceptable situation.

● (1740)

The Bloc Quebecois is therefore opposed on the principle that the parties' right to negotiate must be respected. There is also a concern for pragmatism and for reaching solutions that lead to joint agreements. When the parties have a signed collective agreement, the parties must bear in mind, during the life of the agreement, that they agreed to the solution reached by both of them. When there is compulsory arbitration, however, one of the parties wins and the other loses. Labour relations between winners and losers is not the way to the future. Rather, we must make the parties face their responsibilities squarely and really oblige them to negotiate.

[English]

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Hamilton West, I have the privilege to speak to Bill C-262, the grain export protection act introduced by the member for Lethbridge.

This bill seeks to make it illegal for anyone, employee or employer, to cause any cessation of work at any stage of the progress of grain from the premises of the producer of the grain all the way to export. It should be obvious that this bill would affect a large number of Canadians, indeed everybody who comes near grain, from the farmer who grows the grain to those on the trains and ships which carry the grain.

At this time I want to focus on one particular aspect of this bill and what it brings to the labour relations atmosphere with the government's own employees. That is the provision in this bill which would amend the Public Service Staff Relations Act by adding new criteria limiting the right to strike.

This bill seeks to add to the Public Service Staff Relations Act in section 2 and section 78(1) words which would have the effect

of prohibiting employees from engaging in any strike activity in areas related to the orderly progress of grain from the premises of the producer of the grain to export.

When the Public Service Staff Relations Act was introduced almost 30 years ago, the legislators included a unique concept to labour legislation. That was the notion of designating employees as essential and denying them the right to strike. That is to say that employees whose duties included functions which were performed in the interests of the safety and/or security of the Canadian public could not engage in a strike. If one was to search the Canada Labour Code or other labour codes, one would not find many examples of such a concept.

In my opinion this is a good, reasonable and justifiable concept. Employees of the federal government and numerous other federal institutions should not be in a position to withdraw services which would cause harm to the safety or security of Canadians. This provision has stood the test of time.

When public servants engage in a strike activity a number of their colleagues continue to work and provide essential services to the public. The last public service strike provided us with many examples of this particular provision.

Both air and marine search and rescue operations continued. Ice breaking continued. Mariners' charts and maps continued to be produced and updated. The all important function of providing notices to shipping carried on. As well, fisheries patrols were maintained and employees involved in this function continued to provide a service to the public.

Air operations continued and airport facilities were maintained. Weather observations continued. Forecasts were prepared and communicated to the users and of great comfort, notification bulletins affecting aviation safety continued to be produced and disseminated.

Naturally, prison guards and correctional services are deemed as essential services and continued to perform their tasks. All those employees, including those who provide care and security for inmates, medical care, food, heating and all those functions necessary to maintain the system continued to perform their duties.

Health care was maintained by designated employees in such areas as poison control, hazardous product identification, medical support at federal hospitals, ambulance drivers, and dental and chronic care in isolated areas. Also designated were some employees who were involved in research related to health care which used laboratory animals.

Essential to Canadians, income security programs such as UI, family allowance and the Canada pension plan continued. This included the processing of new claims as well as the issuance of benefits.