Although the bill refers to the public interest, there is very little in it that defines the public interest and under what kinds of circumstances the minister may act to take what is quite an unusual step.

• (1550 )

Let me address the Public Service situation because the government as an employer of Public Service employees has substantial powers that a private employer does not have already. The employer as government has the power at any time to override collective bargaining, to legislate a return to work and to legislate the terms and conditions of a contract.

The present government has used its legislative power three times in just over three years. Essentially with Bill C–113 that was passed yesterday we will have had in the Public Service of Canada a four–year suspension of collective bargaining. I do not think that is a terribly good example to set for the private sector wherein we are trying to encourage more co–operative relationships, not more confrontation.

This present government, as I said, has used its power three times: in the strike by ships crews workers and hospital services workers in 1989; in Bill C–29 to end the Public Service strike, to impose back–to–work legislation and to impose a wage freeze; and again just yesterday on second reading of Bill C–113 which continues the suspension of collective bargaining and the wage freeze for a further two years.

[*Translation*]

In 1991, the Public Service Staff Relations Board declared the government guilty of negotiating in bad faith. Concilation board reports criticized the government for its negotiating tactics. The International Labour Organization, a United Nations agency, criticized the federal government of Canada just two months ago for no longer negotiating with its employees.

[*English*]

Of course we are concerned about the government's intention in wishing to introduce yet another weapon in its arsenal against its employees since it has not shown itself entirely responsible. In fact it has shown itself to be quite irresponsible in how it uses the tools it now has to control rather than to negotiate.

I raise a second concern. This bill makes a minister of the Crown the arbitrator of a dispute between management and labour whether or not it is a strike or whether it is just in the midst of negotiations, if the minister decides it has gone on a little too long. It makes the minister of the Crown an arbitrator to decide that negotiations are not working and he or she as minister has the right to take stronger action to put an end to collective bargaining.

I argue that since the government is the employer no minister of the Crown can be an impartial arbitrator because that minister is the representative of the employer, the Government of Canada.

We certainly have concerns about that provision in the bill as well as about the basic fundamental principle. At a minimum a party separate from the government would have to be designated to make such a determination, and we will be putting forward amendments to that effect.

There are numerous beneficial provisions being added to the Canada Labour Code. We applaud those. We think they are a tribute to what can happen when government, labour and management work together.

However I have to point out that we can only ask why the government has not chosen to give the same legislated minimum standards of employment to Public Service employees. At present those who work for the Government of Canada, those work for the taxpayers of Canada, must go through a variety of Treasury Board policy manuals, the Public Service Superannuation Act, the Government Employees Compensation Act and the Public Service terms and conditions of employment regulations under the Financial Administration Act to find out what their rights are.

• (1555)

We will certainly be exploring in committee why the government has chosen not to provide to its own employees, 250,000 of them, the same minimum working conditions as it provides to those in the private sector.