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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 1, 2003

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 1, 2003

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons I am pleased to present today, in both official languages, the government's response to the first report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled "The Safe Third Country Regulations".

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-35, an act to amend the National Defence Act (remuneration of military judges).

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Health.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 28th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the membership and associate membership of committees of the House, and I should like to move concurrence at this time.

(Motion agreed to)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—CANADA LABOUR CODE

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ) moved:

That this House recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strikebreakers.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the House that, on this important opposition day, the members of the Bloc Québécois will be splitting their time.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak today on a motion that is dear to the hearts of all of us in the Bloc Québécois.

First, I would like to greet all workers, especially the workers of Quebec. This day is dedicated to them. We are thinking of them and have decided that this day would be their day.

Hon. members are aware of my interest in anti-scab measures. Last Tuesday, moreover, my bill was before the House and I sensed a certain support for it. I am anxious to see what the reaction will be on second reading. I am also anxious to hear my colleagues in the House of Commons share their visions or perceptions of this motion, and to have some idea of what interest this matter raises.

In the riding of each member of this Parliament, there are workers who are covered by the Canada Labour Code, so each MP has a concern in this bill.

As hon. members know, it is important for collective bargaining to be carried out in a civilized manner. Anti-scab legislation would make collective bargaining between employers, employees and unions possible. Obviously, giving workers some power to bargain with their employers often means shorter strikes and less bargaining time, and ensures that both parties are satisfied at the end of the day. Therefore, it is necessary to bargain in a civilized manner.

Supply

Having seen how some disputes degenerate, I know industrial peace is important. It is always sad to see strikebreaking. People have just about had it after 10 or 12 months of bargaining. The Cargill workers have been locked out for nearly four years now. One can well imagine their state of mind: imagine how they feel every day when they want to picket and see replacement workers taking their place, doing their job in their workplace. It is absolutely unacceptable that this is still going on in 2003.

In Quebec, we have had an anti-strikebreaking law since 1977. Here are some figures from Statistics Canada, which therefore are reliable. Just prior to Quebec's legislation, in 1976, the average number of working days lost was 39.4. In 1979, it fell to 32.8. In 2001, it was 27.4 days. Imagine that. After all, 27 days is quite reasonable. It is certainly better than 10 months.

It has taken 10 months at Vidéotron; 10 months during which mothers could not buy Christmas presents for their children, because they were getting a meagre \$200 a week to be able to bargain. You know that the purpose of the situation at Vidéotron was to have some employees reinstated. It was to ensure that workers did not lose their jobs. The people who demonstrated did so in order to protect their fellow workers, and rightly so. It took 10 months. That is unacceptable. Therefore, we are talking about industrial peace.

With respect to the balance of bargaining power between employers and employees, it is certain that if an employer decides it does not want to bargain with its employees and, by roundabout means, succeeds in hiring replacement workers and shuts the door on bargaining, the dispute can last forever. Obviously, if there is a balance of power, the two parties will sit down at the bargaining table and the return to work will be much more peaceful.

It is also time to put an end to the existence of two categories of workers in Quebec: those who already have this right under the Quebec labour code and those under federal jurisdiction who do not. This must end.

•(1010)

British Columbia also has anti-scab legislation. Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick, because they saw that it works well in Quebec and has been successful, are now holding discussions and negotiating to introduce anti-scab legislation too.

I would also like to congratulate my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois who, for the past ten years, having been trying to introduce anti-scab legislation here, in this Parliament. I cannot name them all because they are many, but they have all worked hard. They almost succeeded on several occasions. The last time, it was 104 against 114. I hope that, this time, all the members of Parliament here today and during the vote will think hard before voting and will ensure that they are truly representing their constituents and workers in their ridings, and that they will vote the way these people want them to, and not the way they are told to vote. It is essential that members consult their constituents.

I am going to read the following letter because it deserves to be read, and I was deeply moved by it. A woman in Verdun who works for Vidéotron sent me a copy of her letter to the Prime Minister. I am going to quote from it. She says:

On May 8, I will have been unemployed for one year. One reason it has been so long is simple: my federal government has let me down. By refusing to protect the right of workers to strike, your government has left me high and dry. If jobs and the economy of your country were important to you, you would react by implementing serious legislation protecting the right of Canadian workers to strike. By letting companies rule the state for a minority's benefit, the government is openly allowing the pauperization of a growing number of workers. By closing its eyes to never-ending labour disputes and the harsh reality faced by these workers, the government is favouring business leaders over workers.

This is from an e-mail message sent to me by a woman. She was very happy to see that we had taken this initiative to introduce anti-strikebreaking legislation. There are also a great number of unions who have expressed their support, who have written us and who are doing an incredible job organizing their members to get them to sign a petition that I presented, and that is circulating across Canada and Quebec. This is important. In the coming weeks we will see just how many people really are concerned, want the government to understand that we need anti-scab legislation and will sign this petition.

I would be remiss if I did not mention some recent cases. As I said earlier, in the case of Vidéotron, the dispute lasted ten long months. That has an impact on all of the economy. It does not hurt just one business, but the entire economy of a region. Employees who do not have any money no longer function in the system. Often, they go into debt. They no longer have the means to pay their rent or their electricity bill. That is not good for society. Ten months is terribly long. These people suffered because there was no anti-scab legislation to help them.

The Secur case is also incredible. We know that there was also strikebreaking in the case of Secur. We cannot approve of this, but we know that when it happens, it is because people are at the end of their rope and there are no other resources. For this reason, we need to have anti-scab legislation.

There is the case of Radio Nord Communications, where employees are currently on strike. These people need this legislation to get their employer to bargain with them in good faith, which is not the case at present.

I would like to tell all the workers of Quebec and Canada that this is a serious issue for us, that this is not the first time that I have introduced legislation of this type. We have chosen this for our opposition day because it is an issue that is a priority for us. I again want to applaud workers. I invite them to demonstrate their support for this bill.

•(1015)

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in my previous professional life, that is before I was a member of Parliament, I worked for 16 years in the field of labour relations. I must confess that I always worked on the employer's side, and that employer was a pulp and paper company.

I commend the member for Laurentides for her speech, which, unfortunately, was very short. She should have asked for the unanimous consent of the House to continue for another 30 minutes. In short, I will put my question to her as quickly as possible so that she can make her views known.

The reason Quebec's anti-scab legislation was passed during the review of Quebec's labour code in 1977 was to eliminate all the violence in labour disputes.

You will recall that in Quebec, in 1973, there was a labour dispute in Longueuil, at United Aircraft, now known as Pratt & Whitney. That dispute led to confrontations. We must put ourselves in the shoes of the workers, who were exercising democratically their right to go on strike and who, every morning, saw buses go by, with darkened windows covered with wire mesh, filled with people coming to take their jobs. We can imagine how frustrated they were.

I would like to hear the comments of the member for Laurentides on this. If she has enough time, she could also talk about the human consequences of a labour dispute on the women, children and young people who are also affected, unfortunately.

• (1020)

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I know that he cares deeply about the well-being of workers in his area. It is an issue that he and I often discuss.

It is obvious that a protracted labour dispute has severe consequences on families. We know that the number of single-parent families is growing. In fact, a news report on Vidéotron employees showed that some of these employees were single women living with several children, and they had to tighten their belts and even go into debt just to pay for the bare necessities of life.

This is unacceptable in today's society. It puts more pressure on our health care system, and we certainly do not need that. Indeed, these people become nervous, and they fall sick. We must also consider costs related to indebtedness and the negative impact that it has on the economy.

This has to stop. Anti-scab legislation would solve all these problems and ensure that bargaining was quick and in good faith. The average of 27.4 working days lost in 2001 in Quebec is a record. If we do not have such legislation at the federal level, labour disputes will get longer and longer over time, which will cause even more problems in Quebec and in Canada.

There are no costs associated with this kind of measure, but the government must have the political courage to do it. I would like to see this political courage, when the bill reaches second reading stage and members opposite do not hesitate to vote for it. In fact, several of them did so before, and I hope that they will do so again.

In any case, they will be held accountable by their constituents in the next elections. They will go to see workers and ask them to vote for them. If they did not support the anti-scab bill, workers will certainly remember.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise in this House today. I would like to congratulate my colleague from Laurentides for her initiative and commitment to workers.

This day is also a unique opportunity to salute the exceptional contribution of all those who, day after day, are helping build our society. It is worth mentioning. We must also pay tribute to all those workers who, through the years, have fought an epic struggle to have their rights recognized and respected.

Supply

For parliamentarians, this special day is a special opportunity to take stock of our contribution as legislators to the working world and more specifically to the important issue of labour relations. In this regard one of our major responsibilities is to facilitate the exercise of healthy and fair labour relations in our businesses and public agencies in order to optimize economic development and minimize the chances of labour disputes, strikes or lockouts, as well as their negative impacts on society especially for those involved in such disputes.

I would like to mention some of those negative impacts: a drop in productivity both locally and globally, especially in small ridings or in smaller areas such as Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, for instance, in my riding; a drop in revenue for businesses and public agencies; a drop in income resulting in lower buying power for workers involved in the dispute; the possibility of major social unrest as a result of the dispute, and a higher debt load for the families concerned. I could keep on going, with even greater eloquence, but I would run out of time.

The list of negative impacts could be a lot longer, but these few examples are enough to illustrate the harm caused by these disputes and show the importance of doing everything possible to keep them to a minimum.

Among the major factors that can contribute to the prevention of disputes, or at least greatly limit their negative impacts, for a number of years the Bloc Québécois has been pushing a bill that has been consistently blocked by the Liberal government. I am talking about Bill C-328, which is aimed at eliminating the regressive use of scabs during strikes or lockouts in businesses governed by the Canada Labour Code.

The Bloc Québécois' first attempt to get the Canadian government to introduce this legislation prohibiting the use of scabs was in 1989 and targeted only Crown corporations. This bill was debated at second reading, but it is important to note that the Liberal Party, which was then in the opposition, voted in favour.

All of the Bloc Québécois' subsequent attempts were flatly rejected by the Liberal Party, which has since been in power in the House of Commons. This was the case in 1995, 1996, 1998 and 2001, as well as five times in 2002. Today, we are debating Bill C-328 at second reading.

It is also important to note that meanwhile, the Liberal government introduced, in 1988, Bill C-19 amending Part I of the Canadian Labour Code governing staff relations, but this legislation contained no provision prohibiting the use of strikebreakers. It met with strong opposition from several Quebec unions and the Bloc Québécois categorically refused to support the bill.

Supply

Why is the government so set against the introduction of such measures, when we know that similar legislation has existed in Quebec since December 1977 and that it has had very conclusive positive effects? One need only mention a few of these positive effects. For instance, the number of working days lost from 1992 to 2002 averaged 15.9 under the Quebec Labour Code, compared to 31.1 under the Canada Labour Code. This is a difference of 95.6%.

Here is another example: the number of days lost for every 1,000 employees between 1992 and 2002 was 121.3 under the Quebec Labour Code compared to 266.3 under the Canada Labour Code, a difference of 119.5%.

Of course, figures do not tell the whole story, but they are revealing enough to require the government to do a serious study of the issue, a course I urge it to take. If these data are not persuasive enough, allow me to mention a few more examples of major disputes in Quebec companies governed by the Canada Labour Code, some of which are still dragging on. There is reason for concern.

• (1025)

Among others, there was the Vidéotron case. That dispute lasted 10 months and caused the loss of 355,340 workdays in Quebec. More than one third of all workdays lost in Quebec in 2002 were lost because of labour disputes.

There was the case of Secur, a dispute that caused the loss of 43,400 workdays. There is Cargill, where the lockout has been going on for over three years, affecting 43 employees in Baie-Comeau. There is also the case of Radio-Nord Communications, on strike since October 25, 2002, involving the employees of three television stations and two radio stations in northwestern Quebec.

In my view, these cases illustrate the urgent need for the Liberal government to amend the federal legislation and put an end to the use of strikebreakers, and thus encourage the fair and civilized settlement of labour disputes in Quebec. Amending the legislation would also make it possible to put an end to the absurd situation by which there are two classes of worker in Quebec—those governed by the Quebec Labour Code and the unlucky ones governed by the Canada Labour Code.

It is a question of equity, justice and social harmony. I also hope that this May 1, Workers' Day in most of the world, will be an opportunity for the federal Liberal government to think seriously about the damaging effects of its inaction with respect to the use of strikebreakers, and that it will make a positive gesture toward the working men and women of Quebec and Canada by supporting Bill C-328 introduced by my hon. friend from Laurentides.

Workers' Day is a fine occasion for the Liberal government to send a clear signal about its intentions with respect to this bill.

This is an issue about which I care deeply. I spoke earlier about my riding. We are all concerned about everyday problems and the fact that businesses and organizations are going through such disputes.

I am pleased to know that we have the support of three Bloc members in the Saguenay—Lac Saint Jean area. I invite my hon. friend, the Liberal member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, to join with us as well.

I am happy to have had the opportunity to express myself on this matter in this House, and I wish the hon. member for Laurentides great success with her bill.

• (1030)

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay on his speech.

I have seen the employees of Cargill picketing along the shore in Baie-Comeau. That labour dispute has dragged on for three years and is about to be resolved, because the people have approved the report of the conciliator. However, it is important to note that a three-year strike is totally unacceptable. Such an example shows how, in the absence of anti-scab legislation, workers are at the mercy of their employers in areas where the use of strikebreakers is a well-established practice. We need to put a stop to that and what we have here is a very telling example.

Radio Nord Communications is another case in point in a totally different area, the telecommunications sector, but still in Quebec, in the Abitibi—Témiscamingue region to be more specific. It raises the issue of the information made available in a region facing the same problems. For instance, in my riding, I have seen workers of Vidéotron picketing on Lafontaine Street. These people wanted the labour dispute resolved, but they also told me, "What we are hoping for ultimately is anti-scab legislation that would give us the same rights the rest of Quebec workers are enjoying".

Would the proposal brought forward by my hon. colleague from Laurentides not in fact significantly reduce the length of some strikes? It would improve labour relations and ensure better living conditions for many families.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed important to have such measures. We have to do everything necessary to get this bill passed. Thus, we encourage all our parliamentary colleagues to support this bill. It would enable us to resolve many of the current labour disputes facing businesses.

It is also important to think about all the workers who are affected. We talked about statistics and cited specific cases. However, we should not forget the dignity of the people who are used to going to work every day and who are being denied the pride of contributing to the development of our society. This is why this bill must be supported, as is already the case.

We are aware that there are dedicated people. We must think about and strongly support all those who participate in the development of our society.

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canadian parliamentarians are aware that Quebec is an advanced society, including in the agricultural sector. We have the privilege today to welcome UPA representatives, egg, chicken and milk producers. Quebec is one of the most advanced societies in the world when it comes to supply management, a concept which originated in Quebec. It has been a model for many countries in this area.

Supply

We have a similar situation as far as labour relations go. Quebec broke new ground many years ago when it passed anti-scab legislation. The result is that the balance of bargaining power is maintained, and, more often than not, the parties feel like settling the dispute quickly, since they are more or less equal in power. But if the employer can hire strikebreakers, disputes last much longer, as we have seen recently with federally regulated companies.

The end result is that we have two classes of workers. One enjoys the protection of anti-scab legislation in Quebec, but the other, the unprotected workers, suffers because of the traditional indifference of the federal government in this great country.

What is my colleague's position on the disadvantages, for Quebec workers, of working in a federally regulated sector as opposed to one regulated by Quebec?

• (1035)

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, in reply to my colleague, yes, there is indeed a difference. I believe this difference has negative repercussions.

As I mentioned before, since 1977 Quebec has had effective legislation in place. This legislation was passed in December of 1977. Earlier, I mentioned the positive results of this legislation, pointing out that, when it comes to economic productivity and benefits, Quebec had an average of 15.9 workdays lost to labour disputes between 1992 and 2002. This is different from the rate for industries that are governed by the Canada Labour Code, where the average was 31.9 workdays lost. This is a substantial difference.

It is also important to understand that Quebec workers are penalized when compared to workers who are governed by a different system.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very appropriate that we are discussing this motion on replacement workers on May 1, a day that organized labour has traditionally used to celebrate the role and importance of workers in our society.

People who know me know that I am an advocate of fair treatment. I have devoted most of my life to making sure that all Canadians are treated fairly by our society.

I have brought that same commitment to my job as Minister of Labour. I think it is very important that the rights of workers are protected under the Canada Labour Code and I have worked very hard to ensure that they are. But I also understand the importance of bringing a balanced perspective to labour policy issues. That is why I cannot support the motion of the Bloc Québécois

The motion is seeking a ban on the use of replacement workers. However, this motion represents only one side of a very complicated issue. Indeed, anyone who follows this issue knows how complicated and divisive it can be. This is because there are two clearly divided sets of opinions on the use of replacement workers during times of work stoppage.

[*English*]

Employers typically see the issue one way and employees and their unions typically see it from an opposite point of view. This lack of consensus became very clear in the period of consultation that the

government engaged in prior to making amendments to part 1 of the Canada Labour Code a few years ago.

At that time a broad range of labour management issues was up for discussion as the government sought stakeholders views on how the Canada Labour Code could be made to work more effectively for both employers and employees. On almost every issue the stakeholders were able to arrive at some degree of consensus on how they wanted the law to be changed. However on the issue of replacement workers, consensus was not possible. I do not think a consensus would be possible today.

Even across the different labour jurisdictions within Canada there is no common position on the issue of banning replacement workers by law. Quebec has had a ban on the user replacement workers in organizations under provincial jurisdiction since 1977. British Columbia has a similar ban, although it was introduced more recently.

Ten years ago the government of the day in Ontario brought in legislation banning replacement workers but a subsequent government repealed the law a few years later in 1995. No other provinces have legislation banning the use of replacement workers.

When the opposition members propose a ban on the use of replacement workers, they are proposing a change that does not have a clear consensus of support throughout Canada. When it comes to both workers and employers, they would clearly not have the support of both the sides that would be directly affected.

I believe that the balanced approach we brought to the legislation concerning the use of replacement workers when we amended part 1 of the Canada Labour Code in 1999 is still the right approach to follow today.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

When the code was amended in 1999, it struck a balance between protecting the interests of workers on the one hand and employers on the other. Thus the existing legislation does not prohibit the use of replacement workers outright, as this motion seeks to do, but it does put clear restraints on their use.

At the same time, the legislation allows employers some flexibility to use replacement workers to meet their operating responsibilities. And remember, in the case of some large national organizations falling within the application of the Canada Labour Code, such as utilities or transportation companies, for example, those operating responsibilities might be of critical importance to the well-being of individual people, not to mention the country

What would happen, for example, if a major telecommunications company was forbidden to maintain service by using substitute personnel during a work stoppage? How many homes would be without phone service? Or how many other jobs would be affected if the commercial telecommunications infrastructure was shut down?

Supply

In some cases, it is critical that organizations be able to continue to operate during times of work stoppages. But that does not mean that replacement workers should be used to interfere with the legitimate bargaining objectives of a union on behalf of its members.

[English]

So the existing law allows employers some flexibility to meet their operating responsibilities, but it specifically prevents them from using replacement workers to undermine a union's legitimate bargaining objectives.

In effect, the changes governing the use of replacement workers made to the Canada Labour Code in 1999 represented a compromise between the position of employees and unions on the one hand and the position of the employers on the other. It is a balanced approach that also reflects the majority recommendation of an expert task force that reviewed the issue, consulted with stakeholders and provided a comprehensive report that helped guide the legislation.

In practical terms, most of the parties who engage in collective bargaining under part I of the code have accepted this balanced approach as a reasonable compromise in the real world. Because, as a practical matter, the issue of replacement workers comes up in only a very small number of cases under the Canada Labour Code. Over 90% of labour disputes in the federal jurisdiction are settled without a work stoppage. In the vast majority of cases replacement workers are not an issue.

Nevertheless, there are still cases where the issue does come up and part I of the code provides for measures to deal with these cases. Section 94(2.1) of the code states the following:

No employer or person acting on behalf of an employer shall use, for the demonstrated purpose of undermining a trade union's representational capacity rather than the pursuit of legitimate bargaining objectives, the services of a person who was not an employee in the bargaining unit on the date on which notice to bargain collectively was given and was hired or assigned after that date to perform all or part of the duties of an employee in the bargaining unit on strike or locked out.

In other words, the federal law now prohibits the use of replacement workers to undermine legitimate bargaining activities. If a union believes an employer is using replacement workers in a manner contrary to the provisions of section 94(2.1), it can bring the case before the Canadian Industrial Relations Board under section 97 (1) of the code.

Since the code was amended, only a handful of cases have been referred to the board under section 97(1). A few of these have attracted particular attention, but in the vast majority of situations under the Canada Labour Code the existing balanced approach to the difficult issue of replacement workers is working.

By proposing a prohibition on replacement workers today, the Bloc is trying to reopen the debate on this contentious issue, but the Bloc is advocating only one side of the argument. The government has to take a broader perspective: We have to look at the issue from both sides.

As minister responsible for the Canada Labour Code, I have to take into account the competing values and interests of both employers and employees and their unions, not just one side.

• (1045)

Based on the advice the government received during a broad process of consultation in the period leading up to the amendments to the Canada Labour Code in 1999, we made changes to the Canada Labour Code that took both sides into account. And I believe that is still the right approach today.

It is too soon to conclude that the replacement workers provision in part I of the code is not working in the broad public interest. It is too soon to disturb the practical balance that has been achieved and to say the law needs to be changed, and especially to be changed on an urgent basis, as the opposition motion suggests. But it is an issue that I, as Minister of Labour, will continue to monitor with great interest.

One thing is clear to me: This is not a simple issue. It is an issue that can elicit strong opposing views like those we are going to hear all day today. It is being strongly expressed on Parliament Hill, so we know that this issue can divide business and labour.

It can also divide experts within the labour relations community. When the Sims task force looked into this issue a few years ago, it was the only item in a broad range of labour management issues that evoked a minority written report.

• (1050)

[Translation]

As I have already mentioned, across Canada where the jurisdiction for labour law is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial levels of government, there are different approaches to the use of replacement workers in these different jurisdictions.

So there is no clear consensus position on the use of replacement workers in this country. Clearly, each province can deal with the issue in the way it believes is best for the needs and interests of the workers and employers in its jurisdiction.

Those jurisdictions represent some 90% of workers in this country. But at the federal level we have to be concerned for the approximately 800,000 workers who come under the jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code. We know that most federally regulated employers do not hire replacement workers in any case, although they might reassign management and other non-bargaining unit personnel to maintain operations.

So, on balance, I do not think it would be advisable at this time to change the provisions of the Canada Labour Code governing the use of replacement workers. Therefore, I am not in favour of the motion.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my friend the Minister of Labour, a full-blooded Acadian, if I may say so, for whom I have a great deal of respect, particularly in this regard.

I would first like to make a comment. In 1993, British Columbia signed, as Quebec has done, a ban on strikebreakers or scabs. That same year, the work time lost fell by 50%, which is almost a record.

That being said, there are a few things that I would like to ask the minister on behalf of the people of New Brunswick. What does she have to say to the New Brunswick members of the Canadian national council? What does she have to say to the New Brunswick members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees? What does she have to say to the New Brunswick members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada? What does she have to say to the members of the New Brunswick Brotherhood of Engineers, Division 162, when all those people ask her to include anti-scab legislation in the Labour Code? Is the minister not moved by those people? Is she not interested in what her fellow New Brunswickers have to say?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw: Mr. Speaker, unions in New Brunswick, as elsewhere in the country, know quite well that I spend a lot of time with them. They have had more meetings than ever with a Minister of Labour, as was the case last October.

I often meet with my friend and colleague to discuss different things. He must understand that, as the federal Minister of Labour, I saw what was done during the six years that led to the implementation of the Canada Labour Code. The Canada Labour Code works quite well in a labour dispute because we were able to work together with employees and employers and we listened to both parties. In my speech, I explained clearly that, when the issue of replacement workers was raised, we had to discuss this at length, because some people did not agree and we had to reach a compromise.

This is the answer that I would give my union friends in New Brunswick or elsewhere. As the federal minister, I worked very hard with employees and employers to get both sides to reach a compromise.

• (1055)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to speak about this issue in the House today. I want to question the minister directly on the issue of consensus. I can understand that the government does want to build that, not only on this issue but on others. But we know from history that on issues dealing with anti-racism, bigotry, anti-Semitism, all those different things, there often was not consensus. Even currently we have issues in the House all the time that do not involve consensus, but we do it because it is the right thing to do.

Here is what I want to know from the minister. When is that point when we have to make a decision? We cannot always have consensus. If we just wait for that moment it may never happen, but it is the right thing to do. When will she act on this?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw: Mr. Speaker, the right thing to do is take the Canada Labour Code seriously, as we did with part I, which had to do with strikes. Then we did it with part II, which had to do with health and security. When we take that seriously and say to both employees and employers that this code belongs to them, we cannot make an amendment on one part by listening only to the employer and then on another part by listening only to the employee and then saying, "I am the Minister of Labour. I know best. You are going to win this one and you are going to win that one".

That is why it worked in this country: because we took both sides equally seriously. We did not do the consensus ourselves. The Sims

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report worked on it and the staff worked on it with both the employees and the employers. It was not done pie in the sky and that is why, when there is a conflict and a collective agreement is being negotiated, in this country 90% of the conflicts are resolved without a strike or lockout: because we did not say that on this one we will listen to the employer and on that one we will listen to the employee. We made sure. And when we came up with a compromise, it was done with the employees and the employers.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Labour not realize that, by her lack of leadership, she is siding with management?

The minister says that she cannot do anything because both parties do not agree. She could take another position and say that anti-scab legislation is a good idea, that she will hold consultations with both employers and workers and try to have this concept included in the Canada Labour Code, that she will negotiate with both parties to reach that goal.

In the end, we would no longer have labour disputes such as those at Cargill, which lasted three years, at Vidéotron, which lasted one year, and at Radio-Nord, a dispute that has not been settled yet and has lasted several months.

Is it not true that, by her lack of leadership, the minister is siding with management? Ultimately, she is the one not accepting her responsibilities at this time. If she were, employers would accept anti-scab legislation and would get something in return. That is what we are expecting her to do today.

• (1100)

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw: Mr. Speaker, being a leader means being able to listen to what everyone has to say. Being a leader is not going to just one person and saying, "I will be there for you". Being a leader means saying that the Canada Labour Code belongs to employees and employers. And this House can be proud of parts I and II of the Canada Labour Code. We can be proud of the fact that we have had leaders who made the right decision because they listened.

I want to commend the hon. member for the extensive work she has done. I might add that when I met with employees and employers last October, I asked them, "What do you think? Do you feel we should consider some compromises?" If representatives of labour and management told me they wanted to look into it, because the code belongs to them, I would be prepared to listen to them. We are talking about their tools for resolving labour disputes. What the people I met with in October told me is that they did not think they could come up with a better compromise than the one they had.

Let me assure the House and the Bloc Québécois that, based on the work I have done in my community during all the years I was involved, if the employees and employers told me they wanted to work on it, that is how it would be. But when I ask them, they tell me, "We have worked so much on this issue that we have worked out a compromise".

Supply

This came into force only in 1999. Time will tell how well it works. I can assure the Bloc Québécois, and indeed the House, today that I will be monitoring this very closely. If changes can be made to improve on what is there, we are certainly prepared to consider them.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring a case to the attention of the minister.

What is the minister currently doing for employees at Noranda Mineral-Horne Division in Rouyn-Noranda? They have been on strike for more than a year. They are losing their houses and may well end up on the street. What were you doing when the Noranda mine—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. Debate must be directed through the Chair and not to the minister directly. The Minister of Labour has 30 seconds to reply.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my hon. friend has forgotten that I had a food bank and that I saw people who had lost their jobs come in. I saw people who had nothing to eat. I am very sympathetic to what the member is saying. However, these employees can go to the Canada Industrial Relations Board. There is a process in place to protect them. There is no need to play politics with the plight of people who are hungry.

[English]

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate today and have listened for a few key words. One that I heard from the Bloc Québécois was about helping workers. I want to take a look at this from the point of view of helping workers but I first want to get some semantics cleared away and clarify a few things.

When we start talking in terms of workers and unions, who and what exactly are we talking about? Is a union solely the collection of the people who are members of that union or does it have an identity of its own? Is that entity separate from those individual members who make it up?

I sometimes get introduced as the member of Parliament for Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan who belongs to the Canadian Alliance. When that happens I have come up to the podium, thanked the person who introduced me, and said, “I have to make a small correction. I was introduced as belonging to the Canadian Alliance. I do not belong to the Canadian Alliance. I am a member of the Canadian Alliance. The Canadian Alliance is the organization whose policies are most closely aligned with my own. My colleagues in that organization work together with me so I might be far more effective and efficient than I am on my own, so that we may do certain things of commonality for the benefit of all of us”. That is not unlike a union, interestingly enough. However if I belong to anyone I belong to the constituents in my riding, not the party. I do think that is an important difference.

When we start talking in terms of unions we have to remember that a union is an entity that is made up of certain officers and executive, certain ideals and obligations within that executive to the union body itself, and of course its membership.

We spoke to this issue a couple of days ago on a private member's motion, also from the Bloc Québécois. If we want to talk, in absolute isolation for a moment, to the concept of replacement workers, my

response would be that I do not like them. I do not think it is a good system. However it is in isolation. It is such a tiny part of the overall scope of the labour picture that it is almost impossible to put it into context of a piece of legislation or the supply day motion that has been brought forward here in the House.

We have often heard the old adage of reshuffling the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. That in essence is what the Bloc is trying to do with the supply day motion it has brought forward. The Bloc members are saying that there are all kinds of problems in labour. They talk about the problems with Miranda. They talk about how long people are out on strike, the suffering of the workers and everything else, and then they come forward with something that touches just a tiny bit of the problem, and I do mean tiny. Taken by itself, they can make a case where in a specific example it has some catastrophic impact, but in the grand scheme of things it is a very tiny portion.

Maybe where to start is with the history of the trade union movement. Back in the 1800s in North America, primarily in the United States, we had things that were scenes right out of Dante's *Inferno*. We had mill owners who employed people in unbelievable conditions, unsafe and unhealthy, with wages that barely allowed them to buy table scraps and that doomed them to an early death, if indeed an accident in the mill did not do it before. If something happened to them there was nothing for the families. There was back-breaking labour, no time off and no benefits. It was horrible. Those were bad employers. They were oppressive.

Unions started to organize. In those days, union leaders needed incredibly thick skulls, not thick skins as perhaps they would need today. They needed thick skulls because there would be strike-breakers on both sides.

• (1105)

The strikebreakers from the company were hired thugs who would go out with baseball bats, crowbars and everything else to literally beat striking workers into submission. Therefore the person who was the union leader had to be just as tough as those to fight back, to try to deal with it that way. It was a brute force confrontation.

Many people were hurt, maimed, killed or blackballed. It was a horrible time. It was a horrible page in North American history and for history throughout the world where these types of confrontations took place.

Canada certainly was not isolated from this. I am talking about the 1800s. Very early on in the 20th century, right in Atlantic Canada in, I believe, Nova Scotia, there were laws on the books where workers could actually be put in jail just for asking for a raise. As the old cigarette commercial says, we have come a long way but we still do not have a perfect system. One of the reasons we do not have a perfect system is that some parts of the system have evolved and unfortunately some parts of it have not.

Nothing strikes me with more irony than when I hear of a strike taking place, not at Noranda, not at some big company, not at Canada Post or the ports but in fact in a union administrative office where the employer is the union and the workers are on strike because they cannot negotiate with their employer, the union, in a manner in which unions castigate the other employers for not being fair to their workers. It is, one has to admit, very ironic.

There is a growing complexity in terms of the unions themselves and in terms of work issues in this country. One of the things that has changed, part of the evolution of the union movement, is the fact that at one time a long way back the union workers were, by and large, uneducated and unskilled.

● (1110)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am just in the hall here. We are speaking about an important issue and we do not have a single member from the government here.

An hon. member: Excuse me.

Mr. Brian Masse: You just walked in.

An hon. member: You're not allowed to comment on whether people are here or not here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): We will resume debate. The hon. member for Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan.

Mr. Jim Gouk: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the complexity and whole nature of unions have changed tremendously. The point I will make goes back a long way and I do not want anybody to misunderstand it. It goes right back to the very origins of the trade union movement.

We found by and large that union workers did not have access to education or training and were often in the workforce at the age of 12 or 13. They counted on the union leader who hopefully had some education and some training, and the thick skull and brawny arm which was necessary in those early days, to look after them. These were young men who had neither the education or training, or anything else to collectively or individually deal with an oppressive company. It is understandable that unions were extremely necessary by the nature of how employers operated in those days.

Union workers in the 21st century have not only completed their high school education, but in many cases have completed university and sometimes have more than one degree. They also have a variety of training. Many of them operate their own successful businesses on the side. It is a different nature of person entirely. Consequently, the leadership needs to change too. In some cases there is very enlightened leadership in trade union movements, but some still operate under the old premise of might is right and one union had better have more might than the other. Some unions like to operate from a strong arm point of view which shows a lack of growth and a lack of evolution inside the union movement itself.

Originally when strikes took place they were primarily an economic tug of war between an employer and an employee or a group of employees. It was a question of how long the two sides could do without money. In other words, who would blink first. The employer and employee or group of employees primarily suffered from the damage. For example, if it involved a mill in a mill town there obviously would be some collateral damage. The town itself would suffer because no money would be available while this would be going on. Primarily it would be very isolated.

The most simple example I could give the House would be to pick on a bakery where workers would feel that they should have a higher wage. If they did not get the higher wage they would go on strike. Without the employees the bakery would not have any bread to sell

Supply

so therefore it would have no revenue. People in the community would go somewhere else to get their bread or they would bake their own or even do without. This is an example of the economic tug of war between an employer and an employee. That has changed immensely.

I used an example the other night where under our current system a handful of longshoremen went out on strike in the port of Vancouver. As a direct result of that, a farmer and his family in Manitoba, thousands of miles away, could possibly end up losing their farm.

There is a difference in complexity and a difference in the nature of the impact of strikes and lockouts now. There is a tremendous national impact. That is something that must be addressed. It is not addressed by shuffling the chairs on the *Titanic* and not by taking a little portion that has some clear impact in certain unique circumstances and ignoring all the other things that are wrong with the system that need to be looked at and taken into consideration.

Bloc Québécois members spoke about labour relations this morning. I was making notes of certain key things that they said. I would like to talk for a moment about labour relations. There are exceptions to everything, but primarily labour relations in collective bargaining are confrontational.

I am the official opposition critic for public works and government services which includes Canada Post. I worked very closely with both sides when Canada Post went on its fourth national strike, and I have never seen worse labour relations in my life than what I saw between Canada Post and its workers at that time. It was absolutely unbelievable. Under those kinds of conditions it would be a shock if they actually sat down and simply negotiated something. The premise that they started from was so far out that it just could not be done.

● (1115)

There are other problems. I recall when I was a city councillor and was asked questions by a number of school teachers inside my community because I was involved quite a bit with the school board. They were in a labour dispute with the B.C. government and they wanted me to address them because they wanted to ask me some questions. The very first question I was asked was whether I would support the teacher's right to strike. I replied that I would give them a real honest answer provided that they listened to the entire reply.

My answer was that I did not believe that the teachers should have the right to strike and I used the scenario that I just did with the bakery. I said that in this case the economic tug of war or the battle was not between them and the employer. In theory and on paper it was, but the person who got hurt was not the employer. Children were counting on them to educate them in school. They had an economic battle with their employer and the collateral damage would affect all the children who were counting on them for an education. I also used a number of other scenarios.

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I want to make one particular point that I told the teachers in this case because this is an example of how there are so many other factors that we must take into consideration. I addressed the teachers by asking them to imagine the minister of education coming out before the microphones and all the media, wringing his hands in anguish and saying that everything was being done to get them back to the bargaining table to resolve this. He would say, "We will bend over backwards. We will do almost anything. We want the children back in school". Then the lights would go out, the microphones would go dead, and the minister would walk back into the cabinet room and say, "Okay, folks, how do we piss them off enough to keep them out another month so we can resolve a lot of our budget problems?" The teachers would get the flak for not educating the children. The employer would be in the reverse of the normal economic tug of war. The employer would actually be saving money. There are all kinds of issues that we must look at in terms of what happens in labour disputes.

Back to the situation with Canada Post. One of the things that I explained to both Canada Post and the union was the impact of what they were doing. I said that when union members go on strike, Canada Post shuts down. The union wants better wages, guarantees that no one will be laid off, and it wants part time people being made full time. Yet the nature of it going on strike, withdrawing its services, and consequently Canada Post not providing postal services would force people in the public to start considering alternatives in order to get their mail, cheques, information, and everything else delivered.

In this electronic age it is getting easier to do that and a whole lot of people would suddenly start finding alternatives to Canada Post during a strike. When the strike is finally over, many people find that it was suitable enough and non-disruptive enough that they do not go back to use Canada Post. Canada Post gets back into business with less business. As a result it would need less workers, so the very reason that the union went on strike in some cases would cause union workers to lose the very things that they were fighting for. That is something that must be taken into consideration as well.

Let me talk about essential services. We recognize that certain services should not or cannot have the right to strike, such as policemen or firemen. There must be a provision for policing, even in the event of a dispute between police officers and their employer, between firemen and their employer. We recognize that and so do they. They are good, honourable people, and accept and recognize that. There are people like that and it is becoming more widespread all the time.

Then there are transportation services. Marine Atlantic is a good example right now. Its hearing has not started yet but is coming up. It may withdraw its services which will essentially shut down the ferry between Newfoundland and the mainland. It is obviously a pretty essential service.

• (1120)

These things exist and where they exist we must have something that says that this is how we will settle for these people. They should not be penalized because they are important. We must come up with something that is fair, that recognizes they cannot withdraw their services, and yet they must be treated fairly. We need to work on that

because therein lies the real answer to labour problems in the country. If we were to come up with something that is fair for these people, and we had better, then why would it not apply to everyone? Why would we allow all the other types of damages that I have talked about instead of resolving the disputes that we have now?

This is about helping workers. However, we must recognize that it is about helping workers in a new economy, in a new concept of how the country works. Bloc members have taken a kernel of a good idea, just a kernel, but we need something much broader. I would ask them to withdraw their supply day motion, which has good intentions, and come back with it again but in a much broader context. We cannot micro manage a system that is highly complex, but instead we must find a new way for better union labour harmony in the country for the benefit of all Canadians.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 1 it is my privilege to rise and talk about this important issue. I commend the Bloc for putting the motion forward. It is important to discuss this in the House and to take it to committee to study it further. I believe it will improve the working conditions of not only the workers of this nation but it will also provide stability for employment in the country by setting out some pragmatic rules that will be very beneficial to other provinces that currently do not have strike breaking legislation.

To start off my comments I want to touch upon the history of Canada and the labour union.

In 1872 Sir John A. Macdonald's government introduced a Trade Unions Act and at that time many nations across the globe were going through industrialized revolutions. There was great strife and concern and a number of different conflicts. At that time workers in towns and cities across the globe were struggling for their rights, not only for themselves but for their families. They often dealt with even more complex issues then. While the issues of child labour, health and safety and others were different back then, they are also very relevant today because some of those issues still persist as our technology and our industries change.

Canada was five years old when that act was created. Therefore we have to recognize that having progressive and important legislation regarding the unions and the trade movement has been something of our history and part of making the foundations of our country. In my opinion it has made us the most successful nation in the world. The movement at that time was pressing for a nine hour workday and we wanted to reduce the hours. There were a number of different issues that they had to face, including organized strikes against media and other industry.

It is important to note that and it brings us to a period of time of 1909 when there were a number of different conflicts. At Fort William freight handlers were on strike against CPR and gun battles actually ensued. Despite having that legislation in place, there was still conflict.

In 1919 there were over 400 strikes in Canada, three of them were the famous Winnipeg, Amherst, Nova Scotia and Toronto general strikes, so it sets out a pattern. Troops were brought in in the 1923 Cape Breton mine and steelworkers strike.

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As we go through Canadian history, in 1946 some 2,700 Hamilton workers were on strike and replacement workers were brought in. One witness reported that 300 club-wielding men attacked picketers, dozens injured on both sides.

It is important to note that history because it can return and it did return in my home province of Ontario. Prior to the current Tory government, under Mike Harris originally and now Ernie Eves, we had peaceful labour relations under the NDP government which introduced legislation to prevent scabs from coming into the workplace. Since that time we have witnessed the repealing of that law and it has had a detrimental impact on our province.

I want to touch on that because I believe this movement could improve things significantly. We need to learn the lessons from what has happened in Ontario since the removal of that law. Quebec and British Columbia still have it and other provinces are discussing it. It would be an important role for the federal government to participate in it.

Before Bill 40 was passed, the Conservatives decided they were against it. When their predictions of disaster did not come true, they showed no interest in the facts.

Here is the record of Bill 40 which took effect in 1993, under the Bob Rae government. A total of 220,000 new jobs were created in 1993 and 1994, making it clear that Bill 40 was not a job killer. In fact we had a great deal of automotive growth at that time and it was important for the current economy. For two years new private sector investment in Ontario was \$53 billion and for highly unionized manufacturing sector there was \$8.8 billion in new private sector investment in 1994 alone, the most for one year in the history of the province of Ontario.

Predictions that Bill 40 would produce more strikes and ballooning labour demands proved false. In 1993 there were 371,000 person days lost due to work stoppages in Ontario, the lowest number on record. In 1994 it was the third lowest record for that year. There was some definite improvements and some stability that ensued.

•(1125)

Wage settlements have generally tracked the rate of inflation. Average wage increases in the agreements in 1994 were under 1%. There was stability again because of the rules set in place and that was because of the legislation.

When Bill 40 was in, there were 25,000 employees and 777 newly certified bargaining units in 1993 and 27,000 workers and 756 units in 1994, for a total of 51,000 units for the full two years.

The use of replacement workers in Ontario disputes has always been rare. As expected, the ban had no major effect. It may have contributed to ending the work stoppage by major league baseball players and in bringing about a settlement that ended the lockout of major league umpires because it was an issue with which they had to deal.

Since that time we have lost that. We have had some tragic incidences in Ontario and close to my hometown in Chatham where Navistar is located. Previously workers were protected against scabs being brought in and taking on their jobs. What happened was

Navistar decided it would use replacement scab workers for those jobs. That came after a long history of the union being very involved in the community and in the company. Despite that, Navistar brought in the scabs because it now had that opportunity.

At that time Navistar hired professional security people, as it called them, but they were just nothing more than organized thugs. They were decked out in black equipment, goggles, often sunglasses. They intimidated the workers and took pictures of them on the line. They went even further than that.

At one demonstration the union members finally decided they had to stop the scabs from coming in, they had to draw a line in the sand. Their families needed them to be employed. They had fought for it and had collectively bargained for it. They took a front to stop this from happening.

What happened was the security people ended up hurting Don Milner, a gentleman from our community. He was run over by one of the security vans. That happened off site, kilometres away from the actual Navistar plant. If Bill 40 had not been taken away, that would not have happened. Mr. Milner is still recovering today. He will never be the same because of the situation that he endured. It set an unfortunate precedent.

It sets up a situation that allows employers to use this as a tool for bargaining and also to use it as a tool to break people. It leads to intimidation and to the elimination of progressive employment, which is so important.

Strikes are never flippant acts. They come about because people have decided over a period of time that they need to fight for their rights. It is not easy to go on strike. It never is. People make it seem that workers go on strike to rebel. Workers go on strike because they think they are right.

The unions, as well as the workers, think very carefully about what it will mean to their families and their community, and I mean the community not just in the sense of their purchasing power because of their employment but also because of their significant contributions to organizations like the United Way and other groups. When there is a strike, it has a big impact. That is addressed when they talk about whether they should strike.

If they decide to strike, it is done democratically. People cast ballots to decide, based upon their information and their circumstances and what they feel is best for themselves and the collective. It is important to note that because a democratic process is used to decide whether they should walk off the job. That is one of the best and most powerful tools that has implemented social change. It is involved in a number of different things, not just about wages.

We have seen many unions walk off the job for health and safety reasons, whether it be the chemicals they must use, or the hours of work, or the way they are being treated. It may be hiring practices. All those different things can precipitate people leaving the workplace.

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The one way that we can undermine getting people together is allowing scabs to come in. That divides the community because sometimes in situations where communities have high unemployment rates, people feel they have no other option. It pits brother against brother and sister against sister, and that is not healthy. It is very temporary but it leaves a lasting mark on Canadians and also on their communities.

That is one reason why we support this motion. We believe that the Bloc has got it right. I think that we need to move forward in bringing this to committee so that we can have a good discussion about it.

• (1130)

I know the minister was concerned about consensus and about not having the proper buy-in from both parties. That can be looked at and can be addressed at committee level. It is worth a try to get there. Witnesses can come forward and provide the testimony, and perhaps we might see some movement there. It is not something that is foreign to this country. It is happening in Quebec and in British Columbia. It used to happen in Ontario. There is a precedent here. It happens in other nations.

One of the strike lockout issues that becomes very imperative for a company and the workers is what will happen in times of uncertainty about the company, whether it will lose profits, whether they will undermine their ability to sustain themselves, their future, all those different things. It is important to note that people take that into consideration.

Nobody goes on strike to try to lose their job permanently. Workers go on strike as a last resort. They do it because the terms and conditions of employment have challenged them enough and their brothers and sisters in the plant or in the organization, wherever it might be, to consider going off the job. It is not taken lightly.

Companies that are faced with this, if they are going to throw in labour at the last moment, and we have seen this happen in different areas, it has to be trained. The company has to produce the same type of product. The company will not have as high a level of productivity. It will have issues there. It is not a complete recovery of the product either.

What it does do is it distances the company and the organization to provide buying time that leads to conflict. This is the real problem. It builds to a culmination of conflict. This conflict can be avoided. It does not take a genius to figure out that conflict, like we saw in Navistar, needs to be avoided.

Companies are becoming quite smart in some respects on how they deal with this by hiring so-called security professionals. These people receive very little training. However they do receive specific mandates to do things that involve intimidation of our citizens. Sometimes they are brought in from other communities and they often do that.

It is ironic that some of these companies are not even Canadian. They hire individuals here to promote their work. That has to stop. I believe there should be investigation into some of the practices of some of the security companies and what they do on these picket lines. This is a reason why I believe the motion is so important.

We in the New Democratic Party have been calling for this for a long time. As well, we believe there is other progressive legislation that can happen in the House of Commons. We have a collective group, the CEP, where we have employees working. We have a member from Halifax who introduced that bill. We believe it is important for people to have the right to organize. If people can organize everywhere else in this nation, they should be allowed to do it in these halls. We believe this is worthy of support.

We in the New Democratic Party are very proud to support this effort. We believe the Bloc has done a good job. More important, we need to focus on the fact that this brings us to further discussion about this. This could bring about the consensus which the minister wants. Therefore, it is worthy of pursuit in these halls.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate my NDP colleague on his speech and thank him for the support that his party will give to the bill introduced by my colleague from Laurentides.

I have two questions for my colleague. First, how does he explain the fact that this is not the first time that the Bloc Québécois—and no doubt also the New Democratic Party—is introducing anti-scab legislation? In 1990, it seemed that my colleague from Richelieu introduced a similar bill. This has happened three or four times in the Bloc's history, since we have been here in large numbers, since 1993.

Consequently, I would like to ask my colleague how he can explain that, since 1993 or thereabouts, the Liberal government and the federal administration has not made any commitment and has not realized that such legislation would simply make good sense in terms of power balance.

My second question is, what does he think of the minister's reasoning when she says that, despite everything, in Canada, parties end up agreeing and the important thing is to have a fair balance of power between both parties?

In Quebec—and no doubt also in Canada—we have labour disputes that go on forever because of problems with the balance of power. I am thinking of Vidéotron, Cargill, Radio-Nord. In light of these disputes, what does he think about this kind of comment by the minister?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. First, I just believe it is political will. It is quite correct that we have discussed this issue before in the House of Commons. The New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois have brought forth many motions, some actually coming close to being passed.

It is political will. It is about doing the right thing. We have seen the government not taking a focus on issues before. For example, for Kyoto it took several years for the government to even decide it was actually going to create a plan and at the last minute we had to deal with it.

Supply

This is an issue right here that we can start to deal with. We know for a fact that we see some unrest happening. We see the benefits of the lost days in Quebec because of its legislation; we see the benefits of it right there. We do not need any more proof. It is right there and it is political will that will pull this thing through.

I cannot explain this. I guess at the end of the day we have to make a decision about integrity and where we stand on an issue. That is why they are kind of waffling back and forth in terms of their support. I believe that is why we are not going to see some members come over at this time: because they do not want to make a hard decision.

At the same time it ties into the second question about the balance of power. Some people believe that the workers of this country have the balance of power. That is not necessarily true. In fact, it is not true. People have to fight for that in collective agreements. It is done through a history of relationships, and that gives them the right, I believe, to be able to protect them from other people who want to take them away after that history. That is why this should go forward.

Once again, the important thing to note is that what we are talking about here is bringing it to the committee level to talk about it some more. Why can that not happen? Why someone would not want to vote on that, I do not understand.

● (1140)

Mr. Rex Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to rise today to speak to the Bloc opposition day motion, the motion which asks this House to “recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strikebreakers”.

I have spent 22 years in the labour movement. One of the hardest things when we go on strike is to have strikebreakers. That is an ugly word, but it means having employees replaced by other people to do the jobs employees should be doing. Of course it sets up an unfair balance in the workplace, especially when the time comes to finalize negotiations.

Let me state very clearly from the outset that the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada certainly feels that unions on the whole play a very important role in the country in assuring that the equality of employees is maintained and upheld and as such play an important role in helping to preserve an important part of our country.

However, the PC Party recognizes that the motion attempts to address a very serious matter yet in doing so leaves much open to interpretation and provides little in the area of specifics.

The big thing we have to realize is that we as a body and as government members should never encourage replacement workers, strikebreakers, scabs or whatever we want to call them, to take over from regular employees who are providing serious labour and a serious employer-employee relationship. It has a major impact on the way business is done. If employees and employers are not happy together, production goes down and when production goes down everyone loses. The company will probably lose money and benefits are lost. The company ends up failing, closes up the shop and employees are unemployed as a result. If there were legislation to

ensure that there were no strikebreakers allowed, then I firmly believe, from my past experience, that we would see employers having to negotiate fairly. If they do negotiate fairly, they of course I think they will come to a resolution very quickly.

It is very hard sometimes when both parties are apart, but all this does is cause tempers to flare: People get frustrated when replacement workers go in to basically do their jobs. That does not resolve anything. It just causes bad feelings and that is when we get trouble on the picket line. The key is not to cause trouble on the picket line. Picket line trouble comes when other people are in there doing the jobs the employees should be doing. Employers are then of course targeted to make sure that they get the message. We cannot blame the union people and we cannot blame the workers who on strike, because they are fighting for their survival.

In every strike there is an important lesson to be learned on both sides, the employer's and the employees'. In most cases, if not all, solidarity is particularly important in disputes involving workers at the bottom of the jobs and the industries are notoriously difficult to unionized workers. Solidarity within the labour movement when there are strikebreakers involved is stronger than anything we will ever see. People will not tolerate that. People will not tolerate having their livelihood sucked away. When the strikebreakers go in, all of a sudden war breaks out on the picket line. When war takes place on the picket line, someone gets hurt or injured. Tempers flare for one reason or another, and someone could die because we did not do our job to ensure that there is a fair and equitable process to make sure that union and management provide a certain level of negotiations, and that each individual has the right to make sure they get a good agreement.

● (1145)

Of course sometimes it is the same thing when people are not unionized. There are a lot of groups who are not unionized and sometimes they walk out. As a result, people get threatened. They basically are told, “If you threaten to go into the union or if you threaten to leave work or protest like you doing, we are going to replace you. We are going to fire you”. There should be protection for these people, too, but for some reason or another we do not do that, and as a result I think the system fails.

Of course we can all sit down and look at what is being said. I think it is very important that this go to committee. I think it is very important that we not be afraid to discuss this issue. For some reason or another, we at times do not want to talk about situations like those we are hearing about in the House today. There is nothing wrong with sending this to committee so that we can sit down and look at the pros and cons of why and what we are doing. We are supposed to be here to try to make life much easier for people, but if we allow strikebreakers to exist in our society today, then of course we fail the people we are supposed to represent.

Supply

It goes without saying that employers, both small and large, but in most cases small, are the lifeblood of the Canadian economy. A good majority of rural employment is due to small businesses that operate in ways that make them the focal points of their communities. The local sports store, the local shoemaker and the local corner store in small communities not only keep the communities going but they also provide a source of employment to the residents, to their families and to the local economy.

That being said, in most cases these unions can have a very damaging effect at times, but at the same time they can have a positive effect because then of course there is unity. People might say that this is no good, but I firmly believe that if people have unionized workplaces, if people have that action to take against an employer, what we see are better relationships and stronger communities. Communities will exist far beyond if people can work in an environment that is satisfactory to everyone.

If areas of the country allow certain things like strikebreakers, all we have is total chaos in the system. Communities lose, employees lose and companies lose, because the key is to make sure there is a good atmosphere so that employers, employees and the community work together to make sure that everyone survives.

It is very important, as I said before, that we not be afraid to move forward. The hardest thing to do is sit back and let certain things happen and say that people deserve this or that. The time has come when we as politicians should stand up and be counted to make sure that we send the correct message, which is that if people are in a unionized field or a non-unionized field, there is a level that should be maintained. People have to live and have respectable wages. People have to make sure that if there is a dispute there is a mechanism put in place to make sure they can have free and open negotiations.

But if all of a sudden the company can bring in strikebreakers, then of course it will do nothing to make sure that the employees are taken care of. It could cause longer strikes as a result, and it does nothing for the economy. It is very important that we move in the direction of going to second reading so that people can have the ability to make sure that their rights are being freely done and freely heard about. It is very important that we as government send a message that we will not tolerate strikebreakers.

I will close by saying that I have never had the opportunity, as a unionist for 22 years, of being faced with strikebreakers, but I will say right now that I was on the picket lines a couple of times in those 22 years. The worst case scenario is to have people going across the picket line to do one's job and just going in there to aggravate. We have been fortunate over the years that we did not experience it, because we had legislation in place that basically gave us the right to negotiate fairly and to have a settlement so that we as a group could feel that we had been heard and our problems had been resolved.

• (1150)

If we ended up having strikebreakers, we, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, would not tolerate it. We are the type of people who stand up for our rights and who fight to our last breath. If it is trouble people want, it is trouble they will get. All that strikebreakers do is bring discontentment to the picket line and discontentment throughout the whole process.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have listened intently to my friend's speech. I want to ask him a question on the issue of right to work legislation.

A few years ago a group did a very interesting analysis. It looked at states in the U.S. and compared those states that had right to work legislation and those that did not. What it found was that in those states where right to work legislation did occur a couple of interesting things happened. One was that the income in those states that had right to work legislation was significantly higher, in the order of \$3,000 plus per year per worker.

The other interesting thing it found was that the rate of employment was also higher when one compared those states that had right to work legislation to those that did not.

In the interest of workers, in the interest of employment and in the interest of getting the maximum amount of money for workers in Canada, would the member support right to work legislation in Canada?

Mr. Rex Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the biggest problem Canada has had over the years is that we are always looking at the United States. The United States is not an area we should be looking at for any guidelines for Canada. As far as I am concerned, looking at U.S. guidelines for Canada is what has put this country in trouble.

Everyone has the right to work and of course if legislation were brought forward we would have to look at it to see how it would help our Canadian workers. However I will not answer the question yes or no because I would need more details.

As I said before, we are Canada. We should build our own parameters and our own guidelines for our country to satisfy our own workers and the companies we represent.

We should not be looking at the United States. The United States does not have good legislation when it comes to certain things in its country. We can just look at health care. Canada has the best health care in the world and the U.S. does not. As a result of that we hear all these horror stories.

If something like that were brought forward it would be interesting to see if it would be positive for Canada. As it stands right now, it will take a lot more detail and discussion to determine the pros and cons. If the hon. member has more information I would have no trouble looking it over and getting back to him with a suitable answer at another time.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have just come in from outside where there are several hundred Vidéotron protesters, who endured a ten-month dispute. There are also Radio-Nord protesters, who have been in a labour dispute for several months now. As well, there are protesters from Cargill who have been in a labour dispute for over three years. There are other protesters too. I want to congratulate them for having the courage to come here, despite the bad weather. They all came to show their support for the Radio-Nord employees who are now in a dispute. They also came to show their support for my anti-scab bill.

I would like to ask the hon. member, who seems to support this bill, if there are businesses in his riding under federal jurisdiction and if he is experiencing disputes similar to those in Quebec both past and present, because there is still no anti-scab legislation.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Rex Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the people in Newfoundland and Labrador always rally together to make sure their voices are heard. The way they have done that is by always forming a union. It is probably not a dissimilar situation to what we find in Quebec.

However I have never had the experience of knowing a company that was on strike that brought in strikebreakers. I think the people in Newfoundland and Labrador are different from everyone else in the country. We understand that certain things should not happen. However, for some reason or other, when there are strikes in some provinces they only care about getting them settled.

I think the employers in Newfoundland and Labrador are more sensitive to the needs of the people and our people are really sensitive to the needs of employers. Most important, we try to do things differently to make sure there is a process in place so we do not have to entertain strikebreakers. I know that in some parts of the country that happens and it is unfortunate. As a result, as the hon. member has said, it causes walkouts that are probably prolonged for longer periods of time, which does nothing for the company, nothing for the morale of the employers and employees, and nothing for the economy of the country.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the province of Ontario dumped anti-scab legislation we have seen an increase in actual strikes and labour issues. Would the hon. member agree that Ontario should go back to the anti-scab legislation that protected its workers before and prevented situations like Navistar, where Don Milner was run over by a security firm that was trying to bring scabs into that facility?

Mr. Rex Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I know there was a fair amount of controversy in Ontario when the NDP government brought in some good legislation with regard to scabs. I think the labour movement across the country rejoiced in the fact that they had a premier that would do something for employees, as well as employers, because they work together.

As far as I am concerned I firmly believe Canada should make it quite clear to all employers across the country that it will not tolerate replacement workers taking the jobs of people who are on strike. If that were to happen, it would send a clear message to all the countries in the world that, yes, we may have disputes in our workplaces but we have put a mechanism in place that will resolve the situation fairly and equitably, not only for the employer but for employees, so we can do great business in the country and allow it will prosper.

Canada will prosper if we have a situation where everyone is happy in the workplace. Yes, differences of opinion happen because we all have different ways of doing things, but I think Canada would be a better country if all provinces followed suit and established anti-scab legislation that would prevent replacement workers.

Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague for Manicouagan. I also want to congratulate my hon. colleague for Laurentides on her initiative. This initiative deserves recognition. This member is the labour critic, and she regularly tells the caucus how important this bill is.

There are a few things worth noting. In particular, the Labour Code of Quebec has contained anti-scab provisions since 1977. I must admit that this had ensured some measure of social harmony in labour relations, and this is important.

The straw that broke the camel's back in Quebec, and in fact led to these new anti-scab provisions, was the United Aircraft dispute in 1977. People were very dismayed by this situation.

I remember when security guards were systematically shooting at striking United Aircraft personnel. The government at the time, a Parti Québécois government, decided to do things differently, as it did time and again. In order to create social harmony, the government implemented this anti-scab legislation.

Since then, when it comes to labour peace in every business governed by the Quebec Labour Code, things are not absolutely perfect. However, we certainly have data showing how important such a measure is.

I have here the average number of working days lost in Quebec since 1977. Here is the first number. In 1976, before the new measures came into force, 39.4 working days were lost due to labour disputes.

Right after the introduction of the new measures—in 1979—the number of lost working days dropped to 32.8. In 2001, it was 27.4.

There is absolutely no doubt that this new measure introduced in 1977 brought labour peace and a certain civility in labour relations, resulting in a lot fewer working days lost due to disputes.

Here are some more numbers that are revealing. The average number of working days lost between 1992 and 2002, under the Quebec Labour Code, was 15.9; under the Canada Labour Code, it was around 31.1 days. So under the Canada Labour Code, 95% more days were lost. We attribute this to the lack of anti-scab measures.

Still during the same period of time, between 1992 and 2002, under the Quebec Labour Code, the number of days lost per 1,000 employees was 121.3, whereas under the Canada Labour Code it was 266, or 119% more.

So we can see that it would be good for labour relations to include similar measures in the Canada Labour Code. We know there are drawn-out disputes in businesses governed by the Canada Labour Code. We gave some examples earlier. At Vidéotron, the dispute lasted over one year. Another very tough dispute is ongoing at Sécur. Workers have been locked out at Cargill, and they have been trying to negotiate for three years. Radio-Nord is currently regulated by the federal code—as is the whole sector of telecommunications—and it is also on strike.

Supply

The dynamics must be understood. One has to have been on a picket line—as I often was since I am a former unionist—to know how high tensions are in a dispute when scabs are brought in to replace strikers.

● (1210)

Often, there is a strong police presence and these people are frequently driven to work in armoured vehicles. We can understand why things turn bad sometimes.

In this regard, there are also many other advantages. There is the reduction in violence and picket lines, and I have already talked about that. We can also say that it favours a better balance of bargaining power with employers. At the present time, section 94 (2.1) of the Canada Labour Code prohibits the use of scabs to undermine a trade union's credibility.

This means, for example, that pursuant to the Canada Labour Code, an employer cannot say: "I will lock you out. I do not want to negotiate anymore and I will hire scabs". That is not legal according to the Canada Labour Code.

But employers are more cunning than that. They sit down at the bargaining table and play for time. No progress is made. They want to show that they are bargaining in good faith, when in fact the opposite is true. In the meantime, the scabs are inside the premises and they are working.

This undercuts the unions and leaves those who are bargaining with a Sword of Damocles over their head. It upsets the entire process.

There also seems to be a very broad consensus among labour unions. The CSN, the FTQ and the steelworkers, including those in Quebec, are reported to be quite satisfied with the Quebec code but very dissatisfied with the provisions of the Canadian code.

Such an initiative would bring tremendous benefits and I do hope that my colleagues in the House of Commons will vote in favour of this proposal, even if from what we have seen so far the government, the Liberal Party, does not really support the workers. Just look at what they have done with the employment insurance fund.

I am also thinking about the back-to-work legislation the government has passed. Not only can they enforce the rather vague provisions of the Canadian code to keep workers out on the picket line while scabs are inside working, but, in specific cases, they can also pass special legislation to force employees back to work.

From the way it has behaved in the last 10 years, I think the Liberal Party will probably be against this proposal. I still call on the government members to show their social conscience and really reflect on the significant impact this proposal could have on the labour peace we would all like to see.

As for the Canadian Alliance, the official opposition, judging by everything I have seen of them over the past 10 years, it is clear that they will object to this bill. If they thought about it, however, they would see that this bill is important for labour peace.

Labour peace is extremely important to any business. It has a direct impact on increased productivity. If people can work fully confident that there is no sword of Damocles hanging over their

heads, as I have already said, they will feel more connected to their work and productivity will increase.

So we can see that the bill before us has a great deal of merit. The Bloc Québécois has been trying to get it passed for a long time. For example, one of my former colleagues, Mr. St-Laurent, when he was the member for Manicouagan, was responsible for a bill or a motion in the same vein.

This has an important effect on the national economy. We must not go back to the caveman days, giving employers the upper hand and leaving the ordinary union member powerless. This therefore has a direct impact on the bargaining climate and also cannot help but have a direct impact on the outcome when negotiations start to go sour and drag on forever.

What is the point in the employer's negotiating quickly if he can use people within his business, probably for less money, and just let the unionized workers cool their heels on the picket line?

This created a lot of controversy in Quebec prior to 1977 and was in fact what prompted Quebec to change its labour code so that these people could be covered and strike breakers could no longer be used.

This happened in British Columbia as well, and we have the figures from that province. The number of days lost to strikes and lock-outs is really dropping, and continues to do so, to the benefit of companies and their employees .

I will be supporting this bill with great enthusiasm. My congratulations to my colleague, and I want her to know that in Quebec even employers agree with this type of measure because it has improved productivity.

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Jean for another very clear speech.

I would like to ask him how he explains the fact that, despite all the bills that have been introduced in the House, at least since 1990, both by the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party, this government and its predecessors never showed any concern about this gaping hole in the Canada Labour Code, which allows the use of replacement workers and which I think completely upsets the balance of bargaining power.

My second question would be this. I do not know if he heard the minister this morning, but she almost praises—either because she is acting in bad faith or because she is naive, I do not know—the sort of consensus that supposedly exists in Canada in favour of the status quo, claiming that there is indeed a balance of bargaining power with regard to labour relations in Canada, even during a strike, even with—she apparently admitted it in the House—the use of replacement workers.

I would like my colleague to explain how the minister can say that there is indeed a real balance of bargaining power during strikes, even when scabs show up.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Trois-Rivières for his two excellent questions.

Supply

First, why has the government done so little? Why was nothing done before 1990, or more fairly, since the Liberal Party took office? I referred to this earlier, and this allows me to delve further into the subject.

With all due respect to my Liberal colleagues, I find that the Liberal government is not very friendly to workers. The fact that it constantly steals from the employment insurance fund is another example of this. The fact that it passed special legislation forcing some workers back to work after disputes that had not lasted long at all is yet another sign that this government is not friendly to workers. Also, the fact that it opposes new anti-scab measures, as it very well may do, is further proof.

I do not see how workers today, regardless of where they live in Canada, could feel that they are well represented by this government. I think that workers need to look elsewhere. In Quebec, anyway, thanks to the efforts of my colleagues, we have demonstrated very clearly that we are a party that understands workers, that we are not ashamed of our roots and do not renounce them.

As for the minister who says that there is consensus, I do not know where she got this idea. I meet regularly with people from the CSN, the FTQ and the steelworkers' union in Quebec and everyone says that the Canada Labour Code is flawed and needs fixing. This may just be a sign that the minister is not listening, or else she is only listening to some of the people, which is even worse. She is listening to employers, but not workers.

I would like to remind workers that there are more of them than there are employers. When the time comes to make a political choice, they need to remember that in the House, the real advocates when it comes to conditions that affect workers are the members of the Bloc Quebecois. This is certainly the case in Quebec, and I think that we are setting an example for the rest of Canada. Many Canadian workers appreciate the Bloc Quebecois' measures to support them. I hope they remember this during the next election, which may be quite soon, after all.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his speech and for his involvement at the union level. He has been very active in collective bargaining for many years. He therefore has vast experience in that area.

I have a question for him. As we know, the dispute at Radio Nord has been going on for six months already. Could he tell us, according to what he knows and to what he has seen, what can happen when a dispute lasts as long as this one has and when the employer decides to withdraw from the bargaining table, because there is no anti-scab legislation and because he can do whatever he wants? Has the member ever seen such a dispute, and how does he perceive that?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I did work for a year in the field of labour relations. I can tell her that the current provisions of the Canadian Labour Code only prolong disputes. There is no labour peace, and that prolongs disputes. Radio-Nord is the best example of that.

I was saying earlier that the only thing that is to be found in section 94 of the Canadian Code at present is that one should not undermine the union's credibility. If you do not undermine the union's credibility, you have no right to hire strikebreakers.

The employer often drags things out at the bargaining table. This allows him to continue to operate, to prolong the dispute actually, while people stay out on the streets for months and years.

I think that we really have to think about strengthening the current provisions. I believe that this is exactly what the bill introduced by my colleague intends. With this bill, we will restore labour peace and harmonious labour relations, which will have a positive impact both on workers and on overall productivity in companies that come under the jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code.

• (1215)

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too wish to congratulate our colleague from the Bloc Quebecois, the hon. member for Laurentides, who has been working steadfastly for the dignity and respect of workers. I would say that Canadians are lucky to have the Bloc Quebecois looking out, in this House, for the interests of all workers, and not only those of workers in Quebec. With the anti-strikebreaking legislation, we are looking out for workers throughout Canada, we are looking out for all Canadians.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on such an important issue, and one that I care a great deal about. On this great May 1, International Workers Day, as a parliamentarian, I am pleased to see us take one more step to improve the well-being of workers.

In an advanced society such as ours, in human and technological terms, anti-strikebreaking legislation is a necessity. This debate on labour relations during a dispute is of the utmost importance to many workers in my riding, and throughout the country. Work is the salt of society; workers are its beacons.

In the minds of every citizen, the right to strike means having a last resort when seeking better working conditions, employment protection, and better living conditions. Everybody recognizes that striking can be a last resort. It is the ultimate protection for the respect and dignity of workers.

When workers are down to going on strike, thereby forfeiting their work income, there is problem. It has not been recognized that problems are often caused by employers. But striking was recognized as a right, a right that provides workers with a degree of protection. This right was hard earned, and I know what I am talking about. Common sense prevailed, ultimately. It is one of the benefits of democracy, a topic much talked about in recent days, particularly at this time.

The Labour Code recognizes this right. The Public Service Staff Relations Act also recognizes it. What authority does one have to disregard it or to take it away? Yet this is commonplace, especially in this House and in Ottawa. There is a legal void in the legislation. There is a provision missing, one prohibiting any employer from hiring replacement workers, who are outlaws, basically.

Supply

The only way to fill this void is an anti-strikebreaking law, like the one my colleague, the hon. member for Laurentides has introduced. It is not a sword dangling over employers' heads. It is a tool to ensure that the law is obeyed. It is not a luxury, either, especially in a society like ours. It is a necessity. We cannot enhance the value of work with one hand, while with the other we prevent development and growth, and still expect success.

History has taught us this in Quebec and in Canada's provinces. Abominable acts have been committed because of this legal void. Think of cases—some were mentioned today—such as Vidéotron recently. How many problems could have been avoided if there had been anti-scab legislation? How much lost time for both employees and employers? How much hate, worry, suffering and financial loss?

When I think of my area, for example, I think of Cargill. We have talked about the 36 months of strike, the 36 months of conflict, because the employer resorted to strikebreakers. That was not a solution; it was a calamity. It is an illusion to think it protects employers.

A strike that is undermined by replacement workers is a strike that goes on and on. It is a situation of increased hostility between two parties who ought to concentrate on wages rather than waging war on the labour front. It is a bunch of trouble, as we say.

I have seen brothers stop speaking to each other. I have seen families that almost collapsed. I have seen a society sliding from harmony into chaos because of this legal void, this hole, which should have been filled in long ago. In my riding, there is the case of Iron Ore and Quebec North Shore, in Sept-Îles, and that is a pathetic case.

•(1220)

Just imagine. Some family members working under Quebec legislation are well protected, and others are dealing with scabs because they, under federal jurisdiction as railway employees, are not. It was awful.

Legislation in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia proves that the trend to integrate the principle of prohibiting the use of workers to replace striking workers is gaining ground. Both with employers' groups and unions, wherever this principle is applied, it is not only well accepted, it has been well integrated.

The days of giving with one hand and taking away with the other are over. It is high time for the federal government to introduce measures to stop disputes resulting from the use of scabs. Workers solely under the Canada Labour Code deserve, like everyone else, quality of life and respect for themselves and their rights.

The use of pressure tactics, such as hiring scabs, subjects workers to great stress. It increases the risk of violence and makes bargaining more difficult, as we have seen numerous times. The evidence is overwhelming.

The use of scabs has led to unfair, dictatorial practices. It forces workers to settle for less than a good agreement and leads to unhealthy labour relations that inevitably result in poorer quality services and often higher unemployment.

The use of scabs during labour disputes tips the balance of power in favour of employers. Employers resorting to such methods are clearly unlikely to bargain in good faith.

Democratic principles must be introduced to labour relations. These principles have proven very beneficial in dispute resolution. Quebec statistics show, beyond all doubt, that, when these principles are applied, strikes are significantly shorter.

This aspect must be considered. The Canada Labour Code is not a complete tool for resolving disputes under its jurisdiction. Far from it.

Quebec and some of the provinces were right to implement a civilized labour relations system. This system has restored the true balance of power to bargaining resulting from labour disputes.

When what I call scabs cross the picket line, it is not a strike, it is a joke. It is a lie. It is hypocrisy.

Either we support the right to strike, with all that this implies, or we oppose this fundamental right in any enlightened society, a right that was hard earned. If we support this right, we cannot violate this sacred right for all workers, whether directly or indirectly. The Canada Labour Code must be updated and improved to meet today's needs and realities.

A bill whose purpose is to improve the Canada Labour Code and supplement the staff relations act without altering them deserves all our consideration and support. Workers would feel better about themselves.

Employers would be protected against unnecessary downward variations in their production, against a negative work environment, against major revenue losses due to lengthy disputes and against the absence of their most qualified and specialized workers, as well as against material losses due to frustration, stress and the animosity that is inevitably generated by the deterioration of labour relations.

•(1225)

I ask you all to think very carefully before rejecting anti-scab legislation, before refusing to include a beneficial element in the Canada Labour Code, because this would also mean giving up on these workers' human dignity and respect. This would violate our parliamentary privileges, which are designed to let us serve the society we have promised to serve well.

Once again, on workers' day, let us offer our workers all the respect and dignity that this protection of their right to strike in civilized conditions would be. I urge the government to support our workers, for once.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all workers a happy Workers Day, this being May 1.

I also want to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech and his union involvement. Before entering politics, he did a great deal of work for trade unions.

Would my colleague not agree that, with regard to labour relations, especially during bargaining, during the renewal of a collective agreement, workers governed by the federal code are faced with bigger problems than those governed by the Quebec code? In Quebec, workers know that if things go badly, if there is a strike, the government prohibits scabs from entering the company concerned to do their work, which is not true under the Canada Labour Code.

I believe Canadian workers are at a disadvantage compared to workers governed by the Quebec code. Does my colleague believe this has an impact on bargaining? For instance, are workers governed by the Canada Labour Code not more vulnerable when their demands concern working conditions and wages, in view of the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads?

Mr. Ghislain Fournier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Jean for his excellent question.

I have been through both situations. I was a labour leader when we had a six-month strike. It was very civilized. It lasted six months because we had to negotiate better working conditions. However, we negotiated under the Quebec essential services legislation. The employer respected essential services and so did the union. The atmosphere was agreeable and we had a good balance of power.

On the other hand, I have also been through a strike under the Canada Labour Code, and it was hell. It created upheaval and hatred. There was fighting and some people had their legs broken. Still today, some people will not talk to one another because of these unhealthy disputes. There is a legislative vacuum and we keep asking the federal government, "For the love of God, fill this vacuum; do as other provinces have done. Give us a tool to prevent such upheaval and fill this vacuum". Let us not destroy forever relations which, with a good law, could be built again. The government recognizes rights and essential services, but it does not give us the tools to do the job.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I also want to commend the hon. member for Manicouagan on his excellent speech and comments. We can tell that he speaks from experience about something he really cares about.

I wonder what he thinks of the current federal labour minister's attitude when she says, "Unions and employers have agreed on what is in the Labour Code; it is not my duty to help move things forward".

Does the hon. member think that the minister is showing all the leadership needed on this issue?

• (1230)

Mr. Ghislain Fournier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Without a doubt, the minister lacks courage, transparency and accountability. Her main goal is to protect society, which starts with protecting the workers who are building this country.

Not so long ago, I had the opportunity to talk with some seniors. These wise citizens, who were once unionized, who have worked and built something, who now have children and grandchildren in the workforce, asked me at one point if the federal government was going to follow in the footsteps of Quebec and pass anti-scab legislation.

Supply

I told them what my colleague just pointed out, that this is not one of the major concerns of the labour minister, in Ottawa, although it should be. We will call on her to be in the House when we vote on the anti-scab measure brought forward by the hon. member for Laurentides. We urge the labour minister to take her responsibilities once and for all, to be transparent and to tell us if she is for or against anti-scab legislation.

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this debate, especially since today, May 1, is International Workers Day, and I take this opportunity to salute all workers.

I will go back to November 24, 1992, at a time when private members' bills were a very popular topic. That day, in the House of Commons, I introduced Bill C-376, a bill to amend the Canada Labour Code. I asked for leave to introduce that bill to amend the Canada Labour Code with regard to scabs and essential services. In my remarks, I said:

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to amend the Canada Labour Code to preclude Crown corporations from using scabs during a strike and also to maintain essential services. Indeed, for some time now the major central labour bodies in Quebec have been shifting toward responsible and civilized trade unionism.

This bill will encourage workers to stand up for their rights and interests as members of a society where the improved standard of living of individuals is achieved through consultation.

I want to inform my Liberal colleagues that I will support these provisions, just as I supported the bill that was debated in the House in 1995 and that was introduced by the member for Manicouagan. If I am not mistaken, I believe it was Bill C-317. Today, we have Bill C-328, which was introduced by the member for Laurentides. It has already been debated for one hour in the House of Commons and is the 29th item in the order of precedence on the Order Paper. In a month or so, it will be debated again in the House, and I will support it.

But what should we do about this motion that is before the House on this opposition day? I must say that our society has come a long way since the first International Workers Day in 1886. Together, workers, employers, unions, governments and organizations of all kinds have made Canada what it is today.

We are very proud of and very grateful for this heritage from our ancestors. We all have the desire to continue to improve the well-being of Canadians and to ensure that Canada remains a great country in which to live. This is the goal that we have in mind every time we tackle an issue, including the reform of the Canada Labour Code.

In the case of the Canada Labour Code, we apply the basic principle of labour-management relations that says that employees and employers are in the best position to determine what is more appropriate for them.

Supply

We know that two provinces in Canada are against scabs. First, there is Quebec. Today, I salute the new Quebec premier who was democratically elected recently. The hon. Jean Charest spent several years here and will continue down the same path with respect to labour relations. British Columbia is also anti-scab.

Consequently, today, the government's role is to support employees and employers in their discussions and to help them find appropriate solutions to meet their needs. In some cases, it is possible to reach an agreement, as was the case with most of the key amendments made in 1999 to Part I of the Canada Labour Code. In other cases, however, it is more difficult to achieve a compromise. This is particularly so with replacement workers.

As the government says, this is a sensitive issue. But if we follow the same principle as the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia, we will be able to find a solution. Today, we say that this sensitive issue has been debated many times over the years and that, each time, stakeholders maintained their initial position. We were able to see this once again during the extensive consultations that the Canadian government held in 1999 with representatives of labour and management as well as with many people who have a good knowledge of labour policy issues.

Unions almost unanimously support the implementation of legislative provisions prohibiting the use of replacement workers. For their part, employers are categorically opposed to such a measure. What is more, both employers and unions have legitimate arguments.

This is the case, among others, of the communications and transportation sector, where managers and supervisors often replace employees on strike or locked out. We have an example today with the issue of the communication sectors. Right now, and I want to say this, Radio-Nord strikers, who are members of the union of communication employees of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, have filed a complaint with the Canada Industrial Relations Board for unfair practices.

• (1235)

Even though the strike started October 25, 2002, Radio Nord Communications is still broadcasting both on television and radio thanks to scabs. This is 2003, and today Radio-Nord, which is a big company—I cannot deny it, it is very well run—does not know how to manage its employees.

In our area, for instance, Radio-Nord has been cutting jobs for several years. Currently, management and contractors are replacing striking employees.

Radio Nord Communications has hired over 25 persons or businesses on contract to do the work of strikers in part or in whole. This is unfair. It is unfair for their families. Recently, I met one of my good colleagues, who is a journalist, Gilles Hamel, of Radio-Nord Val-d'Or. He came to my constituency office in Val-d'Or and told me, "Guy, the current strike is having an impact on children's school work, and on families too". Why? Because Radio Nord is using scabs.

Today, the head of the union, André Anglehart, and several workers, men and women, are here in the House of Commons to

protest against Radio-Nord Communications, which by using scabs has been denying them their bargaining rights.

A solution must be found. There is nothing difficult about it. We started working on the issue of scabs in 1999. Indeed, the Canadian labour minister should conduct another consultation and hold truly comprehensive meetings, maybe in a few weeks' time, since two provinces in Canada were able to find a solution, to see if the other provinces could do likewise.

However, there must be an outright ban on replacement workers during work stoppages. True, the code considers it to be an unfair labour practice to use such workers to undermine a union's representational capacity rather than to pursue legitimate bargaining objectives.

Under the current legislation, one can appeal the use of replacement workers. We would not need this motion if there were a recourse. It should be banned completely since we know that when an appeal is launched, it takes several weeks or months before the committee renders its decision. But it is always possible for unionized workers to lodge a complaint with the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

Since 1999, the Canada Labour Code has given employees an avenue of recourse. But we should also state that we are against the use of scabs, and then the employees would not have to wait for weeks for the Canada Industrial Relations Board's decision, and we would save the taxpayers money. If we are against the use of scabs, we should clearly say so once and for all.

The Board is an independent quasi-judicial body responsible for the interpretation and the enforcement of Part I and some provisions of Part II of the Canada Labour Code. It is composed of representatives of the employers and the unions, one chairperson and various independent vice-chairpersons.

We would only have to add one provision against scabs to the Canada Labour Code and that would be the end of it. There are many representations from employees and others today in this regard.

We are often asked why government did not ban the hiring of replacement workers when Part I of the Canada Labour Code was amended. That amendment did not completely ban the hiring of replacement workers during work stoppages.

The use of replacement workers for the demonstrated purpose of undermining a union's representational capacity rather than the pursuit of legitimate bargaining objectives will be considered an unfair labour practice.

The labour and management parties that bargain collectively under Part I of the Code have accepted this approach as being a reasonable compromise. They had in fact accepted a compromise back in 1999, but it is now 2003. We should make another compromise and not accept any scabs.

Supply

I know, I do sometimes go to the picket line in front of Radio-Nord in Val-d'Or. Managers are doing the work. Guys like Gilles Hamel come to my office to explain a few things to me. I often meet with a former union leader who is now retired, Antonio Bruno of the United Steelworkers of America. I saw him last week. He spoke to me about this strike that has gone on for six weeks.

• (1240)

In recent years, there have been two strikes in Val d'Or. A solution must be found. Credibility is being undermined, even within families.

We are still asking the same question, "Will the federal government admit that the amendments to Part 1 of the Canada Labour Code concerning replacement workers are ineffective?" They answer, "It is premature to conclude that the provisions on replacement workers are ineffective".

Listen, we have examples of strikes going on right now. We have one in the communications sector in Val-d'Or. Radio Nord Communications is the best example we have. I am disappointed that they are here today. I am very disappointed that they are here today, on May 1, to defend their rights as workers as this should have been settled at the outset, on October 25, 2002. If the Canada Labour Code had banned strikebreakers, they would not be here today, six months later.

They were on strike in the north in the remote regions of Quebec. They picketed at -40 °C. It went down to -52°C this winter in January and February. These people are diplomats. I met them a while ago in front of the Parliament buildings. I spoke with them and invited them in. About nine of them took me up on my offer. They are fine people, these men and women. They want the government to get involved for the sake of the future.

It is very easy. All it would take is to white-out one or two lines in the Canada Labour Code and write in "no strikebreakers will be permitted in future".

I am in favour of this opposition day. When it is time to vote on the hon. member's private member's bill, I will vote in favour of it.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for his convictions and for the courage he is showing in supporting our anti-scab bill.

Like my colleague, I met earlier with some Radio-Nord workers who are demonstrating on Parliament Hill today and who are going through a very stressful time. There is a serious income shortfall six months into a strike. People will often go into debt. They might lose their house and be unable to pay their rent, taxes, hydro and phone bills, to provide their kids with everything need and to put food on the table. Workers who get only about \$200 a week during a strike that has been dragging for six months stand to lose everything and their families might end up on the streets.

We are not supporting the economy either. There is a lot of talk about the Canadian economy. But we are not supporting the Quebec economy either during all that time. Workers on strike no longer have any spending power. The whole climate in their company might never be the same.

Some day, these people may go back to work. It happened at Vidéotron after a 10 month strike. Workers are not always ecstatic about going back. Things might be friendlier if we had anti-scab legislation. Workers have to accept some major compromises. On a financial basis, they do not have any other choice. They can no longer remain on strike.

I was very pleased to hear my colleague say that he would vote for the bill. I find him very brave and I want to ask him if he believes that many other members of his party will also have the fortitude to support the long awaited anti-scab legislation in Parliament?

• (1245)

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I hope there will be others.

I know that I am a former United Steelworkers of America union president, but that is not the only reason. These facts are important to the other members, even if they have not been union leaders or members.

Now, and for the past several months, there is nothing stopping Radio-Nord or any company from telling its employees, "We are against scabs. You win, we will not hire anyone". But, for the past six months, Radio-Nord has been hiring people from Hull who come to Val-d'Or with expense accounts to replace inside workers.

But I hope that other members, more than one or two or three or four, will be in favour of including a provision in the Canada Labour Code prohibiting strikebreakers.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik. His comments show that he is aware of what is at stake.

This is not simply about improving working conditions and bargaining for working conditions, but it is also about the possibility of ensuring that those involved in this bargaining are on an equal footing, so that acceptable agreements can be reached.

The example of Radio-Nord that the member has seen in his riding speaks volumes. There is one argument that he could make with his Liberal colleagues, and I invite him to do so. I recall that, when in opposition, the Liberal Party voted for this type of bill. I fail to understand why the Minister of Labour cannot be convinced now that not only must she follow up on the consensus that exists between workers and employers, but she must also be proactive and, as the member suggested at the beginning of his remarks, bring both parties to accept anti-scab rules, following which, concessions will be possible during bargaining.

Does he think he could convince the Minister of Labour and a majority of his Liberal colleagues to vote the same way they did on this issue before they came to power, and support passing this bill in the end? I am sure that in 20 years, Parliament will be as proud as Quebec's Parliament is for having passed anti-scab legislation in 1978.

Mr. Guy St-Julien: I agree, Mr. Speaker, and I will relay this to the Minister of Labour of Canada. There is no doubt that this would be easy to do, since it already exists in Quebec and in British Columbia, where disputes are settled without difficulty.

Supply

What is going on at Radio Nord today also affects families. This has been going on for far too long. In some cases, even a single day is too long, when it comes to not establishing the practice of hiring strikebreakers.

Company officials maintain that they are not using strikebreakers, that the people doing the work are from Hull, among other places, that they are management, contractors and so forth. The people at Radio Nord are very efficient, and we have nothing against them, but we have had it with strikebreakers in Abitibi.

In our region, we have been doing without news for six months. This is a company established in a vast region, the Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The public is suffering, and it feels bad for those employees who are not going back to work.

• (1250)

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to speak today on this bill. This is a bill that I feel very strongly about, as do all the members of the Bloc Québécois and a number of members in other parties, apparently.

Members have been asking over and over for such a bill to be passed. In this respect, I think that my colleague from Laurentides deserves our heartfelt gratitude. I do hope that this opposition day dedicated to this issue will help convince hon. members, particularly those in the Liberal majority, that it is appropriate to support this bill.

When this issue is raised in Quebec, the first thing people do is ask, "What are you talking about? We already have anti-strikebreaking legislation in Quebec. It has been in place for nearly 25 years. What is going on at the federal level? Why are you telling us there is no federal legislation dealing with this?"

Then we explain to them that the federal Parliament, through the Canada Labour Code, has never settled this matter, even though we raise it as often as we can. The thing that is difficult to understand is that, initially, when it was in opposition, the Liberal Party of Canada supported anti-scab legislation, and since it has been in power, it is systematically against it.

• (1255)

Usually, private members' bills provide an opportunity for members to express their views without having to toe the party line. Regarding the present bill introduced by the hon. member for Laurentides, we have even seen that a Liberal member will vote with the Bloc Québécois on this motion, as will the NDP. I hope that members of the Liberal Party of Canada will help the minister and parliamentary secretary understand the facts. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour said;

The government believes the balanced approach that is set out in part I of the Canada Labour Code is the best way to deal with the issue in the federal jurisdiction. We do not see any compelling reason to change the law now.

That is something special. In my copy of the text, this sentence is underlined because, in fact, while the parliamentary secretary was speaking on behalf of the minister, the minister told us the same thing this morning. She said there is not any compelling reason to change the law now, but the fact is that some disputes go on for years.

For the employees at Cargill, happily, it will be over soon. In the case of the strike at Radio-Nord, some employees of that company have come here to express their support for this anti-scab bill. At Vidéotron, the strike lasted many months.

In all these examples, we note that if there had been an anti-strikebreaking law, perhaps there still would have been a strike, but in the distribution and balance of powers, it would not prevent people from resorting to their right to strike when appropriate. We would certainly have had disputes that lasted a much shorter time than they have.

I believe the Liberal Party needs to change its position. I call upon its members, every individual, every man and every woman, to reflect on this and think about whether the fairest point of view would not be the one they adopted before becoming the government, when they supported a similar bill. What logic can they use for having changed their minds today? It strikes me as totally unjustified.

What is worse, they are on side with the Canadian Alliance, which is opposed to this bill. We have read into the record some very convincing texts on this, which show what a really anti-union attitude the Alliance has, as it is even against the right to representation.

• (1300)

This is an attitude that ought not to be shared by the House as a whole. I invite hon. members, particularly those in the Liberal majority, to support my colleague's bill, one which is moreover supported by the New Democratic Party and the Progressive Conservative Party.

In the NDP, the member for Winnipeg—Transcona, who has always been very firm about what he has been known to call "Quebec separatists", said these very words on this issue:

I am sure that I speak for all my colleagues when I say that I hope one day our country will be as progressive as the Province of Quebec with respect to our labour code.

When those words come from the mouth of the member for Winnipeg—Transcona, it must mean he was deeply concerned. As a sovereignist member of Parliament who wants to see Quebec become a country, I do not often enjoy the support of that colleague. Today, my colleague from Laurentides has obtained it for this anti-strikebreaker bill. I think this ought to lead to some reflection on the position each member will have to take when the bill is voted on.

The Progressive Conservative Party also supported the bill. The member for St. John's East said the following:

These are all reasonable clauses that should help employees and employers in their efforts to resolve differences in a very professional and rational manner.

We have had the possibility of passing such an anti-scab bill numerous times over the past 10 or 15 years. I think it would reflect well on this Parliament if it did so.

I will take this opportunity to tell the Speaker, since I forgot to do so when I started my speech, that I will be sharing my time with the member for Jonquière.

If the House of Commons were to pass the bill, if today there seemed to be support in the House, in this Parliament, for the Bloc Québécois' bill, the Minister of Labour would be compelled to reflect and take action, move forward rather than backward on this matter.

Currently, she is very defensive, saying that the Canada Labour Code reflects what the unions and employers were both prepared to accept. But the Minister of Labour is responsible for ensuring not only that the measures on which both parties agree are included in a labour code, but also that the Canada Labour Code is progressive.

In Quebec, scabs have not been used for the past 25 years, and this has led to healthier worker-employer relationships; this then is a good example to follow. If the Minister of Labour wants to be progressive, if she wants labour relations in Canada to improve, if she wants productivity rates to increase, if she wants the number of days unfortunately lost to strikes to decrease, if she also wants the families of workers in long term disputes not to suffer the consequences, then she must have a positive attitude.

Parliament should tell the Minister of Labour to take action, to go to the employers and the unions to tell them that she wants to work to enact anti-scab legislation; perhaps then we would see results, and the end result would be good.

In 1978, Pierre-Marc Johnson was Quebec's minister of labour in the first Parti Québécois government. There was what is known in politics as a honeymoon, and there was a desire for change, and anti-scab legislation was implemented.

Today, no one in the Quebec Parliament would question those things because they have made for healthier relations between employers and employees. People who were opposed to them then for the same reasons as those who are opposed to them now realized that their arguments were groundless, and that it was advantageous for Quebec society, as it would be for Canadian society, to bring more civility to our labour relations.

• (1305)

Then we would have people who could bargain on an equal footing and reach better agreements.

The fact that the Quebec Labour Code banned the use of scabs resulted in employers being better respected by unionized workers and workers being better respected by employers. In the end, collective agreements were signed faster and better agreements were reached. Today, nobody is questioning this piece of legislation.

We would have expected the federal government to act. It is faced with terrible examples. I repeat: Vidéotron, a one-year strike; Cargill, a three-year strike; Radio Nord is currently on strike and the repercussions are far-reaching. A whole region is dependent on this communications network; journalists and strikebreakers are replacing those who were doing the job before. It creates a very unhealthy climate in the area. The situation is getting worse because the current law is not being amended. If it were, this situation would not recur in the future.

At Vidéotron, the strike would not have lasted one year if they had not used scabs, much less at Cargill. You should have seen the ships arriving at Baie-Comeau and the people who had been hired to unload them. We went there to see them and we saw them going in.

Supply

In conclusion, I will say this. The member for Laurentides deserves all our support for her bill. I hope that when the time comes to vote, we will be behind her and we will be part of a historical moment that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Binet): The hon. member for Laurentides.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his speech. It shows how much the Bloc Québécois cares about this bill, how interested it is in this legislation.

I would love to see other political parties in the House show as much interest in anti-scab legislation.

I met earlier with some employees of Radio-Nord. They described all the hardship they are going through in the absence of anti-scab legislation. Their employer is shamelessly using strikebreakers to broadcast its radio and television shows in that region, while its striking employees are picketing outside. Not an easy thing to do at -52°C, as my Liberal colleague pointed out.

Think also about the impact it is having on a place like Témiscamingue, where a whole group of workers and in fact the whole community is hurting. They live in a very small region. At the economic level, when these workers can no longer afford to buy food, pay their taxes, their mortgages, their hydro and phone bills, it is the whole community which has to pay the price. That should no longer be happening in 2003.

In 2003, the government is making billions of dollars in profits and surpluses in the EI fund, but we cannot pass anti-strikebreaking legislation that will cost the government nothing, nothing except political courage, something I have been hard-pressed to find in this House.

We are giving the government an opportunity to pass legislation to protect workers. Nobody in this House can tell me there is not one single federally regulated employee in his or her riding. There are some in all of our ridings. We are all affected by this legislation and all of us must represent our voters.

It is unacceptable to vote as we are told to by a minister. I for one feel I have a responsibility to vote according to the needs of my fellow citizens. If they tell me they need this kind of legislation, I will vote for it. Sitting across the way would not change how I vote, because my primary duty is to represent my voters.

I would like my hon. colleague to elaborate on this and tell me if they had similar disputes in his riding and what he thinks about it.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I did go to the Vidéotron workers' picket line in Rivière-du-Loup. They were locked out for almost a year. I met with them right at the beginning to support their position.

I would like to put on the record an observation by Paul-André Lapointe, a professor in the labour relations department at Laval University. It captures exactly what these people went through during this dispute:

Supply

In the absence of federal legislation, a dispute turns into a war of attrition where the most powerful wins. This encourages traditional strategies that are disruptive and damaging for economic and social performance.

I think this is the most concise explanation of what happened in the Vidéotron dispute.

Besides, if our labour code prohibited the hiring of strikebreakers, we would not have had to go through this, as is clear from what I just read. This dispute hurt not only workers but the employer as well. It was terribly expensive for the employer to find a way out and save face after using all kinds of tough measures against the workers. Workers had to do the same.

Thanks to our anti-scab legislation in Quebec, we no longer have this kind of behaviour, or very seldom. If honourable members do not believe us, they should talk to employers, workers and employer associations in Quebec. They will find out that nobody would like to do away with this legislation, which has made it possible to regularize labour relations and make them more civilized, and which has ultimately reduced the number of strike days.

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this motion brought forward by the Bloc Québécois.

Today being May 1, which is International Workers Day, the Bloc Québécois motion that we are debating in the House is even more important.

The motion reads as follows:

That this House recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strikebreakers.

I am from the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area, the most unionized region in Quebec, and I am proud to say so. I am proud to say that, over the years, my region has contributed to the constant evolution of Quebec's society. It has helped workers, employers and society as a whole to feel comfortable within a specific framework which everyone helped put in place.

I fail to understand why the government is being so stubborn. I do not know if it can be so out of touch. However, today, it will have to tell all workers how out of touch it really is. The members opposite ask these people to elect them, but once they are elected, they do not represent them.

I am proud to be a member of the Bloc Québécois, which is here to protect the rights of workers. I am also proud to be a colleague of the member for Laurentides, who introduced Bill C-328, the purpose of which is to eliminate the regressive practice of using scabs during strikes or lockouts.

Members of the Bloc Québécois are also stubborn. We are here to promote the sovereignty of Quebec. We are here, in this federal institution, to defend our workers as well as our constituents.

With the member for Laurentides and all our colleagues, we will fight hard to have this bill passed in the House, urging every member on the government side as well as those in the Canadian Alliance, the Progressive Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party to get involved and to do a little bit of soul-searching. Then they will be able to say what they think by going back to their true fundamental values, those of a fair and just society.

When we work, we have the right to do so under conditions that allow us to give our most to our employer. However, we should expect the same in return from the employer when it comes to its workers. They have the right to ask their legislators to come up with legislation to protect them and defend their fundamental values. The Canada Labour Code does not do this.

When I was young, I witnessed barbaric strikes in my region. They did nothing to improve anything for either party. In the end, people need to sit down and bargain. However, individuals, society and the people of my region will never forget. Ask around in Jonquière and people will talk to you about the strikes they lived through.

This is 2003, Quebec has had anti-scab legislation for 26 years now. That is something. People always say that Quebec society is a modern society, one that listens to people. This is yet another example here of how Quebec society is progressive.

It was the late René Lévesque, in 1977, who allowed the National Assembly to pass this legislation, which prevents employers from hiring people to do the jobs of workers who are walking the picket lines.

Before being a member of Parliament, I walked the picket lines to defend the interests of my workers who were subject to the Canada Labour Code. It was not pretty. At five in the morning, it was minus 40 degrees and we were picketing to prevent scabs from crossing the line. That is what I remember.

Today I still run across people who were picketing with me. They still remember, and nothing has been the same for them since then. It is a misconception that there is no social role for the government when it comes to workers and the people who make up the society that it represents.

● (1310)

I refuse to believe this. I am a girl from the Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay region, from a family of die-hard unionists.

My father, who is now deceased, worked at the Alcan plant. At the time, the Alcan plant in Arvida was not a great place to work. There was pollution; it was a horrible environment. What changed labour conditions? What ensured a balance between the employers and the workers? The unions did. Thanks to proactive measures adopted by the Quebec government we can say, in my riding today, that there have not been any strikes for a long time, with the exception of the Vidéotron strike.

Why was there a strike at Vidéotron? There are many reasons. One of them is because it was under the Canada Labour Code. That is the starting point.

I refuse to listen to double talk any longer. I feel sorry for the Minister of Labour. I know her personally. She is a woman with a big heart. I know that today she must be very uncomfortable. I know that she has feelings and that she has to defend the position of her government, which will not lift a finger to help the workers.

However, when the time comes to plunder the employment insurance fund, it does not ask for permission. It says, "Hey there, back off, we decide". It always looks good and always puts on its kid gloves to talk to workers. It does not do so when the time comes to return the favour, as I am sure the Liberal government's Minister of Labour would like to do. It says to workers, "Forget it". This is unacceptable.

On this day, May 1, International Workers' Day, I ask all my colleagues from all parties to do some soul-searching, to live by their values and to say yes, we will be with you and we will work with you toward creating a society that is increasingly just and fair for those who are part of it.

I ask them to be there for the vote, but to vote as their conscience dictates, to set aside party lines and to answer our appeal. It is not true that there are not people in their region and their riding who do not come under the Labour Code. In my riding, there are people at the tax centre, there are postal workers. There is a lot of people. They are the ones I will defend. This is why I commend my colleague from Laurentides for asking that this opposition day be used to discuss her bill.

We are with her, we will continue to fight and we will get these changes for workers implemented.

• (1315)

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Jonquière for her eloquent speech. She is right. We are here to represent our workers.

I was saying earlier that there is not one member in this House who does not have voters working in federally regulated jobs. We all have them and we are all responsible for the position that we adopt regarding these people.

These people are all in favour of the anti-scab bill. There is not one worker in a federally regulated job who is against anti-scab legislation. This kind of legislation is designed to protect them, to ensure proper bargaining between employers and employees, and to ensure that nobody will be brought in to do their work.

I was talking about small communities. Just imagine a community where people on strike, out on the picket line, see scabs coming in to do their work. Very often these scabs are neighbours, friends or even relatives. Just imagine the problems this can create in a community.

And when it lasts for 10 months, it is even worse. When workers finally go back to their jobs, they do so in a totally negative atmosphere. None of them feel like going back to work. In the end, they have had to give up things that were probably essential to them, but they have no more money, they can no longer walk the picket line. They have to back down. Nobody should have to back down in 2003.

There is one thing I would like to ask my colleague. I remember going to her riding last summer during the Vidéotron strike. We met with the unions. I would like her to tell us about some of the things she saw happen to the Vidéotron workers in her riding. What were the consequences of this 10-month strike in the community?

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Laurentides for her question. Today, I am

Supply

struggling with my feelings as a woman and my feelings as a politician and a mother.

Last summer, I attended some meetings with my hon. colleague, when she paid us a visit in my region. I also met with some Vidéotron employees and their union representatives. I remember everything they told us. Some of them were going through breakups. They were happy before. They had a spouse and children. But the strike devastated their emotional, family and social lives. It is serious.

What is important in life is to get along with our relatives, members of our community, the people around us and our co-workers, not to consider them as bulls in a china shop. It is human nature.

People keep saying that society is becoming increasingly dehumanized. The Canada Labour Code dehumanizes society. The government has to agree to pass anti-scab legislation.

My hon. colleague from Laurentides asked me to give some examples. I remember all these men and women who had come to meet with us. It was very hot on the day my hon. colleague and I toured my riding. It was one of the most beautiful days in Saguenay. However, there was no smile on the faces of these people, no sparkle in their eyes. They were all so sad.

I cannot believe we are putting all these workers through so much pain. As the member for Laurentides pointed out, this would not cost the government a penny. It is only a question of political will.

It is now up to the government to show us that it cares and that it has the political will to act.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to enter the debate on the opposition day motion on changes to the Canada Labour Code.

It was interesting to listen to the previous speaker. She spoke with a great deal of passion about the strikes and so forth that have happened in her riding. It was interesting to hear her say that when members get here they no longer seem to represent the interests of the people in their riding. At the same time she talked about her agenda of sovereignty. If I recall the last polls and the last provincial election in the province of Quebec, the people of Quebec said they do not want to talk about sovereignty. I guess she is an example of that sort of thing.

There is no question that organized labour has made great gains for the working people of this country. My riding has a plethora of auto workers. General Motors is a big manufacturer in Oshawa and Durham. Many of these workers have told me about the hard times they have had in order to gain the great benefits they currently enjoy. With that consistency they are very happy and very proud of the automobiles they manufacture in Oshawa, of which 80% are exported to the United States. They make a fine product and are very proud of their jobs. I thought I would mention them today to say that I understand some of the labour problems because I have seen some of the strikes that have happened.

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A strike in and of itself is a conflict. It does not surprise me that the Bloc would bring forward this motion today. Sadly, looking at some of the labour statistics in that province, Quebec has had one of the highest percentages of work stoppages in Canada.

We are trying to compete in a global environment. That means we need a productive labour force. We have to be able to consistently deliver products to our customers, but that does not mean it is at the expense of labour or at the expense of their benefits or protection they have received and other things that are very important.

However, this mode of gaining benefits or recognition of problems that occur on the work site is probably the worst solution. A strike to me is a definition of failure in labour negotiations. I do not think either employers or employees ultimately want work stoppages. We have to find a better way. There have been a number of other models that seem to have worked more effectively. A lot of us will recall some of the Japanese models and others.

I talked about General Motors being organized. At the same time it has a concern that some Japanese labour plants which are operating effectively and efficiently in Canada are not part of organized labour, yet their wage rates and benefit packages are equally as high. This is not to denigrate the union movement and all the wonderful things it has gained, but the question is whether there are more effective ways to resolve disputes.

It goes back to some of our basic teachings in economics. I remember when I was learning economics people were talking about the alienation of workers from the means of production. That is sort of the basic philosophy of a lot of the conflict that has occurred within labour and its tremendous struggle to gain benefits which it so rightly deserves. That alienation basically meant that since the worker did not own or control the actual means of production, he or she therefore had a natural alienation from the employer and by definition they were in conflict.

• (1325)

That is the old school of labour negotiations. In some ways this whole debate harkens back to the sixties and seventies where this was a prevalent school of thought. This whole concept of whether we need anti-strikebreaking legislation and so forth seems to me an add on to that.

As I understand it, this motion centres on how much latitude employers should possess to keep their businesses operational in the case of a strike. Clearly, the motion reflects the view of labour unions which contends that replacement workers ought not to be allowed in any case and that business operations should be restricted as much as possible during work stoppage. In other words, we should essentially grind the business to a halt.

From time to time we will talk about essential services. Most people will say that if it is an essential service, possibly they do not have the right to strike, and indeed we removed the right to strike in many sectors of our economy. Disruptions occur even in the private sector, whether it is an automobile plant, a telephone company, or freight trains. I recall coming into the House a number of summers ago to legislate the railway workers back to work. They had entered into a strike that would have brought the whole transportation system of our country to a standstill. I do not like that either. The whole idea

of a legislative solution is just one more further nail in the coffin of the organized labour movement because it is saying that the whole negotiation process between the employer and employee has failed. This proposed amendment seems to even go further in ensuring that an employer would have to cease operations.

I understand the importance of a strike. When we come to a strike, it should have some meaningful effect. Clearly, employers should not be going out replacing all of their employees with non-union employees just for the purpose of breaking a strike. However, there must be some kind of a balance between that philosophy and one which simply tries to hold up the employer's business basically to ransom.

I recall dealing with grain shipments out of the port of Vancouver and also out of the port of Montreal, and negotiating grain sale agreements with China. I was surprised that the first thing China said was that it wanted a guaranteed delivery date because historically in agreements with Canada we have not been able to meet our delivery dates simply because we have a plethora of labour problems in our country. It was a seemingly odd thing for a communist country to say, but China did not believe we would deliver in time because it did not believe our workers were capable of doing that. I thought that was a terrible slight on Canada and its ability to earn the respect of carrying on productive business throughout the world.

This motion rejects the view held by employer organizations who believe that businesses have the right to continue operations as best they can during a strike. Once again, I do not mean that they will be in full production. Most of us know that they have the right to reallocate labour within their business units. We do not expect them to be able to completely replace the labour. Indeed, within the Canada Labour Code it restricts the ability to replace workers where the purpose of which is simply to undermine the workers themselves. In other words, to replace worker A with worker B. However, it is clear that if an absolute stoppage occurs that there may well be some areas where an employer needs other people just to maintain the site. I know it is almost impossible for General Motors to stop the production line because to get the line up and physically going again takes weeks sometimes.

• (1330)

That one-sided approach is not in keeping with the way the Canada Labour Code has evolved in recent years. It is not in keeping with the approach our government has encouraged and helped to succeed. Our government has taken the view that labour unions and employers must build an industrial relations system that creates a climate within which both can work. Yes, there will be profound differences, but the goal is to create a framework that enables employers and workers to resolve their workplace issues to the greatest extent possible on their own.

The process in recent years to explore each part of the Canada Labour Code has demonstrated how that commitment has been put into practice in reviewing this key legislation. The government started the process. When I look at the Canada Labour Code and listen to the request for amendments, I see that the Canada Labour Code has been revised as recently as 1999. These issues about replacement labour have been discussed at length with organized labour and with employers, et cetera.

Did they come to some kind of an agreement? I do not think they came to an agreement where either one of them were particularly happy, but the point is that they could both live with this agreement. It seems to me that the motion being put forward by the member for Laurentides today tips the balance the other way, so that in fact there would be a group of people who probably could not live with these amendments.

The government started this process by consulting workers, unions, employers, business organizations, industrial relations and human resources experts, as well as many others. The objective was to identify priorities for the revision of part I of the code. The government also created an independent task force to take a look at part I and return with its own recommendations for action, once again based upon an attempt to reach consensus wherever possible.

While the question of replacement workers was a point of deep division, there was consensus on many other issues. The government moved forward on a common ground that led to legislation that Parliament debated and passed, and has been law since the current labour code came into force in January 1999. So, this is a fairly recent revision to the act.

Did that mean that there was no movement at all on the issue of replacement workers? To hear some of the points that the members from the Bloc are making, one would conclude just that. Yet Parliament did agree with the government on five important restrictions on the use of replacement workers. This is important because as we listen to the debate today it would appear that there are no restrictions on the use of replacement workers, and that just is not the case. Once again, it is trying to find that healthy balance between employers and employees to ensure that the element of strike is still available to employees, but that it is not such a disastrous thing that it totally shuts down and in fact may cause costs that are irreparable, both to employers and employees.

First, an employer cannot bring in new people if it is simply to undermine the union's legitimate bargaining objectives. Doing that would be an unfair labour practice under the code. In other words, we have unfair labour practices under the code that prohibit the actual use of replacement workers, the prime purpose of which is to undermine the bargaining position of the union.

Members can see that these are tempered measures that are already in the legislation. It would be an action that the union could take to the Canada Industrial Relations Board for review and a decision. It is worth noting that there have been 11 such complaints since the amended code came into effect in 1999. In eight of these cases the complaint was eventually withdrawn while three are still before the board awaiting decision.

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I want to remind my hon. colleagues that the Canada Industrial Relations Board is an independent third party. It is outside of the labour employer relationship and outside of the Canada Labour Code in a sense. The board has an equal number of members who come from employer and employee groups so that they are represented on the industrial labour relations board by individuals who have an expertise in industrial relations. This is important because this is the way to solve these disputes. They are fairly heavy on work stoppage and they are essentially looking for a solution to the work stoppage. We must have mechanisms in place that bring that about. The board is headed by an independent chairperson.

Second, it is now clear in law that replacement workers are excluded from the status of employees in the bargaining unit. A replacement worker cannot take part in a vote to replace or renew a union or a vote related to collective bargaining. In other words, employers cannot bring in replacement workers, the purpose of which is to deregister a union by saying they are part of the bargaining unit and therefore there will be a vote and therefore the union will be deregistered. This would be another way that it would be unfair to workers and their collective bargaining units.

Third, the code explicitly recognizes that employees in the bargaining unit have a right to return to their jobs at the end of the work stoppage ahead of any replacement worker. It acknowledges the importance of seniority. In other words, even though somebody had to replace somebody for some specific reason, a specific reason which is not deemed to undermine the collective bargaining position, if the work resumed, say a year after the fact, any such persons who were hired would basically be subordinated to the existing people who were on strike.

Fourth, any applications under the code to change or decertify a union during a prolonged work stoppage require the consent of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board. This is a change from the old provisions that enabled an employer to apply to decertify a union after six months of work stoppage. This is another way in which bargaining units have been protected, yet employees who are fired or disciplined during a work stoppage can go to a grievance arbitration. None of these measures interfere with the employers trying to keep the business operational during a strike. However, they do make it more likely that the use of replacement workers will be aimed specifically at continuing those operations and not for the purposes that run counter to the Canada Labour Code.

It would appear in the studies that have been undertaken that this kind of provision actually seeks to limit the terms of strikes. In fact, if we look over the history we see that measures of this nature, as opposed to measures that the member wants to bring in, has actually reduced the number of days that employers are strikebound. It is in the interest of everyone to ensure that the business gets back to work, that employers are happy and that employees are back in their work setting. That is a reasonable balance. It may not be what the labour unions want or what the employer organizations want. That is crucial because of the fact that we have disagreement on both sides, but the important thing is that both parties can work with this or they can live with this.

Supply

Despite some of the claims that we hear from the Bloc, it is far too early for anyone to decide that the replacement workers provision in the code is not working. It is far too early to decide that we need to override this commitment to a consensus driven approach to resolving these issues. It is time for Parliament to allow workers and employers to develop the experience necessary so that they can determine how well these provisions work.

Finally, it is worth putting all of this in perspective. Looking at the departmental performance before 2001-02 for human resource development, we find that 93.7% of collective bargaining disputes under the current Canada Labour Code were settled without any work stoppage whatsoever. We are talking about a small dispute area. We find that the labour program enjoys strong and effective federal mediation and conciliation so that it can step into work with employers and unions in many of Canada's collective bargaining disputes within the federal and private sector.

• (1335)

Furthermore, we find an increase in the use of preventive mediation tools to resolve issues before they reach a difficult stage.

While there will always be high profile collective bargaining disputes, workplaces under federal jurisdiction have a positive environment in which to resolve the issues that matter to workers and employers.

For these reasons I am opposed to this motion.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have not heard anything like the remarks of the hon. member opposite since the 1950s, at least not often.

It is incredible that someone would make such remarks. I took notes. He spoke of the needs of employers. No argument there. We all agree. Businesses need to be productive, they need to compete and to compete in a global environment. No argument there. However, within a country, wealth is divided through negotiations and leverage.

You say that workers can bargain, but you will not give them the necessary tools. This is akin to sending troops to war without providing them with weapons, telling them, "Off you go; fight the war and get yourself killed".

Strikes bother people. There is no doubt about it. We must be aware of that, and accept it. The dignity and respect of workers is at stake.

In your remarks, you spoke only of the benefits of businesses. As far as you are concerned, businesses have the right to operate, and they cannot stop. The workers have no rights; they cannot demand respect and bargain. That is what you said. It is shocking to hear such things in this century.

Do I understand correctly that this is the philosophy of his party as a whole, including the Minister of Labour? Is this how the Liberal Party looks at the issue? Are you abandoning the fundamental rights of workers to negotiate a collective agreement to ensure that wealth is distributed fairly and equitably? Is this your party's philosophy?

Do your colleagues and the Minister of Labour endorse this philosophy? Was it imposed on you by your—

The Deputy Speaker: I always hesitate to interrupt my colleagues, but sooner or later the line has to be drawn.

Comments should always go through the Chair. It can be very useful, especially when one member does not share the view of another. It encourages members to use milder language.

I simply wish to encourage the hon. member for Manicouagan to direct his remarks through the Chair as he finishes his speech.

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mr. Ghislain Fournier: Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely right, but it is because my colleague over there made me angry and got me going.

I agree with you, but I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the member took his cue from the labour minister and if the same holds true for all his Liberal colleagues. Do all his colleagues think like him? Do they all believe that companies have rights and workers have none? Does he think that there is no balance of bargaining power between companies and workers?

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, as I understand the decorum of the House, each individual is entitled to his own opinions on legislation. It is not necessarily directed by some other magical force.

I listened to the hon. member speak, saying that I somehow said that workers had no rights whatsoever. Nothing could be further from the truth. I talked about the importance of the labour movement. In fact, the first thing I said was about the important gains that have been made over the years.

We are not talking about one's right to strike. Clearly one does have the right to strike. We are talking about a small section of that: replacement workers during a strike. We talked about the exemptions in which an employer could use replacement workers during a strike, which is a very tempered thing. Workers cannot be employed when the prime purpose of that is to undermine the bargaining position of the union. It is very respectful of the union and very respectful of the orientation to try to resolve strikes, but the adversarial attitude that the member has hearkens back to that kind of conflict that was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s.

I have my own kids who are out in the labour force. I can say that they do not think about the aspects of strikes. They talk about employer-employee communication systems and about human resources programs where they sit down and iron out their conflicts in a sensible fashion.

That is really where we have to go as a nation, because the reductions in productivity that are caused by work stoppages affect all of us, not just the workers and the employers but everybody in the country. They reduce our wealth and our access to consumer goods, et cetera. We have to find better ways and tools and I think what is here is a compromise between two absolutes: an employer having the right to replace all the workers and the strikers having the ability to totally close the plant down and make it not operate. We have to get beyond this.

I think the whole debate that the Bloc is bringing here today is really quite moot. It is that quite old labour negotiation talk. We have to move beyond that and get into something more modernistic and more effective for the people of Canada.

• (1345)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear the hon. member's comments with regard to Ontario. As an example, since the removal of anti-strike and scab legislation we have seen an increase in terms of conflict between employers and unions. It is up by 2%. As well, we have had increased days of lost production time.

Also, I know he represents the Oshawa-Durham area, with General Motors there, and I would like to get his personal reflections on whether or not he is comfortable with the fact that he could potentially see a General Motors strike at some point in time and have scabs shipped in from Toronto. Is he okay with that in his community?

Mr. Alex Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, once again, the member uses the concept of scab labour. I have never seen that happen. It does not make for good industrial relations. That is the pure reality of it. We want to talk about the disasters that can happen within labour negotiations, but the fact of the matter is that we have had fairly peaceful labour negotiations in Oshawa and we are all happy for it.

Getting back to the Canada Labour Code, the concept is that there is a balance there. When the member talked about scab labour he was talking about replacement workers who do the jobs of on line workers. That is not what is being addressed here. We are talking about the ability to hire some replacement workers to keep some modicum of operations in the plant but clearly not to undermine the union's bargaining position. It seems pretty clear to me that we are not going to replace the workers for the prime purpose of taking away their advantage of a strike.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand how the member over there can make such outrageous remarks, claiming that the anti-scab bill hurts production, creates anarchy, and gives extraordinary powers to union workers, and that the latter run the show.

Since 1977, Quebec has had anti-scab legislation. Between 1992 and 2002, there have been labour disputes in Quebec. The average length of disputes governed by the Quebec Labour Code, which includes anti-scab provisions, was 15.9 days, compared to 31.1 days for companies governed by the Canada Labour Code.

In 1993, British Columbia passed a labour code with anti-scab provisions. In 1993, the year the code came into effect, the number of days of work lost because of labour disputes was reduced by 50%. So where is the loss of productivity?

• (1350)

[English]

Mr. Alex Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I think it goes back to my old days. We can do a lot of things with figures. I would have to examine the figures that the member has given me, but what he did not talk about is the total number of days per capita lost through work stoppages in his province compared to any other province in Canada.

Supply

The last time I looked it was one of the highest in Canada. He can look at individual wage stoppages and say the stoppages relative to each individual stoppage were for so many days, but what he does not tell us are the total stoppages in the whole of the provinces all of the time. In other words, there are more stoppages as a general feature. I believe that is true. The last time I looked, it was one of the highest in Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with a deep feeling of justice that I rise today to speak to the Bloc Québécois motion that asks very clearly:

That this House recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strikebreakers.

Everybody recognizes that in Quebec during the last 50 years of the twentieth century, 1976 was a turning point. That was the year René Lévesque came to power. The following year, the National Assembly passed an anti-scab law. I would like to talk about Quebec before and after 1977.

What happened in Quebec before 1977? Even though I was very young, I still remember very clearly the strike in Asbestos. I clearly remember the strike in Murdochville. I clearly remember the strike at Radio-Canada. Those strikes were long, tough and marred by violence, by a blatant lack of respect for workers and their families. Wildcat strikes such as those that occurred in Quebec before 1977 resulted in extremely violent clashes between workers and employers.

In life, when disputes occur, they have come to an end eventually and then we must move on together. After each violent strike, huge walls separated employers and workers. I do not know if there are many members in this chamber who have been on picket lines. For my part I was on a picket line three times. The first time was in 1963. It was the first time nurses were on strike, and it was an illegal strike on top of that. It lasted one month. There were no scabs because the workers to be replaced were nurses and naturally in those days nurses were just as scarce as today.

In 1973, I was still at the hospital, and the hospitals were again on strike. Therefore, there were no scabs that time either. I firmly believe that if there had been scabs, the hospital work environment after the strike would have been terrible. Patients would have paid the price of that terrible environment and that would have been unacceptable.

Quebec has had anti-scab legislation since 1977 and British Columbia since 1993. My colleague for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles has mentioned some figures that were not to the liking of our friend on the other side.

Maybe I should mention some figures on recent disputes in Quebec businesses governed by the Canada Labour Code.

An 18-month-plus strike with scabs forced Vidéotron to sell off a large number of shares. Mr. Péladeau was a little put out and not very happy. At Sécur, the strike lasted three months. At Cargill, the strike is entering into its fourth year.

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I am so worked up that I have forgotten to say that I must share my time with my colleague for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, since I will have to leave after oral questions.

The strike at Cargill is in its fourth year. At Radio Nord Communications, it has gone on for six months and we are wondering when it will be over.

One thing is quite clear. When a strike lasts, as it did at Vidéotron, more than 340, 350 person days, how do you think families can survive? How do you think social networks can hold up? These disputes create unacceptable social tensions. I believe that the present Canada Labour Code promotes these social tensions.

I will read you a quote from a worker at Cargill. This quote comes from an article that appeared in *La Tribune* in late January 2003. Here is what this man said:

I found work eight times.

When you are out of your company for many years, you try to find work to survive:

And in all eight of them, Cargill managed to have me fired. In the meantime, we are still tied to Cargill. We cannot get employment insurance or social assistance. If the lock-out lasts 10 years, I will not be eligible for employment insurance.

We know where the employment insurance surplus comes from.

Even if I worked elsewhere for six years, the day I am fired, I will still be considered to be in lock-out status.

This is a striker who is speaking. This is someone who must wonder every day if he will be able to put enough food on the table for his family, to pay his mortgage.

I will quote a professor of industrial relations at Laval University.

• (1355)

He is very clear. He states:

In the absence of federal legislation, a dispute turns into a war of attrition where the most powerful wins. This encourages traditional strategies that are disruptive and damaging for economic and social performance.

Furthermore, these traditional strategies are confrontational.

I would also like to address another issue. Canada takes great pride, and rightly so, in its Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Indeed, the charter is a wonderful piece of legislation and serves as a model to the whole world. I wonder if the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not give a worker, who is first and foremost a citizen, the right to respect and justice. I wonder if the Charter does not give a citizen, who is also a worker, the right to bargain in good faith.

In your opinion, Mr. Speaker, will the Charter of Rights and Freedoms create or recognize the need for arrogance or scorn, which are seen in disputes that last for months on end and during which employers do not hesitate to hire replacement workers to do the job? Will the Charter of Rights foster social and economic tension? I have great respect for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and I am certain that it does not condone unfair social tension.

I encourage all members to support the motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois and I ask all parliamentarians to strongly support Bill C-328 when it comes back to the House. Thus, Canada will follow Quebec's lead and I will be absolutely delighted.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today representatives of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, the Chicken Farmers of Canada, the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency and the Canadian Broiler Hatching Egg Marketing Agency are in town. These groups represent agricultural producers engaged in supply managed sectors of our domestic farm industry. Essentially, they are here to remind all Canadians of the benefits of supply management.

Supply management has a long history of ensuring a safe, adequate and affordably priced food supply.

As a member representing a predominantly rural riding, the chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and a Canadian farmer myself, I would ask all members in this place to join with me in making a commitment today. As we continue to embrace processes, such as the WTO, let us work to ensure that supply management remains functional in the years ahead.

* * *

• (1400)

TAXATION

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the deadline for filing taxes has come and gone. The Liberal government's tax grab will rake in over \$90 billion, almost \$40 billion more than 1994, a 44% increase and results in a \$20,000 tax bill for the average family.

Canadians carry the heaviest tax burden among the G-8 and must wait until June for tax freedom day.

Every Canadian feels the burden. Families have less money to spend, businesses struggle to survive and high taxes stifle economic productivity, but the Liberal motto is: Canadians were born to be taxed.

The tax and spend Liberal government blows our money on a billion dollar gun registry, advertising fiascos, GST fraud, corporate welfare and patronage. The Prime Minister just shrugs his shoulders when millions of dollars are stolen. That brings cold comfort to the taxpayer.

Here is a novel idea. Let Canadians keep more of their hard earned money. Let us raise the basic personal exemption, lower the overall tax burden and fire up the economy.

Why should Canadians pay for the government's incompetence, mismanagement, waste and fraud?

[Translation]

RIDING OF SAINT-LÉONARD—SAINT-MICHEL

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, April 5, I had the honour of attending a reception held in my riding of Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel to celebrate the national day of Senegal.

There were many cultural presentations, such as dances, poetry, a display of traditional fashions, and a multimedia presentation promoting African and Senegalese culture.

In attendance that evening were their Excellencies, Amadou Diallo, Ambassador of Senegal, Francis Loko, Ambassador of the Republic of Benin, and Amara Joubar Soumah, Ambassador of the Republic of Guinea, as well as members of the Italian and Haitian communities.

Once again, Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel has demonstrated that the traditions and beliefs of its residents from different cultural backgrounds are not only respected but also celebrated, and can serve as a model for everyone in our beautiful country.

It is a place where young people from various continents live together in harmony, forming a cultural mosaic that has become the pride of those who live there—a picture of Canada at its best.

* * *

RADIO NORD COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the strikers from Radio Nord, members of the Syndicat des employés en communications de l'Abitibi—Témiscamingue, have filed a complaint with the Canada Industrial Relations Board concerning unfair policies.

Despite the strike which began on October 25, 2002, Radio Nord Communications continues to operate its radio and television stations by using strikebreakers.

Radio Nord Communications is using more than 25 individuals or companies on contract to perform part or all of the work of the striking employees. Today, the union's president, André Anglehart, and many of the striking men and women, are here in the House of Commons to demonstrate against Radio Nord Communications, which is thwarting their bargaining power with the presence of strikebreakers.

* * *

[English]

ROSEMARY BROWN

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mourn the death and pay tribute to the life of Rosemary Brown.

Rosemary Brown was the first black woman to be elected to a legislature in Canada. Yet that was not the sum total of her legacy. She was an ardent feminist and fighter for gender and racial equality.

Fiercely partisan in her politics as a New Democrat, she was a trailblazer, forcing Canadians to examine their traditional beliefs and

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prejudices, constantly advocating for justice and human rights locally and internationally.

She was a role model for all of us immigrant women, forcing us to be the best that we could be, challenging us to participate in the social and political life of our new country to change it for the better.

Then there was the warm, funny friend, Rosemary, the mentor.

To look back on a life lived is to examine the mark made by its brief passing flame. Rosemary Brown left a long and impressive mark. She changed Canadian society and, to quote the *Vancouver Province's* recent editorial, "She helped build a better world".

* * *

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest continuous battle in World War II. It was Winston Churchill who emphasized the tremendous contribution of Canada through the merchant marines by saying, "Give us the tools and we will finish the job".

Canada went from 13 naval vessels in 1939 with a personnel of 3,500 but when the war ended in 1945, we had 375 fighting ships and over 110,000 members, all of whom were volunteers, and more than 25,000 single merchant marine trips were made.

I am pleased these heroic veterans will be marching to the National War Memorial this Sunday to honour those who lost their lives and to all who served in this great battle, all the navy, air force and merchant marines who gave their lives and suffer today yet to give us the peace that we enjoy.

Lest we forget.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

EVELYN SUTHERLAND

Mr. Serge Marcell (Beauharnois—Salaberry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to Evelyn Sutherland, a woman in her eighties from Huntingdon, in my riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry.

On April 28, Mrs. Sutherland was presented with the Caring Canadian award by the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson.

Mrs. Sutherland has been a tireless and devoted volunteer for many years, and many groups, including Communic-Action, Meals on Wheels, the women's auxiliary of the Centre hospitalier d'Huntingdon, the Petite Bibliothèque verte and the parish, depend on her unwavering support. As active as ever, she continues to put in four days a week at her church and municipal library, in addition to accompanying patients to doctor's or hospital appointments.

Her smile and her kindness work wonders on all those who eagerly await her visits.

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I want to pay her tribute today and send her my hearty congratulations for an award truly well-deserved.

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INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, International Workers Day is a time to salute those men and women who have made a special contribution to the Quebec society we hold so dear.

Our thoughts are also with the unemployed, who have been deprived, as a result, of such a fundamental right as the right to work.

Men and women from Radio Nord Communications in Abitibi and from Cargill in Baie-Comeau have come to the Hill today to tell us that they have been deprived of this right to work due to a lax Canada Labour Code.

The federal government must stop encouraging the use of scabs and right this wrong oppressing tens of thousands of honest workers.

The best way for the government to pay tribute to these men and women will be to vote in favour of the anti-scab bill.

* * *

[English]

JOURNEY OF HOPE AND HEALING

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk—Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 4, 2003, Mr. Rick Casey, a resident of Paris, Ontario, will begin an 8,000 kilometre bicycle trip across Canada to increase awareness of the need for community support for people with mental illnesses. Rick will travel across Canada without a support vehicle or companion riders. His amazing journey will last have lasted approximately 120 days when he reaches Cape Spear, Newfoundland.

Mr. Casey's goal is intensely personal. In September of 2001, Mr. Casey's 19 year old daughter, Kyla, died of a pulmonary embolism while a patient in a mental health unit. Mr. Casey's self-described "journey of hope and healing" represents his determination to find meaning in his family's tragic loss.

I ask all hon. members to join me in wishing support and encouragement to Mr. Casey as he completes his journey of hope and healing.

* * *

2010 WINTER OLYMPICS

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow morning the International Olympic Committee will release its evaluation report on the finalists for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

This will be an exciting day for Canada. I have no doubt that the IOC will note what British Columbians have known for years: Vancouver is one of the most beautiful cities in the world; Whistler is a world class facility for winter sport; and Canadians are ready to host the world.

All of us look forward to welcoming the IOC report, it is another step on our journey to Prague. We are confident that on July 2 the IOC will announce that Canada will host the Olympics in 2010.

The people of Vancouver, British Columbia and the rest of Canada are fully committed to putting on the best games ever and cheering the athletes from every corner of the globe.

July 2 in Prague will mark the beginning of a very exciting seven years as we prepare to host the world in 2010. Way to go Canada.

* * *

JACK DONOHUE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise in the House to recognize the passing of legendary basketball coach Jack Donohue, who died April 16 in Ottawa.

Jack Donohue came to Canada over 30 years ago from New York City, where he had been a successful high school coach. Unlike many foreign coaches, he chose to remain in Canada to bring up his family, while taking the Canadian men's national team program to heights never before experienced.

Along the way, Jack had a profound influence on the players and support personnel who worked with the team. This was appropriately and widely acknowledged in the press and at the funeral which was held April 22 in Kanata.

Through his countless speaking engagements, Jack's wit and wisdom entertained and taught his audience the value and meaning of sport in the context of our lives. His messages will forever live in the minds and the hearts of those who had the pleasure of knowing him.

* * *

● (1410)

WINDSOR-DETROIT BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 25, 2002 the Ontario and federal governments launched a 60 day process to find short-term and medium term solutions to the Windsor-Detroit border problems.

Today marks day 219 of that process and not only do we not have solutions, the government will not tell us how or when decisions will be made. Last week yet another trial balloon was floated in the media creating more concern.

The government has taken so much time that the long term binational study is due to be released this coming month. This time the government has to show commitment to our community in Windsor and show some respect.

First, it must stop using the media to float trial balloons. Second it must move immediately to implement measures that have broad community support, such as increasing the truck ferry service and establish a truck staging area outside the city. Lastly, it must commit to establishing a truck bypass, like Ottawa and Orangeville, outside established neighbourhoods.

[Translation]

IRAQ

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently the world witnessed the throes of war in Iraq. In all our communities, no one remained unmoved in the face of such a tragedy.

Marc-André Turcot, the president of the student council at Paul-Arsenault high school, together with Gaëtanne Garneau and Cathy Thibeault, initiated a petition which was signed by more than 500 students and staff, opposing the action in Iraq and calling on the Prime Minister of Canada not to take part in this conflict.

I want to acknowledge this show of solidarity which reflects our students' concern for and commitment to peace. With young people like them, the future will hopefully be more peaceful.

Also, I wish to thank the teachers for their cooperation and I commend their initiative.

* * *

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Ms. Yolande Thibeault (Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week across the country we are celebrating National Volunteer Week.

On this day, I wish to express my appreciation and respect for these men and women who are only happy when others are.

Volunteers have had a major impact on almost all aspects of Canadian society. Quietly, they have helped shape our country and they will continue playing a major role in providing direction for the future. Their dedication and commitment are a real testimony to Canadian values and identity.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the volunteers in my riding of Saint-Lambert, who give their time and talents in the service of others. These individuals make an invaluable contribution to strengthening the communities in my riding.

* * *

[English]

DISABILITY TAX CREDIT

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, over one year ago I contacted the minister responsible for the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and expressed my serious concern about the application form used for Canadians applying for the disability tax credit.

One year later I am standing here holding in my hands the denied application of Michelle MacDonald. Michelle suffers from multiple sclerosis that is both debilitating and constantly deteriorating. Her doctor from the Dalhousie Research Centre noted on her application that her condition was recurrent and "totally incapacitating".

Despite the doctor saying she is totally incapacitated, due to the score card system she has been denied the disability tax credit.

I am again today providing the minister with more information. I am publicly asking that Michelle MacDonald's denial be reviewed and reversed.

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NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is National Volunteer Week, an occasion to thank the people who donate their time and talents in service of their fellow citizens. All across Canada much of our quality of life depends upon the commitment, compassion and generosity of volunteers. Now more than ever Canadians need to strengthen their sense of community.

The theme for National Volunteer Week 2003, "The Power of One, the Value of Many", highlights the uniqueness of each volunteer and acknowledges the importance of their collective contribution.

I call on my colleagues to join me in celebrating the spirit of caring as we thank Canada's 6.5 million volunteers for the support they bring to countless causes every day, all year round.

* * *

SPRUCE BUDWORM

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Parks Canada has finally made a positive decision to combat the spruce budworm problem at Prince Albert National Park. Thankfully, common sense and an effective official opposition can declare victory.

The use of the organic agent BTK is both a safe and an effective means of control. It is in wide use across Canada. Yet this government almost gave in to the pressure of a vocal small minority for whom any form of environmental stewardship is unacceptable.

The Canadian Alliance has worked hard on this issue. However the real winners are the thousands of park users who have fought to save their forests. This decision shows that the average citizen can be heard in cabinet. This is truly a victory for grassroots democracy.

* * *

●(1415)

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, May is Asian Heritage Month, the month when we acknowledge the long and rich history of Asian Canadians and their contributions to Canada.

In Canada our cultural diversity enriches us socially, politically, economically and culturally in many ways. Asian Heritage Month is an ideal occasion to celebrate the beauty and wisdom of various Asian cultures.

Since the inaugural Asian Heritage celebration began in Toronto in 1993, cities across Canada, including Halifax, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, have been holding annual festivities. In December 2001 the Senate of Canada passed a motion designating May as Asian Heritage Month.

I invite every Canadian to take part in the festivities that commemorate the legacy of Asian Canadians and their many contributions which have helped Canada become the multicultural and diverse nation it is today.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***HEALTH**

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, one month ago the World Health Organization recommended that the government institute interviews with outbound passengers at Canadian airports. The Minister of Health consistently refused to commit to these recommendations up to and including yesterday here in the House of Commons. Yet now she has apparently issued a letter to airlines recommending that these and other procedures be instituted.

If the minister will not simply admit that she made a mistake, can she explain to the House why it is so important to implement these recommendations now that the SARS crisis is abating, as opposed to before when it was at its height?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the World Health Organization has clearly on a number of occasions indicated its support for what Canada is doing. For example, today, May 1, Dr. Guenaël Rodier, the WHO's director of communicable disease surveillance and response said about Canada:

Canada has been a model of transparency in its reporting and public information, of determination in its contact tracing, and of heroic dedication on the part of its medical, health and scientific staff.

That is the World Health Organization's assessment of Canada today.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I can only observe that this crisis has really aged the Minister of Health.

On another issue, just this spring the federal government signed a new health accord with the provinces, with the support of all the provinces and I should add, the Canadian Alliance. However, now the former minister of finance is suggesting that the accord should be ripped up, that it is inadequate, that it does not deal with fundamental issues.

Does the health minister still endorse the accord and does she agree that it is a basis for further health care reform?

[Translation]

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly an interesting question. Yes, we still endorse the accord, and I will explain why. It was very clear that what we wanted to do with this accord was to make changes to our health care system.

That is why \$16 billion has been earmarked for the next five years to deal with the issue of exorbitant drug costs and also the issue of access to care outside of hospitals.

This is how we are bringing about reforms. We on this side of the House are still very proud to endorse the accord.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, when the health minister starts answering questions again, we will see whether she agrees with the new boss or the old boss.

[Translation]

Apparently, the former Minister of Finance wants to rip up the new health accord. This accord enjoys the unanimous support of all levels of government, provincial, federal and territorial, and of the Canadian Alliance.

Does the federal government still support this accord, and has the Prime Minister spoken with Jean Charest, the new Premier of Quebec, to determine whether the Government of Quebec still supports the accord?

● (1420)

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously since agreement was reached earlier this year on this famous accord, the provinces will still ask for more. This is no surprise to us; the moment they say it is enough is the moment when they will start having problems.

Of course, with Quebec having a new government, I am sure that the Minister of Health and the other ministers involved will meet with this new government and discuss their concerns and their interests. I am sure that we will be able to cooperate and work together to take note of their interests.

[English]

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, a dozen patients in Hong Kong who had recovered from SARS have now shown a relapse of the illness. A relapse may mean the patients can still transmit SARS after recovery, again suggesting the need for greater caution in surveillance.

Are Canadian officials involved in investigating the situation there in order to prepare for the same here?

[Translation]

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly this is a serious disease. We need to acknowledge that we must continue to monitor the situation.

[English]

Dr. David Heymann, executive director, communicable diseases at the World Health Organization had this to say today:

SARS is the global emergency. We need to get this disease under control and contain it. We made our recommendation based on three criteria. The criteria no longer apply to Canada and they have been taken off the list. We did not make our decision based on something that Canada was doing wrong. Canada was doing everything right, including screening passengers as they left.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, back on March 27 the WHO recommended surveillance and it was not taking place here. The government at that time had two options: passive voluntary half-measures; or erring on the side of caution with action. If we have learned anything over the past month, it is the terrible cost of a passive, weak approach.

Oral Questions

What specific measures is Health Canada taking should a SARS relapse occur in Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this disappoints me. With this type of attitude, it is difficult to be very positive. We on this side of the House are very positive.

Canada is one of the first countries in the world to follow the WHO recommendations regarding passenger screening. We are doing more and more every day. We are making the necessary adjustments based on new information we receive. That is how we will solve the problem, not by criticizing. We must learn from what has happened. That is how we will move forward.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the anti-scab legislation in place in Quebec since 1977 has made it possible to greatly reduce the duration of labour disputes and thus limit the impact on workers' families. Unfortunately, Quebec and Canadian workers under federal jurisdiction do not have the same protection.

Since the Liberals were in favour of anti-scab legislation when in opposition, will the minister admit that after 10 years it is high time her government legislated and solved this problem?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said this morning, and say again now, the Canada Labour Code is in place because we negotiated with employees and employers.

It has only been in effect since 1999. In the discussions, we were forced to reach a compromise on replacement workers, and that is what we did.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what the minister is telling us is a total aberration.

A labour code is not a collective agreement. It is legislation. It is something decided on here. Workers and all unions are against this part of the Canada Labour Code. They have made this clear, but she does not get it.

That said, with his preoccupation with leaving a legacy, the Prime Minister took inspiration from Quebec to make political party funding more democratic. Could he not emulate Quebec one more time as far as anti-scab legislation is concerned, which would leave a legacy of benefit to workers, rather than the nonsense we are getting from the minister?

• (1425)

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clearly understood that the Canada Labour Code is a tool for both employees and employers.

It took six years to get it in place. I agree that there was no agreement in the discussions on replacement workers, but we did reach a compromise.

The Canada Labour Code is, however, a tool for them and one that belongs to them.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when they were in opposition, the Liberals voted for an anti-scab bill, a bill introduced and defended by the Bloc Québécois.

Now that they have the opportunity to do something because they are the governing party, why do they refuse to adopt anti-strikebreaking legislation that would make labour relations more civilized, as they have been in Quebec since similar legislation was passed in 1977?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is often said that decisions cannot be made alone. Decisions must be made in cooperation with people all over our country.

It took six years to implement the Canada Labour Code. Why? Because the minister and the department listened to employees and employers.

Because we did it that way, the code belongs to them.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a number of labour disputes under the Canada Labour Code are dragging on and poisoning the atmosphere for employers and employees, because there are no anti-strikebreaking provisions in Canada.

Are disputes such as the one at Cargill, which lasted three years, Vidéotron, which lasted a year and Radio Nord, going on for six months now, not enough for the Liberal government to act on what it supported when in opposition—an anti-scab law—without delay?

That is what the workers are asking for.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Bloc is not saying is that the Canada Labour Code is such a significant instrument that last year 90% of labour disputes were settled without a strike or lockout. That was because the code belongs to them.

I would also like to tell the Bloc that, as Minister of Labour, I listen to employees and employers. If they come to see me with a better solution than what we have now, I will certainly listen to them, because we, on this side of the House, work in partnership.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that the law did not allow him to provide assistance to Toronto. Well, he was dead wrong on that one. Then he found another excuse. He said there is no dedicated tax. Well, nobody asked for a dedicated tax. They are asking for help. The only thing preventing small businesses in Toronto from getting the federal help they need is the Liberals themselves.

Will the Prime Minister give a straightforward answer and will he provide the assistance to Toronto's small businesses that they so desperately need?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should pay close attention. We committed a large amount of money toward marketing Toronto as a safe place to visit. Canadian consulates and embassies worldwide are getting the word out that Toronto is a great place to visit.

Oral Questions

We are helping people who are ill or quarantined by waiving the waiting period for EI. We are introducing special coverage for part time, self-employed health workers unable to work because of SARS. Canada Mortgage and Housing will help people who face difficulties in meeting mortgage payments because of SARS related work absences. The Canada Customs and Revenue Agency will help individuals and businesses that experience difficulties because of SARS.

Much is being done. The hon. member should pay attention.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to say it is the federal government, the federal Liberals, who need to pay close attention. It is not only small businesses that need help, it is workers too. Hotel workers in Toronto are being laid off by the thousands. They often have low wages. They cannot pay their rent. Thanks to Liberal EI cuts, now they do not even qualify anymore.

So again I ask the Prime Minister, will the government make it clear today that his government will help these hotel workers and make the changes to EI that are necessary to help them to qualify so they do not go under?

• (1430)

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I mentioned just a moment ago that we are making changes to the waiting period for EI to help exactly the group of people that the hon. member is talking about.

The difference between people on this side of the House and those in the NDP is that we are trying to get Toronto back to being a centre for tourism, a centre for people to visit, so that these people can continue to work. The NDP simply wants to continue the problem, bad mouth the area and do nothing to deal with the fundamental problem, which is the perception overseas.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, after the 1998 ice storm the Prime Minister authorized \$717 million in relief. In the SARS outbreak he has authorized only \$10 million for Toronto. He has the same legal authority now that he had in the ice storm. The difference is that he wanted to help in the ice storm. He could end this double standard very quickly.

When the government spent \$100 million on two executive Challenger jets, it took only one day to submit the requisition, sign it and sign the contract. Why does the Prime Minister act more swiftly on his personal comfort than he does to help a city devastated by the SARS outbreak?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the expert in the House on double standards has just spoken.

He talked about what we are doing with respect to the SARS outbreak in Toronto. Yes, there are difficulties and yes, we are certainly trying to help. We are working to help to make sure that people get back to work, that Toronto gets back to being a centre for tourism and the major contributor that it is to the Canadian economy.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the heritage minister broke clear cabinet guidelines this week when she criticized the inept and beleaguered health minister on the SARS outbreak, but the Prime Minister did not enforce his own guidelines.

He said the rules of resignation do not apply to his friend the heritage minister.

Government policy now is to refuse federal help to Toronto dealing with the economic impact of SARS. Do the guidelines of cabinet solidarity apply to ministers who disagree with that cold shoulder to Toronto? Are they also free to disagree with the government and keep their seats in cabinet?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it ill behooves a gentleman who is stepping down as leader of the fifth party because of his failure to do very much in his time in leadership to criticize the Minister of Health who has been working consistently to make sure this problem is dealt with and dealt with effectively to the benefit of Toronto and others in Canada.

The Minister of Health has perhaps only one failing, which is that she has not elbowed her way forward in the press, in the media, to take credit for the good work she has done.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the health minister was profoundly slow in implementing the screening provisions, which the World Health Organization asked her to do over a month ago. We have another new infectious disease and my question to the government is, has it learned anything from the SARS epidemic? Has it learned anything so that we can avert another SARS blunder with the West Nile virus?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to correct the hon. member. He says on the World Health Organization that the approach taken a month ago was inadequate. A month ago the World Health Organization said:

...what has been going on in Canada, including the system of notifying airline passengers and of screening airline passengers, has been shared with other countries as an example of best practices.

That is what we did.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I guess the travel advisory would be a good indication of whether those measures were adequate or not.

SARS had a devastating effect on the tourist industry in Toronto. Now we have summer camps and wilderness resorts having exactly the same issue in relation to the West Nile virus: cancellations.

My question is, this time will the government follow every single directive from health experts rather than carrying on with its own mindless play?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is a gentleman who has had an education in science. He is a medical doctor. He should know of the difficulties—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, when any member of the Alliance is mentioned as having an education, no wonder Alliance members stand up.

The fact is, we are following every possible approach we can to minimize the West Nile problem for summer camps and for others in Canada.

It is a serious problem—

•(1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Québec.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Minister of Finance categorically told us no additional moneys would be added to the Canadian Television Fund, thereby contradicting the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The Minister of Finance told the Minister of Canadian Heritage to stretch her own budget. Does the minister intend to follow his advice and stretch to find the missing \$25 million?

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Television Fund is a success story. I am very proud today of how much the fund has done for television production in Quebec by investing more than \$467 million in Quebec productions since 1996.

The resulting creativity does honour to all Quebecers and Canadians. This government is listening to artists, and a solution will doubtless be found.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what planet the parliamentary secretary is from, but that is not what her minister is saying outside the House.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary, what guarantee can the Minister of Canadian Heritage give people in television production that they are not about to become casualties in a leadership squabble?

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the Bloc Québécois again be so negative. The Canadian Television Fund has guaranteed Canada 1,372 hours of television production since its creation in 1996. Nothing indicates that this will stop.

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[English]

POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are back to their old bag of tricks, gouging taxpayers. Bill C-24 will limit corporate donations to political parties and force taxpayers to make up the deficit in the Liberal coffers.

Taxpayers reject outright the suggestion that they should be forced to support financially parties they would not support politically. Even the Liberal Party president, Stephen LeDrew, calls the idea “dumber than a bag of hammers”, so why is the Prime Minister forcing taxpayers to pay the expenses of political parties they do not even support?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is

factually incorrect. In fact, the amount that will be given to political parties will be exactly proportional to the amount of votes that they receive in the previous election.

So if the hon. member is afraid that people might want to vote for Reform or Alliance and then give them money, I can assure him that they probably have very little intention of doing either.

•(1440)

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader should get an acting school diploma for that performance.

The Prime Minister must know that overburdened taxpayers hate this legislation just as much as most of the Liberal elected members do. That is probably why he is offering a gift of an early summer recess if they will just get it passed before June 12. Is the Prime Minister's goal to be remembered for insisting that overburdened taxpayers be gouged even deeper by forcing them to pay the cost of the Liberal Party's expenses regardless of which party they support?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member is raising the issue as to whether or not the Liberal Party itself supports this bill. He quoted our party. Let me do it in return. I will read the motion: “The National Executive of the Liberal Party...affirms its support for...Bill C-24”.

So if that is what he is buttressing his argument on, I say to him that four of the five parties, including the Liberal Party, fully support this. Why does the hon. member not get outside?

The Speaker: A little order, please, and hon. members know that cellular telephones are not permitted in the chamber.

An hon. member: How about BlackBerries?

The Speaker: Somebody is going to get a raspberry from the Speaker if they do not watch out.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier.

* * *

[Translation]

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the deadline for the federal government to file an appeal with the Supreme Court against the Quebec Appeal Court opinion on the Young Offenders Act.

Rather than using the appeal process, does the Minister of Justice plan to amend the act to bring it into compliance with the charter, as the Bloc Québécois has been demanding from the start?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are particularly pleased with the Appeal Court opinion as far as jurisdiction is concerned, as the court has confirmed that the Canadian government did have jurisdiction over this.

It did indeed declare two sections of the act invalid under the charter, namely the two concerning presumptions on sentencing and publication.

Oral Questions

I would just like to say that we decided not to appeal today because there are other ways of satisfying the legislator's intent.

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the minister seems to be at last seeing sense, ought he not to do the only proper thing and consult Quebec's new minister of justice, who shares the opinion of the previous government, namely that Quebec must be exempted from this legislation?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have just explained that it is possible to satisfy the legislator's intent without an appeal, and I have also explained that we would not be appealing.

That said, we will see that all provinces are consulted in order to ensure that we can move on certain amendments to clarify the legal situation.

That said also, I am a bit surprised at my colleague's comment that I finally get it, when an examination of the existing philosophy in connection with this law is essentially based on current Quebec practice, namely ensuring that social objectives are met while also making it possible for young offenders to be reintegrated into society while maintaining appropriate sanctions. It is a matter of giving young people a chance.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, these Liberals ran in 1993 with a promise to have an independent ethics commissioner. Now, 10 years and a multitude of scandals later, we have legislation in this House that has an ethics commissioner who is appointed by the Prime Minister, who answers to the Prime Minister and who advises the Prime Minister in regard to ethical breaches by ministers. To add to the insult, this Prime Minister-appointed commissioner will have jurisdiction over back-bench MPs and opposition MPs.

Why can these Liberals not keep their straightforward promise and legislate a truly independent ethics commissioner?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased and quite honoured to have had the opportunity of introducing Bill C-34 in the House yesterday, which appoints the independent ethics commissioner.

I want to remind the hon. member that the system for appointing the ethics commissioner is identical to the one utilized in the first modernization committee report about all officers of the House. Here is what the then House leader for the Alliance said on October 24, 2001, "The appointment of important positions like the clerk of the House and officers of parliament should be approved by parliament". That is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Elk Island.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, what does he do after he is appointed? He is still appointed by the Prime Minister.

Under this bill tabled by the minister, the ethics commissioner will be appointed by the governor in council after consultation with the leaders of the parties. The majority government will have its members voting on command, as usual, to endorse the Prime Minister's choice. Consultation has no power to change anything. We have suggested a meaningful, all party input prior to selection and the House ratification by free vote, secret ballot, and a higher than 50% standard.

Why this fixation on prime ministerial control?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again we are hearing some things which are a little different than what would be accurate, to put it mildly. The hon. member says he made such recommendations. There were all party recommendations regarding the draft bill. No such recommendation appeared there.

Second, in terms of what the former House leader of his party said about this method of appointment, I will read further. "That is...a step forward," he said. "I anticipate no problem with that. In fact, we have been blessed with good clerks and good officers of parliament".

That is referring to the system utilized in this bill. Maybe he should talk to his seatmate.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Lawrence O'Brien (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, four years ago the crab quota off Labrador was cut by 30%. This year it was slashed by a further 40%. The cod quota has been cut by 100%. Yet while 60% of Canada's northern shrimp is caught off Labrador, only 5% of it is harvested and processed in Labrador by Labradorians who live in rural and aboriginal communities adjacent to the resource.

My constituents want to know: How does the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans plan to correct this gross injustice, and when?

● (1445)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I am currently preparing the northern shrimp plan. We will have some new opportunities that greatly increase quota. Access will be guided by the recommendations of the independent panel on access criteria. We will make sure to maximize the opportunities to local communities and their people without risking the viability of the established industry, and we will be doing that very, very soon.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians decry the return of star wars, and I do not mean the movie. The signs are unmistakable that the government is getting ready to buy into the U.S. ballistic missile defence system as a kiss-up to Bush for Canada's non-participation in his Iraqi war. Why does the Prime Minister not show some backbone and say no to Bush's ballistic missile defence madness?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing the Prime Minister will not say no to, what this party will not say no to, and which I hope parliamentarians will not say no to, is the investigation and understanding and reaching a conclusion as to what is the best for the security of Canada and Canadians, and working with our American partners in North America, as we have traditionally done, to achieve that result. We will look at all proposals for the interests of security of Canadians. Surely the hon. member opposite cannot object to any such investigation.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Labour Code does not protect workers enough from the use of replacement workers during strikes and lockouts. The use of strikebreakers causes bitter disputes that persist. Anti-strikebreaking legislation produced excellent results in Quebec and also in Ontario, until Mike Harris scrapped it.

When will the Minister of Labour set up a working group that includes employers and unions to change the Canada Labour Code and prohibit strikebreakers?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I already mentioned, amendments to the Canada Labour Code were made in 1999. Employers and employees can see me at any time to review the situation. I am prepared to meet with both groups.

It is important to remember that the Canada Labour Code belongs to both employees and employers.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have in my hands a job listing for at least 10 administrative support jobs for the Government of Canada. Anyone in Toronto is eligible to apply for these jobs, but not one person in Perth—Middlesex is even allowed to apply. Constituents in all the ridings in Toronto are automatically included in the job competition, but the residents of Perth—Middlesex are automatically excluded because of where they live.

Will the government change these offensive hiring practices and stop discrimination against the people of Perth—Middlesex?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole hiring system in the public service is the responsibility of the Public Service Commission. This is an agency that reports directly to Parliament.

Parliamentarians have asked the commission, and I think the opposition member is aware of this, to change its system. Right now, it is undertaking pilot projects and must report the results directly to Parliament to make all public service positions more accessible to all Canadians.

• (1450)

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday the member for LaSalle—Émard told journalists that both the defence minister and the minister of public works, and I quote, “don't think we can waste any more time” before replacing our Sea Kings. The member clearly implied that the delay in replacing the Sea Kings is not caused by these two ministers in charge of the file but rather some other person in the cabinet.

Seeing as how the Prime Minister is not here today, I will ask the Minister of National Defence to explain the frequent delays that have plagued the Sea King replacement process, and will he give us a firm date when our pilots—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is entirely correct that the two ministers she referred to and indeed the government as a whole are working as hard as we can to get that helicopter as fast as possible. The two of us arrived in our new jobs on the same day and have been working ceaselessly since that time, through a re-bundling of the contract and other measures, to get the right helicopter as fast as possible.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian military needs heavy transport planes to quickly and reliably move troops and their equipment to trouble spots, both in Canada and abroad. The Royal United Services Institute says our military's lack of strategic airlift undermines Canada's sovereignty and security. That is the view shared by almost every military organization in the country.

Why will the defence minister not just get our military the heavy transport planes it needs to protect and to deliver to the Canadian people when they need help?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have made it abundantly clear that one thing we are not about to do is make a unilateral purchase of large numbers of huge airplanes at a cost of \$3 billion to \$5 billion in strategic lift, because if we did that we would use up so much money for the lift that we would not have enough money left to put things into those big planes. On the other hand, we are still looking into cost effective alternatives to get the lift to which the hon. member refers.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): In fact, Mr. Speaker, this report says that the minister's plan to share planes with small European countries simply will not work because too often there will be too few planes to deliver our troops and equipment to where they have to go. Even within Canada our military has had to rely on the United States to deliver the troops and their equipment to such natural disasters as the ice storm and the floods in Manitoba, for example, but the United States will not always be there to help when Canada needs the help.

Will the minister commit to lease or purchase large strategic airlift or will he leave it to chance to get our troops to disasters when they happen?

Oral Questions

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have made it abundantly clear precisely what we are not going to do. When one is in the opposition one will not say no to any piece of equipment. One will urge the government to buy everything under the sun.

On the other hand, when one is a government, one has limited resources and one has to use them wisely and strategically. I have determined that of all the pressing demands upon us strategic lift unilaterally made to buy all these large aircraft, which only the two biggest NATO countries have, the United States and the United Kingdom, is not the right thing for Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the government claims to be 1000% behind supply management, yesterday, the Canadian agriculture negotiator at the WTO told farm producers difficult decisions may have to be made.

Could the Minister of Agriculture explain to producers what these difficult decisions will be?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in some of the recent decisions Canada made it very clear that we would not support the Harbinson's report on modalities. That emphasizes and stresses the support that the government has for supply management in this country. We recognize what it does for producers, for consumers and for the economy of our country. We will continue with that full and strong support for supply management.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's positions are increasingly vague. On the one hand, our ministers are telling us they will not touch supply management, but on the other hand, the chief negotiator told producers yesterday that defending administered prices was not part of her mandate.

Does the minister not think that the time has come to give his negotiator a clear mandate to protect all three pillars of supply management: first, planning; second, border control; and third, administered prices?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those three pillars are very clear. The industry was part of that. The government was part of that. Part of the mandate to the WTO of this government is that on supply management the decisions of domestic marketing and the protection of that system will be made here in Canada. That is the position of the government. Industry agrees with it and that is the position our negotiators are taking as well.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the dairy farmers of Canada have spent eight

years trying to get the government's attention on the butteroil/sugar blend issue and the government has been indifferent.

Now the working group that was established to study the issue has also pushed producers right out of the loop.

Why, as has happened in so many other agricultural areas, is the government ignoring dairy producers?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the working group of the four departments involved in this, revenue, finance, trade and agriculture, met with the industry group and took its recommendations.

Those recommendations are being considered at this time and we will be making a decision in order to see the direction that we can take. We recognize the erosion of some products in the dairy industry and we will do all we possibly can to stop it.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government has failed to protect Canada from imports of dairy substitutes. The importation of butteroil-sugar blends has reduced the market share for Canadian dairy farmers. It has cost them a pile of money.

Now the working group has said that its report will not be ready for another month.

Is the government waiting until after the Perth—Middlesex byelection to give its dairy producers the bad news?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): No, we are not, Mr. Speaker. We are working on that so we can, hopefully, come up with a solution in order to assist the dairy industry in this. However it is interesting to hear the comments about supply management coming from a party that does not even support supply management.

* * *

WESTERN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Vancouver agreement was developed two years ago by three levels of government, NGOs and local communities with seed money from the crime prevention program and two other federal departments.

In the early stages the plan was adequately funded by the pooling of resources from many departments of all three levels of government. As one of its originators, we knew this would not be enough in the long term.

On April 22 the Secretary of State for Western Economic Diversification announced additional funding for the Vancouver agreement. Could he inform the House of the details?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Secretary of State (Western Economic Diversification) (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vancouver Centre for her question but also for her dedicated and effective work in launching, as my predecessor and minister responsible for the federal government, the Vancouver agreement.

I am pleased to advise the House that the federal government has invested a further \$10 million in the Vancouver agreement to be matched by \$10 million from the province of British Columbia. This will go toward the revitalization of the downtown east side of Vancouver together with the partnership of the mayor of Vancouver, past and present, and will help to make that community safer, more secure and healthier, and it will create jobs and business opportunities, restore cultural places—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lanark—Carleton.

* * *

•(1455)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I realize that the concerns of Canadian farmers are rarely top of mind for the Liberals but given that there is a byelection underway in the largely agriculture riding of Perth—Middlesex perhaps they will take them seriously today.

The government and its Pest Management Regulatory Agency are making it harder for Canadian farmers to compete with their American counterparts by denying Canadian farmers the right to use cheaper and more environmentally friendly farm chemicals that have been approved for use in the United States.

Why does the Liberal government deny farmers the right to these safe, environmentally friendly farm chemicals?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the system of regulations and registration of agricultural chemicals, as with all chemicals in Canada, is reviewed by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency in Health Canada.

First, there has to be an application for them by the company that wishes to use them. As well, the government put over \$60 million in place to help the industry in minor use registration. We will now be able to move to a program similar to that in the United States IR-4, but the application for those products first has to be applied for. We will then make sure that the application for those in use in Canada is safe.

•(1500)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the heroic efforts of the government, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency is approving minor use regulations at 150th the rate in the United States. In 2000-01, a total of 1,200 minor use registrations were approved in the U.S.A. compared to 22 in Canada.

This forces Canadian farmers to rely upon older, less environmentally friendly farm chemicals. Given that the allowable limit for de-listed farm chemicals in the United States is 0%, this means that failure to harmonize with the United States will result in de facto trade barriers against Canadian farm products.

What will the federal government do to end the regulatory mess that it has created?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I gave that answer to the hon. member. Last year we put forward \$54.5 million on top of \$7 million just prior to that in

Oral Questions

order to improve our system. However, I first have to stress that the applications have to be there.

* * *

[Translation]

FISHERIES

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced job creation measures to be implemented in fishing communities hard hit by the moratorium on fishing.

If the minister were prepared to guarantee a quota of 35,000 seals to a sealskin processing business, this business could begin operations right away.

Does the minister intend to give this exclusive quota to the fishers of the Lower North Shore, thereby creating immediate jobs in a community in need?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, this winter, I announced that seal quotas would increase significantly—by 975,000 over three years. These quotas are being apportioned within the various regions through regional discussions.

I am prepared to listen, however, if the hon. member has a proposal for me, and I will consider it fully.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, three years of drought in the Horn of Africa have left more than two million people in danger of starvation.

Could the Minister for International Cooperation inform the House how her department and the Government of Canada are responding to their urgent need for food and water?

Hon. Susan Whelan (Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada recognizes that famine has caused a critical situation for the people of Eritrea. As a result, Canada has committed an additional \$3 million to provide emergency assistance to help purchase and distribute food aid to drought and war affected Eritreans. As part of our contribution, \$1 million will be contributed to UNICEF to undertake an emergency water supply and sanitation program to provide clean water to those affected. This brings Canada's total contribution to \$4.2 million to assist those in Eritrea.

I thank the hon. member and other members on this side of the House for having raised this very serious issue.

* * *

[Translation]

SAINT-HUBERT AIRPORT

Ms. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Ind. BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

Points of Order

For two years, the Minister of Transport has been dragging his feet so much with regard to the transfer of Saint-Hubert airport to the City of Longueuil that we are beginning to wonder if the government still intends to transfer the property.

How can the Minister of Transport explain the fact that, two years after talks began, we are still no further ahead and Saint-Hubert airport has still not been transferred to the City of Longueuil?

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member opposite for her question. She is aware that we have been looking into this matter for several months. Unfortunately, I must tell her that our review is not yet finished, but that it will not take much longer.

* * *

● (1505)

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Right Hon. Donald C. McKinnon, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask the government House leader to advise us of what the business is for the rest of this week and next week. Could he also advise the House if he will be bringing forward Bill C-10A? It has been on the agenda week after week on Tuesdays and always withdrawn. Will it be on the agenda next Tuesday, and will he use his time allocation motion so that it is completed on that day?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to note the lobby just put before us by the hon. member for Bill C-10A to be debated next week.

[Translation]

This afternoon, we will continue the debate on the opposition motion. Tomorrow, we will commence with Bill C-34, the long-awaited bill to amend the Parliament of Canada Act.

I have informed the House leaders of the other parties of my intention to propose, pursuant to Standing Order 73(1), that this bill be referred to committee before second reading. If this debate is completed by the end of the day, we will return to third reading of Bill C-9, which deals with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act; then we will go to Bill C-13, the reproductive technologies bill, but I would be surprised if we got that far tomorrow.

On Monday and Wednesday, we will return to the two bills that I just mentioned and we will add to that Bill C-35, regarding military judges, which I think was introduced this morning. Then we will complete, I hope, Bill C-33, dealing with the transfer of offenders.

On Tuesday, and again I am responding to the request made by my colleagues opposite, we will continue consideration of the Senate amendments to Bill C-10, respecting the Criminal Code.

Next Thursday will be an allotted day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I am on my feet, there has been consultation among all parties in the House and I believe you would find consent for the following travel authorization. I move:

That, in relation to its study on relations with Muslim countries, 10 members and the necessary staff of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade be authorized to travel to New York, Morocco, London and Paris from May 8 to 15, 2003.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

DECORUM IN THE CHAMBER—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to respond to the point of order raised on April 30 by the right hon. member for Calgary Centre concerning remarks alleged to have been made by the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans during the emergency debate which took place on April 29 concerning the closure of the cod fishery.

I have reviewed the *Hansard* blues and the video record of the proceedings and cannot find anything in those records that violates our rules concerning the use of unparliamentary words or expressions.

That being said, the right hon. member for Calgary Centre is quite correct in pointing out that *Hansard* records an interjection by the hon. member for Labrador saying the minister uttered some words, but the member for Labrador did not rise at the time to seek the intervention of the Chair nor has he raised the matter with the Speaker to provide further information or to seek redress.

Under these circumstances, I do not consider that there are any grounds on which a point of order might be based and, accordingly, I consider the matter closed.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES REPORT

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with regard to the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages and how it may relate to Standing Order 21. I also seek your opinion regarding its relevance to parliamentary privilege and whether it is a conflict of interest.

Points of Order

The report reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, the Committee adopted the following resolution:

It is resolved that the Standing Committee on Official Languages express its support for the initiative of [the member for Ottawa—Vanier] in the *Quigley v. Canada* case, and request the House of Commons suggest to its Board of Internal Economy to make available a maximum budget of \$30,000 to cover a portion of the legal fees incurred by [the member for Ottawa—Vanier] for his role as intervener in this case.

The report is signed by the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

Standing Order 21 states that no member is entitled to vote upon any question in which he or she has a direct pecuniary interest.

Page 189 of Marleau and Montpetit states:

On being elected, Members of the House of Commons become trustees of public confidence. Members must be seen to be impartial and to derive no personal benefit or gain from their decisions.

I am not sure if the member voted for or against the motion in committee but signing off on any document is a decision. A signature is legal proof of a person's decision on the matter.

The member for Ottawa—Vanier has made a parliamentary decision that grants him personal gain to the tune of \$30,000.

Page 194 of Marleau and Montpetit states:

A Member with a pecuniary interest in a matter simply refrains from voting. In the event the Member votes, the vote may be questioned and eventually disallowed.

What I am arguing today, Mr. Speaker, may be breaking new ground by introducing the notion of a signature on a report, but there is a clear relationship between the report and the member's pecuniary interest. The member's signature on the report has a parliamentary consequence almost as effective as the member's vote.

I would think that a chairman with a pecuniary interest in a committee report would refrain from signing on it, as a member should refrain from voting on such a matter.

Since the signature of the member for Ottawa—Vanier constitutes a decision, it meets the criteria on page 189 of Marleau and Montpetit:

Members must be seen to be impartial and to derive no personal benefit or gain from their decisions.

This decision by the member for Ottawa—Vanier is a clear conflict of interest and a breach of the Standing Orders and the practices of the House. The report, Mr. Speaker, should be withdrawn.

• (1510)

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I became acquainted with this issue just before question period when the Leader of the Opposition made me aware of it. There are still a number of matters that have been raised during this point of order of which there is no confirmation yet.

The first item this afternoon alleges that the member had somehow a personal gain in this. Most of us know the hon. member and we know that he is certainly not the lawyer representing himself, so he does not have a personal gain in the sense that he would personally benefit from the legal action and funding for which the committee, on which he sits and chairs, is asking the House of Commons.

Second, there is no evidence, at least not any demonstrated yet, that in fact any of these expenses have been undertaken. If it is a matter of requesting that these committee expenditures be paid, we may like it or dislike it. That is an interesting debate, but if they have not been undertaken, let alone the member having a personal gain from them, the accusation of a conflict of interest may be somewhat overstated in the case at hand. In any event, I am sure Mr. Speaker will acquaint himself with the details of the matter and report to the House in due time.

In summary, I think that it would be important to ascertain whether these accusations of a personal gain, in terms of a pecuniary interest, are in fact materially true, which would hardly be the case given that the member does not, of course, have his own law firm. He does not gain personally, he does not represent himself, and he is not a lawyer. We all know that. So certainly, that part of it is at least overstated somewhat.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Who would pay if the House did not?

Hon. Don Boudria: Whether or not he would have paid that himself and asked for reimbursement, as was just asked by the right hon. member, is not proven because he does not even know, nor do I, whether the expenses actually happened at this time or whether they ever would if the funding were not secure.

This goes a little beyond what is at least materially evident at this point. Nevertheless, I am sure Mr. Speaker will verify the veracity of the allegations.

The Speaker: The Chair wants to thank the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast for having raised this matter and the hon. government House leader for his intervention. I will take the matter under advisement and return to the House in due course.

On a different point of order, the hon. member for St. John's West.

WEEKLY STATEMENT

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, today as the House leader for the government responded to the request of the House leader for the opposition regarding the business for the coming week, he mentioned a number of bills that would be dealt with today, tomorrow, and on through to Wednesday. In talking about all of them he gave the indication that there would be carry-over time and that we would go back to aforementioned business. However, when he talked about Tuesday he just said we would be doing the Senate amendment on Bill C-10A specifically, without any provision for carry-over. Would the House leader for the governing party tell us if he plans to introduce time allocation on that bill?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether that is a regular business statement question, but notice of time allocation has been confirmed. Anyone who reads the Order Paper could take note of that. I am sure the hon. member is aware of it. I can confirm that this notice had been served to the House some time ago. It is hardly a secret. It is in the record of the House.

Points of Order

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek your guidance on a matter that came to public attention this morning. There would appear to be interference with the business of the House by officials of the Prime Minister's Office.

I refer to an article by Campbell Clark in this morning's *Globe and Mail*, wherein it is reported that the duly elected president of the Liberal Party of Canada, Mr. Stephen LeDrew, was prevented by the Prime Minister's Office from giving testimony to a committee of the House. The article stated:

In an unusual move that highlights a battle over the bill between the outgoing Prime Minister and his party, [the Prime Minister's] office told Liberal Party president Stephen LeDrew that it did not want him to testify on the changes to fundraising laws at a parliamentary committee yesterday.

Instead, the Prime Minister's Office asked the party's senior paid staffer, national director Terry Mercer, to give the Liberal view. Mr. Mercer said he would speak in favour of the bill. He was accompanied by Eddie Goldenberg, the Prime Minister's senior policy adviser and right-hand man, who rarely appears before Commons committees.

The article went on to say:

Mr. LeDrew said he found it unusual when [the Prime Minister's] chief of staff, Percy Downe, told him the PMO did not want him to testify at the hearing. "The Prime Minister wants Terry to give the evidence," Mr. LeDrew said in an interview yesterday

Mr. Speaker, as an experienced parliamentarian, you know that irregularities before committees are usually dealt with in committee. However, from time to time, Speakers have implicated that in grave circumstances the Chair would be justified in intervening without a report from the committee.

It is known that there is a dispute between the Prime Minister and the president of the Liberal Party of Canada. That is not a matter for the House. What may be a matter for the House is an interference with witnesses or people who seek to be witnesses before committees of the House.

If Stephen LeDrew were prevented from giving testimony on Bill C-24, and I remind you that he seems to oppose the bill, having described it as, "dumb as a bag of hammers", if he were prevented by the Prime Minister's agents from giving testimony to a parliamentary committee, that would seem to me to be a grave and serious matter. Therefore, I seek the guidance of the Chair.

On April 7, when dealing with irregularities in the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources, Mr. Speaker stated:

That said, it is, I think, advisable, to remind the House of our usual practice with respect to procedural irregularities in a committee. Marleau and Montpetit, page 858, states: "If a committee desires that some action be taken against those disrupting its proceedings, it must report the situation to the House".

At page 128, we read: "Speakers have consistently ruled that, except in the most extreme situations, they will only hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings upon presentation of a report from the committee which directly deals with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual member".

In ruling that there are extreme cases where the Speaker would have a responsibility to hear a question of privilege on a matter that was before a committee, did the Speaker have in mind such a matter as interference with a potential witness? Or is there another avenue open to the House to ensure that the Prime Minister's agents do not stop the elected president of the Liberal Party from expressing his

opposition to a measure that the Prime Minister has threatened to push through the House whether or not his party favours it?

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your courtesy in hearing me on this important issue.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a very good effort on the part of the right hon. member.

First, he referred to the newly elected president of the Liberal Party. I voted for the guy two years ago, so he is not a newly elected president of the Liberal Party.

Second, he referred to the fact that the president of the Liberal Party had been invited to testify before the committee. The right hon. member always asks us to table all the sundries in the House. It would be interesting for him to find such proof and make it available to the rest of us where such an incident did happen because, in fact, it did not.

Not only that, the leaders of each party were invited to appear and send a representative. Do you know who was sent on behalf of the Conservative Party, Mr. Speaker? Do you think it was the duly elected president? It was the bagman of his party who came to testify last night before the committee. The allegation made by the right hon. member is factually incorrect. He did not even do it himself which is proof of its inaccuracy.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I do not normally intervene in these matters. However, since I do sit on that committee that is looking at this legislation, I would like to support the right hon. member from Calgary on this issue. My party, with the support of his party, the support of the Bloc, and the support of the NDP, moved to invite all the presidents of all the parties to this committee and it was voted down, with every Liberal voting against it. Every Liberal was brought in there to stuff the committee with members who had never been on a committee before. They got rid of the guys who might have voted for it.

We could go on and on in this debate, but it is obvious the Liberals do not want the president of their party here. We would love to have him here and I actually sent him a letter this afternoon inviting him to come.

• (1520)

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe on a more serious note, because I cannot help but notice some kind of Cheshire cat grins on both the right hon. leader of the Conservative Party and the member from the Alliance, quite obviously they are taking—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stan Keyes: This is a noisy place.

They are taking their information from a newspaper article that was quite incomplete and, in fact, not very well researched.

Let us go back to the committee itself. I have been monitoring the committee with great interest. As the national caucus chair—

Mr. Vic Toews: I bet.

Mr. Stan Keyes: Maybe members would want to hear this first. As the national caucus chair I am also our caucus representative on the national executive which just met on the weekend.

It was clear in committee that the request was made not to the parties but to the leaders of the parties, specifically the Prime Minister and the leaders of the opposition parties. Those requests went out and those leaders made their decisions on who would represent them in committee.

Subsequent to that, there has been a discussion in committee, which will carry on in short order and be brought back to the table after some careful consideration, some thought, and some phone calls to see if these witnesses are available. Many of the witnesses that the committee had hoped to have are not appearing for one reason or another, and we want to ensure that if the invitations go out that certainly these individuals would be available.

It is my understanding that the president of the Liberal Party of Canada will make himself available at a moment's notice to come before the committee if it so desires.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Will he be allowed to speak?

Mr. Stan Keyes: The right hon. member for the Conservative Party asks if he will be allowed to speak. Yes, he will be allowed to speak. Last weekend a resolution was passed at the party level. The first part of that serious resolution reads:

The National Executive of the Liberal Party of Canada affirms its support for the stated objectives of Bill C-24, advancement of transparency and increase in public confidence in the political process.

The president of the party voted for that resolution, in other words, endorsing the principles of Bill C-24. He would be more than happy to come.

The Speaker: The Chair has heard all the arguments advanced. I have heard more than enough on this point, with great respect to the hon. deputy government whip, who I know wants to intervene.

There is a limit to how much we can hear on a point of order that in my view is not well taken. It was very interesting to hear the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast suggest that some committee had been stuffed. I am not sure that is parliamentary.

The right hon. member for Calgary Centre has raised a point of order that he made in a very serious tone, but which I think he knows is perhaps of interest as a newspaper story and not of relevance in democratic or procedural terms in the House. He is aware, as well as every other hon. member, that committees are masters of their own procedure.

Committees have the power to send for persons, papers and records. There is an excellent treatise on this subject written by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River which explains the power of committees to summon witnesses.

Whoever the Prime Minister may choose or not choose to send to committee, according to this newspaper article, and I appreciate the hon. member for Hamilton West's assistance on this matter, does not matter. The committee can choose whomever it wants. The committee, being master of its own procedure, can do what it likes. It can choose whatever witness it wants and can enforce attendance

Privilege

should it choose to do so. It can request the assistance of the House in compelling the attendance of a witness.

I invite the right hon. member to have another look at the book written on this very subject by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River. It is extremely clarifying on the issue. It might even assist the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast to understand something of the composition of committees and how they get appointed rather than stuffed. I am sure he would appreciate that assistance as would all hon. members.

While on the subject, I am sure it is one that we could go on at length this afternoon. I think it is not a well taken point of order. We can proceed with another matter.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, do I then take it that this incident, in your judgment, falls outside the exception that you referred to in your judgment of April 7?

The Speaker: At the moment far outside, the right hon. member is absolutely correct.

* * *

• (1525)

PRIVILEGE

FIREARMS ACT

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege. I have been waiting since April 14 for the House to reconvene so I could raise this important question of privilege. I just returned to Ottawa with committee duties that I was engaged in and this is the first opportunity I have to bring this matter to the attention of the House.

Section 2 of the Firearms Act defines "Federal Minister" as the Minister of Justice. In 1995 members of the House voted five times on Bill C-68. It was Parliament's clearly stated intent that the Firearms Act be administered by the minister of justice, not the solicitor general.

Imagine my shock on April 14 of this year when the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General issued a news release saying that the federal minister responsible for the Firearms Act would no longer be the Minister of Justice but that it would now be the Solicitor General of Canada. If true, they amended an act of Parliament without coming back to Parliament to ask for our approval of the amendment. How could they possibly have such contempt for Parliament? Even the fact that the Prime Minister's Office waited until the House of Commons was just starting its two week Easter recess to make this change was insulting. Did they really think we would forget about it over the two week break?

I asked the lawyers in the Library of Parliament, parliamentary research branch, this question. How did they transfer the firearms program without getting it approved by the House of Commons? The law and government division responded as follows:

Further to your e-mail dated 15th of April, 2003, the transfer of responsibility of the Canadian Firearms Centre was accomplished by means of an Order in Council. This O-I-C was enacted pursuant to the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act. The transfer took effect on the 14 April, 2003.

Privilege

The research branch provided a link to the specific order in council posted on the Privy Council Office website. The order in council registration number SI/2003-96, dated Friday, April 11, 2003, states:

Her Excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, pursuant to paragraph 2(a) of the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act, hereby:

(a) transfers from the Minister of Justice to the Solicitor General of Canada the control and supervision of the portion of the public service known as the Canadian Firearms Centre over which the Solicitor General of Canada shall preside, and

(b) transfers from the Minister of Justice, who is defined as the federal minister in the Firearms Act, to the Solicitor General of Canada the powers, duties and functions of the federal minister under the Firearms Act.

effective April 14, 2003.

We did get some advance warning that the PMO might try to use, or one might say abuse, the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act to make this amendment to the Firearms Act without giving MPs a chance to debate and vote on the amendment.

On the day the justice minister announced his action plan for the firearms program, justice department bureaucrats were overheard saying that they did not have to come back to Parliament to change the definition of federal minister.

Based on this obvious disrespect for what is clearly stated in an act of Parliament, I asked the parliamentary research branch again to investigate how it would be possible for the government to use a subordinate act of Parliament, originally passed in 1918, to override a specific section of the Firearms Act passed after nine separate votes of Parliament in 1995.

On March 14, 2003, the law and government division of the parliamentary research branch wrote the following answer:

It is unclear if the statute of general application can be used to re-define the Minister responsible in statutes of specific application such as the Royal Canadian Mint Act. The issue becomes more acute when the statute as set out in Justice Canada's website defines the Minister as one person but, in reality, that Minister is someone else entirely.

A subsequent paper, written by the law and government division of the parliamentary research branch, dated March 20, 2003 states:

● (1530)

Ministers in Canada have most of their responsibilities assigned by statute. Despite the broad language and the PSRTDA [Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act], any transfer of responsibilities made by the PSRTDA remains a subordinate legislation. This may explain why the PSRTDA was given a fairly restricted interpretation, at least until the major reorganizations of federal departments in 1993. It is presumed that regulatory provisions, such as Orders in Council under the PSRTDA, are meant to work together, not only with their own enabling legislation, but also with other Acts and other regulations as well. In so far as possible, the courts seek to avoid conflict between statutory and regulatory provisions and to give effect to both...

On the one hand, any argument limiting the [Where conflict is unavoidable, however, the statute provision prevails], scope of a PSRTDA order based on the superior nature of the statute conferring the power in question could, potentially, eviscerate the PSRTDA and the ambit of its operation. On the other hand, to go to the other extreme by completely emasculate the supremacy of Parliament to legislate who has responsibility of administering its enactments.

The latter interpretation is the position I take in this question of privilege and the one the Speaker must resolve before allowing this amendment to the Firearms Act to take place without any debate or a vote by members of the House.

When the courts are confused by the wording of legislation, they often go back to the debates of the legislation to determine what the original intent of the legislation was. Even a cursory review of the debates of Bill C-68 will show that both the government and Parliament clearly intended that the federal minister in the Firearms Act would be the Minister of Justice and no one else.

I cannot find one reference in any of the debates or the testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice that suggested that any minister other than the Minister of Justice would be or should be responsible for the Firearms Act.

The House of Commons voted on Bill C-68, An Act respecting firearms and other weapons, on five occasions: second reading, report stage, third reading and two time allocation motions.

On June 7, 1995, the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs reported Bill C-68 back to the House with amendments, but the definition of federal minister was not one of the amendments proposed. The Senate also held extensive committee hearings, reported the bill back with 14 amendments and had four votes on Bill C-68. No one ever disputed or debated the question of who the federal minister should be, and on December 5, 1995, Bill C-68 was proclaimed into law. After months of debate, extensive committee hearings in both the House and Senate and nine parliamentary votes, the clear intent of Parliament was that the federal minister would be the Minister of Justice.

It is my position that a subordinate act of Parliament should not be used to subvert the clear intent of Parliament in a statute of specific application and if the government has valid reasons for wanting to transfer responsibility for the Firearms Act to the Solicitor General, then it should bring such an amendment before the House for full debate and a vote.

The powers of the federal minister are extensive and are described in Firearms Act sections 2, 7, 82, 95, 97, 118 and 119 and the Criminal Code sections 103 and 104. The federal minister's powers include: prosecuting Criminal Code offences for the illegal import or export of firearms or ammunition; laying regulations before each House of Parliament; entering into federal-provincial compensation agreements; approving firearms safety courses; prescribing forms and designating chief firearms officers and firearms officers for provinces and territories.

These are important legal responsibilities approved by Parliament and the decision concerning which minister will carry out these duties in the future should have been debated in the House before being amended. Under section 118 of the Firearms Act, regulations are to be laid before each House of Parliament. How can the government propose such a major amendment to the Firearms Act, the definition of the federal minister responsible, without extending the same courtesy to Parliament?

My privileges have been breached and the government has shown contempt for the House by trying to amend the Firearms Act through the back door by order in council.

•(1535)

Clearly, it was Parliament's intent that the Firearms Act be administered by the Minister of Justice, not the Solicitor General. The Minister of Justice has discharged these responsibilities under the Firearms Act for more than seven years. Why is it necessary to change ministerial responsibility now after so many years? What can the Solicitor General do better than the three justice ministers have done? Clearly, these are questions requiring full debate in the House of Commons.

Why is the government amending an act of Parliament without giving Parliament the opportunity to debate and vote for or against the amendment? Why does the government have such contempt for what is clearly stated in an act of Parliament passed by the House? The lawyers in the Library of Parliament stated:

It is unclear if this statute of general application can be used to re-define the Minister responsible in statutes of specific application...

I ask the Speaker to clarify this important issue for Parliament.

In the House of Commons *Debates* for April 29, 1971, Speaker Lamoureux stated:

In my view, parliamentary privilege does not go much beyond the right of free speech in the House of Commons and the right of a member to discharge his or her duties in the House as a member of the House of Commons.

One of the most important duties is to represent my constituents in the House and to vote on their behalf. The government's actions have prevented me from debating and voting on an important amendment to a bill that is very important to them. The government's actions have directly impeded my work as a member of Parliament.

Joseph Maingot's "Parliamentary Privilege in Canada", second edition provides "A practical definition" of parliamentary privilege on page 13, which states:

If someone improperly interferes with the parliamentary work of a Member of Parliament—i.e. any of the Member's activities that have a connection with the proceeding in Parliament—in such a case that is a matter involving parliamentary privilege. An offence against the authority of the House constitutes contempt.

I believe the Prime Minister's order in council registration number SI/2003-0096 dated Friday, April 11, 2003 has improperly interfered with my parliamentary work as a member of Parliament and has also undermined the authority of the House.

I believe changing the definition of federal minister in the Firearms Act from the Minister of Justice to the Solicitor General by order in council using the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act rather than bringing the proper amendment before the House undermines the supremacy of Parliament and constitutes a prima facie breach of privilege. Mr. Speaker, if you agree, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion and appreciate your attention to this matter.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this question of privilege that has been raised. It is certainly a creative attempt on behalf of my hon. colleague.

First, we know that there has certainly been considerable discussion in the House about the change of duties from one minister to another in relation to the Firearms Act and responsibility

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for it. We also know that the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act does provide in fact that such a transfer can be made by order in council. It is provided for in law. The House has considered the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act obviously. It has passed that act and given that power to the governor in council to make those changes. Therefore, it is clearly not a question of contempt.

Nevertheless, as usual, the government has had no notice of this question of privilege and I would like to reserve the opportunity to come back at a later time to make further submissions, if need be.

•(1540)

The Speaker: The Chair will take the matter under advisement and provide time for the hon. parliamentary secretary to make further submissions on the point.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion introduced in the House by my charming colleague the member for Laurentides, who is asking that we recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strike breakers whom I will call scabs during my speech since I believe that this word is much more telling than strike breakers.

I am doubly pleased to speak today since it is May 1, International Workers Day. Mr. Speaker, I know that you are tolerant and that you will allow me on this day to pay tribute to workers in my riding, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, in Quebec and in the other provinces of this country as well as to workers around the globe.

Today we are debating a bill that concerns them directly. Before I start making a list of all its benefits or debating why the use of scabs should be banned by the Canada Labour Code, I would like to briefly review the history of the work done in Quebec.

This history starts before a major turning point that occurred in Quebec in 1977. Let us remember the disputes that took place in Asbestos where the likes of Trudeau, Marchand, Hébert, Michel Chartrand and others sided up with workers who were fighting against scabs who were doing their jobs in the Asbestos mine.

I remember very little of this event because I was very young. My colleague, the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, does not really believe how old I was then, but yes I was quite young. But having seen reports of the dispute on television, I remember how it divided even the clergy. Half of them were in favour of businesses and the other half in favour of workers. This dispute divided families. Even today, there are still scars from this dispute involving scabs and illegal workers from one company.

Supply

Remember the dispute at Wabasso in Trois-Rivières in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The same thing happened there. The provincial police got involved; there was some arm twisting; strong harm tactics were used against workers; scabs were brought in to replace employees who were fighting for their way of thinking, for their jobs.

Let us remember the dispute at the Noranda mine, in my hometown, in the early 1950s. Things got really rough there. Strikers threw stones, and scabs threw nails and pellets. Scabs even splashed strikers with gasoline and set them ablaze. One of my uncles, Joseph-Albert Perron, suffered third-degree burns in that dispute.

Before 1977, labour disputes in Quebec were just horrible. I could mention the disputes at Radio-Canada and at Ogilvie Mills Limited. Do you remember the Ogilvie dispute in Montreal? I could add to that the Murray Hill dispute, and the United Aircraft Corporation dispute, in Longueuil, the company that is now known as Pratt & Whitney. I think that the move to ban the use of scabs in the latter was the last straw for Quebecers and for the premier of the day, René Lévesque. This happened in 1976, the year before the passing of the anti-scab legislation in Quebec.

What did this anti-scab legislation do in Quebec? What kind of result did it produce? Why is the government opposite so afraid of such legislation?

• (1545)

Anti-scab legislation is indispensable to ensure that bargaining in labour disputes will be civilized. It balances the relationship between employers and employees, so that employers do not have all the power, and employees none. Anti-scab legislation promotes industrial peace. Later on, I will use statistics to prove this. It has changed the labour environment in Quebec.

Anti-scab legislation is the cornerstone of balanced bargaining power between employers and employees. Including such provisions in the Canada Labour Code would create one type of worker in Quebec instead of two, namely those who are governed by the Canada Labour Code and those who are governed by the Quebec labour code.

There are many benefits. Earlier, I heard members opposite who are against such legislation say that it would cost money, that it would affect productivity, and so on. This is absolutely false.

Quebec has had its anti-scab legislation since 1977. I could give statistics. I will just give a few because I do not want to overwhelm people with figures.

Between 1992 and 2002, all the disputes under the Quebec Labour Code lasted an average of 15.9 days, compared to 31.1 days for disputes under the Canada Labour Code. That is a difference of 95.6%.

In terms of days lost per employee, for the same period, that is between 1992 and 2002, for disputes falling under the Quebec Labour Code, there were 121.3 days for 1,000 employees, compared to 266.3 days for disputes under the Canada Labour Code. For the benefit of my colleague from Champlain, that is a difference of 119.5%.

You do not need to be a rocket scientist to realize that those who talk about all the time, money and efficiency lost are sticking their heads deep in the sand. It is completely false.

I want to add one more thing. Nobody can criticize the Bloc Québécois for not believing in the need for anti-scab legislation. Since the Bloc Québécois has been represented here, in Ottawa, so for the last 12 years, a number of its members have tried to have this legislation passed. The first was my hon. colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour who introduced Bill C-201 in 1989 or 1990. That is how long we have been working on this issue. We do not give up easily.

Lastly, I want to remind the House once again that we in the Bloc Québécois are not the only ones who would like to see anti-scab legislation. I have here a list of unionists not only from Quebec, but from all over Canada, who support this motion from the Bloc Québécois. I hope that everyone in the House will vote in support of the bill introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Laurentides.

• (1550)

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to take part in this interesting debate on the motion by the member for Laurentides.

The motion reads as follows:

That this House recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strikebreakers.

As you know, the Canada Labour Code is composed of three parts: the first deals with industrial relations; the second deals with occupational health and safety; and the third deals with standards related to the workplace.

Today's motion calling for a ban on the use of strike breakers concerns Part I of the Canada Labour Code.

You will recall that Part I of the Code was amended in 1999. These amendments, which were passed by the House, came about after a long and thorough review process during which a study was conducted by an independent task force, the Sims Task Force. This group was composed of experts in industrial relations.

What came out of these consultations is that the representatives of the unions and companies directly impacted by the code agreed on a number of major reforms. However, as concerns the use of replacement workers, the positions of the unions and of the employers remained entirely different, and the working group was unable to make recommendations based on consensus.

The government has already implemented most recommendations of the Sims working group. With the new provisions, the use of replacement workers is not prohibited generally, but it is possible to prove that it is an unfair practice in labour relations.

The parties involved in collective bargaining under part I of the code consider the current approach a reasonable compromise.

As you know, the government thinks that this balanced approach is the best way to settle this issue in the context of federal jurisdictions. The government does not see any compelling reason to change the legislation at this time.

Personally, I am quite pleased to address the House on the motion by the hon. member for Laurentides. I encourage her and all my colleagues in the House to nonetheless examine all the ramifications of this motion.

As we all know, the issue of replacement workers can lead to positions that are opposed one way or another. Typically, employers see things one way, and unions have another point of view. There are sometimes diverging views.

That is why we should take a few minutes to consider what the Canadian Labour Code says on this issue. More specifically, let us examine the amendments that were passed in 1999, as I said earlier.

• (1555)

[*English*]

What these amendments achieved was an eminently balanced approach to the issues, an approach that protects the interests of workers and employers during work sabotage. This balanced approach prohibits the use of replacement workers if they are hired to undermine a union representational capacity during the work stoppage, yet it is simultaneously an approach that allows an employer to continue operating. In the event there is a dispute about the use of replacement workers, employees and their representatives can make their case before the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

As my colleagues know, the Canada Industrial Relations Board is an independent third party. It is made up of an equal number of members from both the employer and the employee communities. As well, the board has an independent chairperson.

[*Translation*]

I want to point out that this board already has the appropriate expertise and mandate to address these labour relations issues. It is incumbent upon the Canada Industrial Relations Board to determine the circumstances underlying the dispute and help the parties reach an agreement.

I also want to talk a little more about some of the other provisions of the current Canada Labour Code concerning replacement workers.

Current legislation contains several provisions regarding practical issues arising from the use of replacement workers. These are the kind of issues that, in the past, led to bitter and endless disputes.

Finally, I also wish to give a very good example of this. Under the provisions of the code, replacement workers are now excluded from the bargaining unit. In practical terms, this means that these workers do not have the right to participate in representation votes to decide whether a recognized bargaining agent should be either replaced or removed, nor in other votes in the collective bargaining process.

• (1600)

[*English*]

As well, no employer can cancel or threaten to cancel medical, dental, disability, life or other insurance plans or deny these benefits to employees who are on strike or in a lockout position.

In addition, during the prolonged work stoppage, no application to change or decertify a union can be made without the independent consent of the Canada Industrial Relations Board. The board, as I stated earlier, is in a sense bipartisan and in a sense is chaired by a

Supply

person who is not associated with representatives of either the employees or the employers.

Finally, the code recognizes the rights of employees in the bargaining unit to return to their jobs at the end of the work stoppage ahead of any replacement workers. As the hon. member may be aware, in the past an employer could apply to decertify a union after a work stoppage had continued for six months.

[*Translation*]

Since it was amended, the Canada Labour Code provides that employees have the legitimate right to choose their bargaining agent. The object of this provision is to ensure that work stoppages do not last unduly.

Under this balanced approach, part I of the Canada Labour Code now provides the settlement of disputes through arbitration, in the case of dismissal or disciplinary action taken during a work stoppage.

[*English*]

Altogether, the 1999 amendment to the code adds up to a very balanced package that we believe is the right way to proceed.

Well over 90% of all disputes that arise between employers and employees under the Canada Labour Code are settled without a work stoppage. This fact in itself speaks volumes about how well the code's balanced approach is working.

It would be very helpful to reflect for a moment on just what this legislation means to Canadians. The federal legislation applies to employees and employers under federal jurisdiction. This includes Crown corporations and industries with an interprovincial or international dimension, such as the transportation sectors, the banking sectors and the broadcasting sectors. The Canada Labour Code also applies to many first nations activities.

Employees under the jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code make up approximately a total of less than 10% of the Canadian workforce. The House is well aware that the provinces each have their own labour legislation. Provincial laws and regulations therefore apply to approximately 90% of Canada's labour force. These various jurisdictions all share the same vision: we want to promote and work toward a fair, safe, healthy, stable, cooperative, productive work environment. We also want to foster a work environment that contributes to the socio-economic well-being of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I believe that the balance struck in the existing provisions of the Canada Labour Code greatly support this vision.

By reaching a fair compromise between the values and interests, which are not easy to reconcile, of employers, unions and employees, part I of the Code touches on the critical issue of replacement workers with logic, balance and respect for all parties.

In fact, the philosophy underlying part I of the Canada Labour Code recognizes the precedence of compromise and negotiation in the resolution of the problems we are facing.

Supply

I greatly appreciate that my colleague, the member for Laurentides, has given the House the opportunity to deal with this issue. But, for all the reasons that I have just set out, and for another reason that my colleague knows—a bill has already been presented to the House—I hope that the House will have the opportunity to discuss this issue, which has been brought forward by my colleague—in a straightforward manner.

If the House decides to support this bill, I hope that the appropriate committee of the House of Commons will have the opportunity to examine these issues again, to analyze them in a fair way and to listen once more to representatives from all sides, that is the employees and the employers. This could lead to suggestions that will improve the bill in one way or the other.

•(1610)

I am sure that the government is listening to ensure that it responds positively. You know that, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, we had problems, several times, where employees and employers could not reach an agreement or a positive resolution that was beneficial to one party or the other.

I know that the then Minister of Labour, Alfonso Gagliano, worked extremely hard to ensure that there would be a positive solution in this regard.

Another time, with the new Minister of Labour, another problem was front and centre in the national capital region. We saw how the minister managed to promote a positive dialogue between representatives of management and labour. Once again, we were able to find a solution.

I point this out to show how most problems that may arise at times between employees and employers are solved through mediation, and sometimes through direct or indirect negotiations or arbitration.

So far, we have not seen, at the federal level, problems indicating that the system is not working. We talked about these issues in 1999, when the government asked a task force to study the labour code, to look at the different aspects of this code and to make recommendations to the government to act positively to help employees and industries. Most of these recommendations were included in a bill that was passed by the House.

Even though I know that the intentions are good, this is perhaps not a good time to raise these issues and to adopt these provisions, particularly because the motion before us does not provide details. We would need the appropriate details to take action on this issue. However, perhaps the member's bill will be drafted in such a way that we can look into this issue more closely.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the remarks made by the member for Ottawa Centre. I was most disappointed to hear what he said because I do not understand why he is not shocked—let us take Quebec for example—by the fact that disputes under the Quebec labour code are half as long, which means that the number of working days lost is also reduced by half. This can be taken both ways. There surely is a reason for that.

If disputes are twice as long and the number of working days lost per 1,000 is twice as large, there must be a reason. It is not because one group of workers is under federal jurisdiction and the other is

under Quebec's jurisdiction. Studies have shown that one of the main reasons is the lack of anti-scab provisions in the Canada Labour Code.

I would like to look a little more closely at the reason for this result. In 1977, when the anti-scab legislation was passed, Pierre-Marc Johnson was labour minister, and I was vice-president of the CSN and one of those who supported the passing of such legislation.

I remember that most employers were strongly opposed to this move at the time. Certain people in political circles had some concerns, but the dispute at United Aircraft had left such a mark on the political and economic landscape in the Montreal area and in the whole province of Quebec that experience and reason led Mr. Johnson to take the risk of making this change to the labour code.

I would like to add something that members may not know. When Premier Bourassa came back to power in 1985, since he was a Liberal, someone who was supposed to favour corporations—at least in those days—, they asked him if he was considering going back to the way things were before. He said, “We now have industrial peace and we will certainly not go back to the way things were”. He was even quoted in *Les Affaires*. I remember that perfectly well.

Why is this the case? It is normal. What is negotiation? I heard your explanation of how it was settled, but essentially that happens when there is a relationship of strength on both sides and each party has an interest in settling. Every time one party thinks it can win out over the other, through strength alone, the conflict continues. Workers who decide to go on strike penalize themselves; no more wages. There may be a little bit of strike pay, but no wages.

What makes them do this? It is different in the public sector, but in the private the purpose is to stop the employer from making a profit. The effects are felt. This may lead to negotiations. When there is a strike, if the employer is able to decide that production can go on, it is abundantly clear that it will thumb its nose at the strike, continue production and continue to make a profit.

What reaction does this elicit in the workers? My colleague has spoken of violent strikes triggered by this kind of provocation. People are on strike because they are convinced that their demands are justified and make sense, and that the employer should negotiate, not give them everything but negotiate with them, and see their employer carrying on as before, production still continuing. This makes them angry. Sometimes—and we do not approve of this—they do not care about the serious consequences that might result from their actions.

If his company cannot carry on its operations, before heading for a strike, the employer, who has a say in the matter, will take the bargaining more seriously. He will know that, in case of a strike, if he cannot use strike breakers, he will be hard hit by a work stoppage. So, it is quite normal then for disputes not to last as long.

Supply

I would love to say that bargaining can usually be resolved at teatime, but that is not how things work out. The employer wants to keep making as much profit as possible. We do not have anything against that, but the workers say, "Not at our expense. He has been making huge profits for the last two or three years, the economy is doing fine, so it is now our turn to get our fair share".

• (1615)

Frankly, I would say that it would also be good for the economy. It cannot be good for the economy of Quebec or for that of Canada to have employers raking in huge profits while workers are unable to get their fair share and to sustain the economy.

It would also be good for labour peace; it would be in the interest of workers and of labour relations within the company. In fact, when people go back to work after a strike where scabs were used, it takes some time to restore good working relationships and to reach a good level of output. It would also improve our economic well-being. There is nothing better than anti-scab legislation to restore some sense of balance and to achieve harmonious labour relations.

In many cases, I was told that workers and employers had been able to reach an agreement, but I never believed it. The workers had a choice between a package or nothing. They took the package they were offered.

Legislators have other things to do. They must know what is good for society, for workers, for the economy and for businesses. As I said, a prolonged strike and the use of scabs virtually destroy a business. It takes years to rebuild, to create a suitable working environment to promote the level of productivity we are entitled to expect today.

I really would like the House to vote on this issue. It will not happen now, but we will vote on the bill introduced by my colleague from Laurentides. I would remind members that this is the eleventh time the bill has been introduced in this House. Members should not be afraid to support this bill. True enough, similar legislation does not exist in some provinces. So what? Should we adopt the least favourable approach because it does not exist in some provinces, and not follow those which are the most favourable, which have been tested and which have a proven record, as is the case in Quebec?

I hope the issue comes back to the House. We do not talk enough about labour relations. Labour relations are not something magical. They require knowledge of the elements that are in place and in opposition. When these elements are known and recognized, we can develop of labour relations that are productive, desirable socially and conducive to the development of a society where workers do not feel the joke is on them while companies are lining their pockets.

Also, we should not forget that we live in a world that has just witnessed certain scandals, such as Enron, in the United States. It is a world whose faith in the business world has been shattered.

I often go on missions with Canadian parliamentarians who like to say, "Canada does this, Canada does that." In the field of labour relations, Canada is not at the forefront, on the contrary. And those who are paying the price are the workers and their families, society as a whole, the economy and even businesses.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank the member for Laurentides for introducing this bill and particularly for her thoughtfulness in asking me to talk about it with certain members of the Bloc.

Let us remember that historically, more than 10 years ago, I was the first member not only in Canada, but from the Bloc, to introduce an anti-scab bill in order to amend the Canada Labour Code to ban forever the use of scabs. Members will recall that it was rejected by 18 votes.

Why, in 1987, did I introduce this bill, which was not selected? At the time, there was a sort of lottery. Private members bills were subject to a draw and since mine was not selected, I had to introduce it again in 1989. In 1990, it was debated in the House and voted on.

But why did I introduce it in the first place? Because it was part of a reflection process on ways to prevent bitter strikes like that of the letter carriers in the spring and summer of 1986. Throughout the country, Canada Post Corporation hired scabs, most of them young unemployed individuals, to replace employees who were legally on strike. This made things worse and resulted in tragic scenes of violence. This bill was aimed at countering these measures taken by Canada Post Corporation.

However, 10 years later, we see that it remains a pressing issue because disputes are still taking place, as at Radio-Nord and Cargill. We are still talking about a number of disputes. A few years after the postal strike, there was the well-known dispute at Voyageur that lasted for a long time also. The federal charter therefore encouraged the use of scabs.

These were sad events. It is even more urgent that the federal government provide an instrument to encourage negotiations rather than confrontation. Given all of the talk about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, I think it is the responsibility of the government to put an end to scenes that violate human dignity and human rights.

This anti-scab legislation being proposed is based on section 97(a) of bill 45, the Act to Amend the Labour Code, introduced on April 29, 1977 by Quebec's minister of labour of the day, Pierre-Marc Johnson.

If you would allow me, Madam Speaker, I would like to go back briefly in time to remind you of some of the arguments given to support the anti-scab provisions that were so talked about 26 years ago. The purpose of these provisions was to help eliminate one of the reasons that some of the conflicts soured, and one of the most obvious sources of frustration and violence during work stoppages.

The history of labour disputes in Canada shows that a systemic imbalance between parties quickly leads to the frustration of one of the parties, if not both, which degenerates into either physical or verbal violence. Given that the Canada Labour Code provides for the right to strike, does it not then follow that this right to strike also be paired with the protection of the job for which it is associated?

Supply

Only a small minority of employers use scab workers. However, tolerating the regressive actions of this minority of employers is tantamount to denying the basic right to strike.

It is worth noting that Quebec's legislation has not only limited the number of labour disputes that have led to the use of strikebreakers, but it has also considerably reduced the average length of these disputes despite the fact that scabs were used before. There is, therefore, a reduction in the number of days a dispute lasts and a reduction in the overall number of conflicts. There was a 35% decrease in the years since the legislation was enacted.

The Quebec legislation also minimized the negative impact of labour stoppages on workers and their jobs, in terms of the number of days of work lost to disputes. If a dispute is shorter, there is less probability of violence and exasperation, which causes atmosphere of tension that is not conducive to resolving disputes. When employees return to work, the climate is calmer and the end result is, of course, getting back to work more quickly.

I would like to specify that the current bill would in no way prevent establishing essential services and maintaining business operations, but instead to humanize these essential services.

• (1620)

Like the Quebec government in 1977, the current federal government must introduce a new dimension to labour relations in federal institutions. The goal is not, as some people think, to give more to one side at the expense of the other, but to eliminate, once and for all as best we can using the tools at our disposal, the factors most likely to generate disputes and tension in employer-employee relationships.

Of course, these provisions give precedence, initially, to those exercising their legal right to strike. They protect the workers' dignity, but aim, first and foremost, to limit the unfortunate times when companies decide to hire workers to replace those exercising their legal rights.

By restoring a certain balance between the parties, by forcing them to continue their negotiations in a calmer climate, the government is showing its leadership in changing mentalities.

Too many employers have failed to maintain this balance between the parties during bargaining, and this works against them. Is not the purpose of bargaining for an employer to know in advance the rules and criteria under which a company will operate for the next two or three years? For employers, a collective agreement means two or three years of smooth operations without external pressures. Employers that have failed to accept these fundamental rules have created more problems for themselves and other employers.

With increasing talk these days of new agreements between employers and employees, of co-management and the role of each worker in ensuring smooth operations, with the insistence on the need to implement permanent bargaining mechanisms, with the increasing efforts to get everyone to fully participate as workers and citizens aware of national issues, this archaic custom from the dark ages of using scab labour must stop.

It is with this in mind that we have to examine the need for federal anti-scab legislation. If we want working citizens to trust the

government, we must preserve what is most precious to them, that is their dignity. The right to strike was acquired over the years, thanks to the courage of many workers and their belief in human dignity. Along the way, there were some tough battles in which many workers sacrificed their health. And it is this basic right that is threatened by the use of scabs.

By allowing the use of strikebreakers, the government is indirectly putting the right to strike on the back burner. With the presence of scabs in certain disputes, the right to strike has become an illusion because one party creates, to its own advantage, an imbalance in the rules of operation and hinders the normal balance of power.

I do not believe the government wishes to rewrite history. On the contrary, it should be looking forward, towards creativity, technology and better developed and more modern management techniques.

Far from prejudicially affecting the relationship between the parties involved, I reiterate that the object of this bill is to get things back on track and to restore balance between the parties. It is the parties who are responsible for this balance, and the outcome of bargaining will depend on the way they use it.

As I pointed out at the beginning of my speech, most strikes and lock-outs lead to service agreements without employers resorting to scabs. In this sense, the anti-scab bill focuses more on incentives than coercion.

The bill is also aimed at preventing situations from deteriorating and culminating in violence and aggressiveness among striking workers, material damage, to the detriment of the business itself, and often in injuries to some people.

I say and I repeat, the idea is not to wage a war against employers, but to ensure the respect of humane and reasonable conditions during disputes, to create tools that will allow workers to negotiate calmly during strikes and lock-outs, without being scared of having their job stolen by scabs.

• (1625)

The important thing is to limit the duration of disputes to ensure that the public, workers and businesses are not excessively penalized. Statistics show that all disputes that have led to the use of scabs have gone on too long.

I encourage all members of the House to take what I just said into consideration and to vote for this bill.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Hon. Steve Mahoney (Secretary of State (Selected Crown Corporations), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to talk about issues involving the labour code, issues that are somewhat near and dear to my heart given my background growing up as the son of a fairly major labour leader in the country.

Supply

As some members may know, my dad was the national director of the United Steelworkers in Canada. He was also vice president of the Canadian Labour Congress as well as chairman of the ICFTU, the International Congress of Federated Trade Unions, the home base of which was in Geneva. My mother and dad had 10 children so home was a bit like a union unto itself. It was at least described as a local, and at times I had to play the role of shop steward in trying to find ways to at least get the food off the table without somebody getting seriously injured.

I have grown up around unions. As a young man I wanted to work in the labour movement, and unknown to my father I applied for a job with the steelworkers so I could be an organizer and go up into the mines in Timmins and perhaps follow in his footsteps. He was not keen on that and told me there was no room for nepotism in the labour movement. He suggested I go find my own career, which I did.

Notwithstanding that, many of the issues being discussed today are issues with which I am quite familiar.

I also had the privilege and opportunity of serving in opposition to the Bob Rae government for the better part of five years where I was, for most of that time, the labour critic of that government. It was fairly easy to be critical of the Bob Rae government, whether it was labour policies, or economic policies or other issues.

The issues of replacement workers or as they have been colloquially referred to, scabs, has always been an issue that causes a tremendous amount of emotion and concern in the workforce, and leads to a lot of situations where there can be violence or problems if real care is not taken in the regulation of them.

While it does not ban outright the use of replacement workers, one thing that the Canada Labour Code does in my opinion, in a far superior way to the provincial labour codes or at least the province with which I am most familiar, Ontario, is it clearly puts into place some rules and regulations, which I would like to share with the House, that I think maintain a sense of peace and harmony in the labour management relations field which we have not enjoyed for a long time.

If we take a look at what is happening in this country, we will see there are disputes but the collective bargaining process is working and it is working well. There is the right to strike if it is a non-essential service, and that is a right that is as inherent in law in this country as one could imagine. It is part of the democratic process and is based upon the fact that the labour movement offers a real and necessary service to protect workers.

Too often people think the labour movement was important 20, or 30 or 40 years ago but is not so important today. I reject that idea. It is even more important today because it has changed dramatically. In the old days everybody worked in the steel industry and it was pretty clear cut what the issues were. It was the same way in the auto industry. Only 25% of the membership in the Canadian Auto Workers actually work in the automobile industry. The rest of them are in various workplaces. It is an extremely varied situation that is not as cut and dried or black and white as it used to be back in the forties and fifties when unions were growing with great strength.

● (1635)

Frankly, I think we should celebrate the fact that we have a very strong labour movement in this country. It is a movement that is dedicated to bettering the quality of life for the workers, with health and safety being a very major issue. It is important not only to the workers but to the people who run the actual unions.

I think more and more the labour movement is finding opportunities of negotiating with governments right across this country, provincial and federal, on how they can improve the situation.

The Canada Labour Code governs about 10% of the labour force while 90% of it comes under provincial jurisdiction. Of course it should be of no surprise that once again we are debating an issue that has a much greater impact on the provincial labour scene than it does on the federal. However that is not to say that we do not have a role to play. In fact we do.

As I have said, the Canada Labour Code does a number of things in relationship to this issue that I think should give some comfort to the labour movement. While it does not ban replacement workers outright, let me share with members what it does do.

Replacement workers, under the Canada Labour Code, cannot claim the status of employees in the bargaining unit, which means they cannot take part in votes on whether the current bargaining agent should be replaced or removed.

I submit that is extremely important. If in fact there is a situation where some replacement workers are being used, they cannot come in and take away somebody's job. It is quite clear that in many cases, particularly today, there is probably a requirement for some skilled training, for some proper knowledge of health and safety rules, and of the use of equipment. Therefore, it is not as easy today as maybe it was 30 or 40 years ago to bring in replacement workers, other than perhaps to use some of the management who might come in and who would know the system. They might have some training to keep the plant going, to keep the lights on while the negotiations take place.

If we were to ban that opportunity outright I think we would tilt the balance of the labour management relations that we have. Particularly in the federal employ we would tilt it too much in the wrong direction.

This gives some protection to workers because they know full well that if they go on strike their jobs are protected under the Canada Labour Code. Once the strike is settled, once they have signed an agreement and have a new agreement in place, they know these people will not be able to take over their jobs.

The next thing that the code does is it gives existing employees in the bargaining unit, as I said, the right to return to their jobs ahead of replacement workers following a work stoppage. I think I covered that in the same description of the first area.

Third, applications cannot be made to change or decertify a union during a prolonged work stoppage without the consent of the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

Supply

Certification, decertification, these are all very sensitive issues in the labour movement. I do not want to move away from the issue of replacement workers but as an adjunct to that, on the issue of whether there should be secret ballots in an organizing or certification drive, where the union comes in and wants to convince the employees that it can provide the kind of protection and service that will be to the benefit of those employees, there is a big debate over whether there should be a secret ballot vote.

On the surface, people say that it does not make any sense. Why would there not be a secret ballot vote? It is democratic. It seems fair. Why would we put people in a position where they would have to get involved in the politics of the labour movement?

Let me tell members that if they think this is tough politics, I can assure them that the politics of labour is a real blood sport. There are problems because there is intimidation. We do not see that much today because there are laws that protect against unfair labour practices by management or by the labour movement. However we used to see situations where the actual workers would be intimidated as to how they should vote.

I do not think that is fair and it is not something we should support. People should have the right to decide if they want to join a union or an association without being subjected to any kind of intimidation tactics on the part of an employer or, for that matter, on the part of the union organizers.

● (1640)

I have known a few union organizers in my time. I have known some great ones and I have known some who were not afraid to use the hammer, shall we say, in terms of creating problems in the workplace.

While the Bloc's intention here may be good in the sense that it wants to protect workers by eliminating the use of replacement workers, we have found across the country that provinces have come down on both sides of the issue. There is not a clear agreement. There is no consensus on this particular issue anywhere in the land. Some provinces have banned it outright and others have not touched it at all. Other provinces banned replacement workers, found it did not work and then changed the law again.

As long as there are rules, as long as there is balance and fairness in this thing, the old axiom is, "if it ain't broke, why fix it?". I do not think there is any evidence, nothing that I have heard argued here today on behalf of the Bloc or anybody else, that would lead me to conclude that this situation is broken or that we need to make this kind of an amendment which could create some kind of chaos throughout the country.

I should also point out that while one cannot apply to decertify a union during this, this is an extremely important aspect for the safety and solidarity of the unions. Just because there is a strike and they have brought in replacement workers to keep the business going, to keep the lights on and the basic fundamentals operating, they cannot, through the back door, turn around and apply to decertify, therefore putting the union out of business and, in essence, break the strike that way. That is not what I would call fair and reasonable labour practices.

The Canada Labour Code addresses that by saying that one cannot decertify during such a time period. My friend shakes his head. I guess he does not like the truth, but that is one of the ways the Canada Labour Code actually protects.

I would also add that there is a further protection under the code, and that is that employees are free to choose their bargaining agent, and work stoppages cannot be prolonged in the hope that workers will be forced to abandon their collective bargaining rights.

I have known men and women who literally have died in the pursuit of the right to bargain freely and collectively in this country. The days are not that far in the past. In my home town of Sault Ste. Marie where I was born and where most of my older siblings grew up, it was and still is basically a one industry town. Algoma Steel would be familiar to everyone. I used to listen to horrible stories of accidents that occurred in the steel plants. I know they would also have happened at Stelco in Hamilton, down on the east coast and wherever. I even heard of stories where the situation was so unsafe that people were actually dragged into a blast furnace and killed in a terrible industrial accident.

We cannot say that those kinds of things will not happen again, but it was not all that uncommon an occurrence in the 1930s and 1940s in this country. While we may have moved way beyond that, we have to recognize the gains that have been made.

Just to give an example of how far I think we have come in labour relations, Canada Post is one of the crown corporations that reports to me as a Secretary of State for Selected Crown Corporations.

● (1645)

I think in general the Canadian public would agree that the labour relations between Canada Post, management and labour have never been better.

I do not know what all the fuss is about but perhaps some members do not understand the labour issues. In any event, the labour relations between Canada Post, the management and labour have never been better. We seem to have peace in our relationships.

There are still some outstanding issues. I know CUPW wants to talk about organizing the rural mail couriers, and that is an ongoing issue that will be dealt with, but by and large we have very good, solid relationships. I think that is as a result of having a law in place, such as the Canada Labour Code, that gives confidence to people on both sides of these issues.

I should also say that the Canada Labour Code, further to the other comments, protects workers who are unfairly dismissed or disciplined during a work stoppage by providing them with recourse to grievance arbitration. It also ensures that employees continue to be covered by their benefit plans during a work stoppage.

What would we achieve if we were to adopt this recommendation by the Bloc Quebecois? If we were to make the amendment then we would come down hard on one side of the issue. I am quite sure people in the corporate sector and people in crown corporations would have concerns. People who run operations in which 10% of the Canadian labour force are employed would be very concerned that we would do anything in a unilateral fashion such as this by simply a stroke of the pen. We have very positive, solid, long term relations with the labour movement in this country, particularly with those who are affected by the Canada Labour Code.

I should say as well, in addition to the issues of what else the Canada Labour Code does to protect workers in case of a strike, that it does prohibit their use if they are hired specifically to undermine a union's ability to represent its members during a work stoppage. I understand that might be subjective and that it might be hard to prove, but in reality in the workplace it is not as hard to prove as one might think. The rhetoric and the heated exchanges that take place during a labour strike, very often the Labour Relations Board would see clearly if there were attempts to decertify or to undermine the credibility of the management of the union.

This actually takes me to an interesting point. People do not really think of a union as a business but I can tell members firsthand that it is a business and a big business. In the 1960s I acted as a chauffeur for my father and a number of his cohorts as we drove from Toronto to Sudbury. I was not totally sure what was going on, but I have since studied it and have found out what was going on. It was called a raid. I think anyone involved in the labour movement would understand what a raid is. It was the United Steelworkers attempting, and successfully doing so, to take over Mine Mill.

That happened in the 1960s. It was not too many years ago, in the early 1990s, 30-some years later, when I was in Sudbury at a meeting and some people wearing Mine Mill jackets came up to me and said that they remembered my father who destroyed their union. In reality, however, the steelworkers led the raid, took over the membership in that area and built the strength of their union.

I can hear members opposite asking what that has to do with the issue. It all has to do with the strength of the labour movement and how one maintains confidence in a relationship in the labour movement. Labour is a business and a big business. Union dues are involved. The labour leaders are absolutely committed and dedicated to representing the men and women, the rank and file who work in the workplace, to ensure they are safe, that they have good collective bargaining agreements and that they are protected, as they clearly are under the Canada Labour Code.

•(1650)

By just simply putting in a motion that would cast aspersions against the code and that would destroy the balance between management and labour, does absolutely nothing to contribute to the labour peace which exists in the country and which protects men and women in every industry, not only the federal industry that is governed under the Canada Labour Code but also by those that are governed under the provincial code.

I think we have struck the right balance and for that reason cannot support the Bloc's motion.

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, Health.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, allow me first to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the charming member from Longueuil.

I also take this opportunity to pay my respects to all the workers in Quebec and Canada. They are fortunate to have the Bloc Quebecois looking after their interests, because neither the Liberal nor the Alliance members are standing up for the workers in Canada, the Bloc Quebecois is, along with the New Democratic Party, I must say.

On this May 1, International Workers Day, I pay my respects to all the workers in Quebec and Canada. I would like remind hon. members that, as they are aware, May 1 commemorates a tragic event. In Chicago, in 1886, labour leaders who were just fighting for their right to organize, for their right to work, for better working conditions and, ultimately, for better living conditions were subjected to brutal repression.

I find it absolutely incredible that, 117 years later, in Canada, which is described by some as the best country in the world, we are discussing in this House something as obvious as the prohibition of the use of strikebreakers. With a government like this one, which defends the use of strikebreakers, we could think Canada has gone back to the late 1800s.

I think it is disgraceful, especially since in Quebec and British Columbia, and to some extent in Ontario, there already are measures prohibiting the use of strikebreakers or scabs. In Quebec, we have been working within the context of this legislation for 26 years, since 1977, and I think that we can agree that labour relations in Quebec are much more harmonious than in many other provinces.

Let us consider the serious disputes in Ontario in recent years, while in Quebec, we were able to reach agreement, within the framework of summit meetings, especially on improving the public finance situation.

I think that we should stop the hypocrisy that has prevailed since part 1 of the Canada Labour Code was amended. The current Minister of Labour and her predecessors are not fooling anyone. By using terms such as replacement workers or replacement staff, everyone knows that, in the end, the law permits the use of strikebreakers or scabs. It disturbs the balance of power among unions, workers and employers.

That is not at all fair, because the business is allowed to carry on its activities, to continue to make money, while the workers are out on the street, trying to gain some bargaining strength, simply to be able to respect themselves.

Supply

I was secretary general of the Confederation of National Trade Unions or CSN. I know that on the Liberal side there are not many who know that, because they have never set foot in Quebec. The Confederation of National Trade Unions is the second largest labour organization, after the Fédération des travailleurs et des travailleuses du Québec or FTQ.

So, I was secretary general of the CSN at the time that the idea of amending part I of the Canada Labour Code got started, and I took part in the work of the Sims committee, along with other people, including the current President of the FTQ, Henri Massé. I know that the current Minister of Labour is doing nothing to quash the rumour that there was a deal made with the FTQ, the CLC and the Teamsters to leave out any anti-scab clauses. That is utterly false.

I think the labour minister should correct what she said, especially what she stated in the House. Let me read you part of the letter the President of the FTQ, Henri Massé, sent to the minister after she put forth such drivel in answer to a question by the hon. member for Laurentides. Henri Massé wrote:

Before the parliamentary committees of the House of Commons and the Senate, the differences were maintained.

We are talking here, obviously, about the differences between the position of the employers and that of the unions:

Madam Minister, organized labour, whether it is the FTQ, the CTC or any other labour union—

And that included the CSN:

—has been asking for years now that anti-scab provisions similar to those found in the Quebec labour code be included in part I of the Canada Labour Code.

Of course, in the end, we agreed that the reform as a whole was acceptable. We have to remember that we had the choice between that or nothing. That is what the Liberals did. They offered organized labour a heart-wrenching choice between, on the one hand, some kind of improvement—because there were improvements made to part I of the Canada Labour Code, but without any anti-scab provisions—and, on the other hand, absolutely nothing.

Given the circumstances, he concluded his letter by saying:

We always argued that it was not good enough in terms of anti-scab provisions.

•(1655)

I find it utterly unacceptable that, in the Liberal caucus, the Minister of Labour would, as we have learned, skew the reality and distort the facts, play on words simply to defend an indefensible position, that is allowing the use of strike breakers in this day and age—this is 2003, and not 1886—to put an end to strikes and break the unions, which are simply trying to represent the interests of workers.

Once again, we think, along with many others, that it is just window dressing when we are told there is a difference between replacement workers and scabs. In this regard, the current President of the CSN wrote a letter for this May 1 celebration. It helps us understand the position of the government on the amendments to part I of the Canada Labour Code. Here is what she had to say:

Right now, the Canada Labour Code prohibits the use of strike breakers only when the purpose is to undermine the capacity of the union to represent the workers. In practice, how can we know that what is at stake in a strike or lockout is the right of employees to be represented by a union and that strike breakers are used only for that purpose? It is impossible, and the unspeakable remains unspoken.

That is the truth of the matter. Even with the amendments made to part I of the Canada Labour Code, this government did not defend the interests of the population. It gave in to the arguments of the employers against the union demands. And this argument now stating that there is a balance in the Canada Labour Code is nothing new. That is utterly false. There is no such balance.

First of all, the union and the workers have two opponents to face, the scabs and the employers. That is two against one. In my view, this is not a balance. This situation breaks the balance of power and allows the strikes to last longer under the Canada Labour Code than under the Quebec labour code.

I have seen many of those, both as President of the Conseil central de Montréal and as Secretary General of the CSN. I remember one in particular, the strike at Voyageur. The owner of that company was none other than the member for LaSalle—Émard.

Scabs were used to let buses go in. I can tell you that it was very difficult for us, union leaders, to hold the members back. Three of them were affected by the lockout, because it really was a lockout. When they saw the police or security guards hired by the member for LaSalle—Émard open up the way for buses full of scabs, we had to step in to try to prevent violent confrontation. Some other time, I can show you pictures of me trying to hold back exasperated workers who wanted to fight with these scabs.

In order to reduce violence on the picket line, it is obvious that if there were no scabs, violence would not be as prevalent. In fact, there would be no violence. In Quebec, in most of the labour disputes under the Quebec Labour Code, there is no violence any longer, because the disputes are based on a real balance of power and not on an imaginary one, as is the case with the Canada Labour Code.

One must imagine also what it is like in small communities. In a village or a region where there is a large business, like a mine or a sawmill, the use of scabs pits people in the community against one another. Sometimes it is even fathers and mothers against sons and daughters. I have seen that happen.

All these aspects must be taken into account with regard to both the power relationship and the issue of labour relations. In a broader perspective, we must also take into account the nature of our society, the need to respect a social contract where unions are not only tolerated as a necessary evil, but where they are considered as partners on the same level as businesses. This is not the case right now under part I of the labour code, nor is it what this government is doing.

One could ask why, if it has been in existence in Quebec for 26 years and if it is used in British Columbia, the Liberal government, that has supported such a measure before, refuses to listen to reason.

I believe that we had the answer this morning in the *National Post*. Let us look at contributions to the Liberal Party of Canada. Contributions from corporations are in excess of \$6,411,000, whereas those from individuals barely reach \$2,384,000. This means that there is three times as much money coming from large corporations. The Liberal Party is the party of big business in Canada. It defends big business against workers and unions.

Fortunately the Bloc Québécois is there. I invite all members to vote in favour of the motion brought forward by the member for Laurentides.

• (1700)

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is quite an experience for me to follow such a great speaker with such vast experience. Still, I am pleased to speak today on the motion before us, which falls on May 1, International Workers' Day. I want to take this opportunity to pay homage to all workers, especially those in the Longueuil riding.

It also coincides with the protest today on Parliament Hill by several hundreds of workers in support of the anti-scab legislation introduced by my hon. colleague from Laurentides. I want to highlight her tenacity, her ability to listen to and her will to work for the workers of Quebec.

Several hundred workers came to tell the federal government that it is high time it took a stand, once and for all, and said that they are entitled to the same things as their brothers and sisters working under Quebec jurisdiction.

It is impossible to imagine that, in 2003, in a so-called democratic society, all these people who play a fundamental role in the economic development of Quebec and Canada do not have the same rights.

How is it that, in 2003, the rights of the those primarily responsible for our economic prosperity are being trampled on? It is high time to introduce measures for civilized bargaining between equal parties to ensure labour peace, as proposed in my colleague's bill.

I am particularly aware of the devastating effects that hiring replacement workers can have. To illustrate the effects, I would like to tell a few stories.

Many members may remember, others perhaps all too well, the infamous dispute at United Aircraft in Longueuil. This dispute deeply affected the history of Quebec's labour movement. In 1974, 2,200 union members, members of the United Auto Workers, went on strike.

These workers were victims of numerous attempts at intimidation and provocation by the employer, who did not hesitate to hire scabs who, furthermore, came from around the world to replace the union members.

Eight hundred of these workers stood strong until the end and then returned to work. Others, however, did not get this chance and bowed under family and financial pressure.

That strike and the sacrifice of those who went on strike must never be forgotten. On the contrary, it must be a lesson to us and

Supply

guide us toward concrete and positive actions. Above all, we must not forget those obscure workers whose dignity and rights were, in several cases, trampled on.

However, one must use the positive aspects of those stories to build the future. There were positive effects, in fact, and it took René Lévesque, who respected workers' rights, to understand that those shortcomings had to be corrected and to bring the National Assembly to pass anti-scab legislation in 1977. René Lévesque had understood how important it is to respect workers' rights.

This is exactly what I am asking all my colleagues in this House to do today, that is, to understand how important it is to respect workers' rights. Too much energies and too many resources were wasted on these disputes for them to be forever forgotten. And, above all, we must be very careful not to lapse into old habits.

More than a quarter of a century later and in spite of the pressure the Bloc Québécois has been exerting for ten years, the federal government has still not updated the Canada Labour Code as René Lévesque courageously updated its Quebec counterpart.

If the government had taken its responsibilities, I would not have to tell you other stories, stories from the very recent past. We need only think of Vidéotron, Secur. History repeated itself once again. Management ruined the atmosphere of trust by hiring scabs.

This has to stop. As parliamentarians, we have a great responsibility in this regard, and also the power that is required to take action. We have the responsibility to ensure that collective bargaining is done with the greatest respect, in the greatest harmony and equity, both for workers and employers. Quite frankly, why would anyone be opposed to promoting harmony respect of the parties' rights, in collective bargaining?

A dispute is never healthy, particularly if it lasts long, and when this happens, it gets worse.

• (1705)

It helps no one. It hurts businesses, it hurts workers and it even hurts local economies. Nothing justifies such an attitude.

This is why I urge my colleagues today to remember, as these workers remember. They should be inspired by these stories and see to it that whenever we have to go through such degrading attacks on workers' rights.

I urge those who are listening to us, particularly the people in my riding, to mobilize, to be heard and, in the end, to make the federal government come to its senses.

Experience shows that prohibiting the hiring of scabs helps to improve bargaining and, in particular, to keep management from being tempted to let disputes drag on.

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Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on this day, May 1. I join with my colleagues who offered their best wishes to the workers in their ridings, and I too offer my best wishes to the workers in Champlain.

Today, my thoughts are especially for workers who have lost their job, for instance, because of the softwood lumber dispute, a dispute that has still not been settled by the government, which is just standing by and sitting on its hands.

Earlier I heard a speech that shocked me, I am talking about the last Liberal member who spoke. He says he is the son of a unionist, but I must say it has been a very long time since I heard such a depressing speech for the working class and workers, and such contempt for workers. I do not know how to say it otherwise, but it makes me seethe to hear, in 2003, speeches it would have been difficult to accept in 1975. These speeches are 30 years behind the times.

I was a member of the Quebec National Assembly when René Lévesque asked his labour minister, Pierre-Marc Johnson, to introduce anti-scab legislation. There is a reason we passed it. There is a reason it helped the situation in Quebec.

We have the numbers to prove it. My colleague from Joliette mentioned them at length since, in an earlier life, he worked in the labour movement. The situation in Quebec as far as strikes are concerned has improved greatly since 1977. It is not true that it has been detrimental to businesses. It has actually helped businesses. Days of work lost to strikes and violence on job sites have never benefited anybody. It is of no benefit for the evolution of society.

When Mr. Lévesque asked us to pass an anti-scab bill in Quebec, I had the pleasure of hearing great speeches. I also had the displeasure of hearing speeches from those who opposed it. Those speeches were similar to the one we just heard from the Liberal member. This bill brings to my mind good memories, but also bad memories linked to people who are against workers and the evolution of work and who despise the working class.

It does not surprise me to see that people like those opposite have stolen \$45 billion from the employment insurance fund. That does not surprise me at all. This money is now paying society's debts. But it was not the workers who got the society into debt. With that kind of attitude, we wonder how Quebecers would be defended if all we had were Liberal members. We can ask the workers how well protected they would be in Quebec if all we had was this kind of member of Parliament.

Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois is on the job. This is the eleventh time we are presenting a bill asking the government to show some conscience with respect to the workers and help redress the balance of power in labour disputes.

I still hope that the government will do it, because I know the hon. members opposite. In the corridors we sometimes meet members who cannot object to a motion or a bill. I know this law has improved things in Quebec. We have said so.

In 1976, before the Quebec law was passed, the average strike lasted 39 days. In 2002, strikes lasted 15 days. And is someone going to say that this is not good for all people, including the bosses?

The workers are not the only ones who lose out in a strike: bosses do too.

• (1710)

And then there are all the problems generated by these disputes which, after the strike is over, take months to solve. And that is because scabs upset the balance of power and prevented the strike from being settled properly.

I would like to commend the hon. member for Laurentides for raising this issue today. I hope we will debate it as often as possible, so that the hon. members across the way will one day realize that they should pass such a law. It is rather curious that, when they were in opposition, they supported an anti-strikebreaking law. Now they are in power and the minister tells us today that everything she has done has had the blessing of the workers and the unions.

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: That is not true.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: The hon. member for Jonquière, who was part of that group, tells us it is utterly false, that the union never agreed. It must have given in, because it was that or nothing.

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: Arm-twisting.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Yes, arm-twisting. That is exactly what happened. Workers have been asking for a proper balance of power for a long time. Workers do not necessarily want a strike that goes bad. Workers want their rights to be respected.

Balance is achieved by ensuring that the use of scabs is no longer allowed, as the Quebec Labour Code already provides, with the result that there are no scabs working during a strike, and strikes get settled.

I would like the speech of the Liberal member who just spoke to be distributed to all the workers in our region who, because of the lumber issue, among other issues, find themselves in a precarious position. I would like them to hear him, see him, and read what he said. They would find it hard to believe what we are hearing from the people opposite on this issue.

It is imperative that this bill be passed when it comes back before the House. Hon. members must be guided by their conscience and pass this bill.

At the time when the anti-scab legislation was passed in Quebec, Minister Johnson gave a great speech. I recall another minister: Pierre Marois. He had been involved with the labour movement. He was a leading expert on the Labour Code. Pierre Marois was the Minister responsible for Social Development. He made a speech which emphasized the social aspect and the fact that we have no right letting disputes go unresolved and no right upsetting the balance of power between management and labour at a time as difficult as the time of a strike.

Pierre Marois demonstrated the need for collective awareness, an awareness strong enough to ensure that these issues are settled as quickly as possible.

Supply

I am getting on in years, but I have this dream that before I retire, I will get to hear speeches that will advance the social issue, the community and the sense of humanity. Speeches should be made, which are more fitting of a big, beautiful Canada; after all, it is being called the best country in the world. The speeches should better reflect who we are, and who the workers are. Society should be the one developing legislation fostering greater social justice.

● (1715)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak to the Bloc Québécois motion calling on this House to recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strikebreakers.

Today, we are asking the House to recognize the need to accept the innovative measures taken not only by the Government of Quebec but by the whole province when anti-scab legislation was passed in 1977 and implemented in 1978. We want this same philosophy and this same approach to serve as the basis for amending the Canada Labour Code.

Members will recall that this fundamental change, which was an important step forward in Quebec with regard to workers' rights when it was made in 1977 and implemented in 1978, came after a dispute at a company located in the riding of the member for Longueuil, namely the United Aircraft dispute.

At that time, Quebecers and more particularly the Government of Quebec clearly indicated that it was fundamental to do something to avoid or limit considerably the possibility for an employer to use replacement workers.

It was an innovative measure at the time, but today, we basically believe that this approach and this philosophy that have to do with respecting workers' rights must be reflected in the Canada Labour Code.

Why must we make these fundamental changes? First because we believe that it will civilize labour disputes as well as the whole approach with regard to labour relations. We think that protecting the rights of workers may, in the end, create greater equality among people. So it is good for labour relations. Moreover, it naturally promotes industrial peace. I will come back to that later.

We have also seen that the number of dispute days in Quebec has been reduced considerably over the last few years thanks in part to the measures taken by the government. Finally, the Quebec experience is not meaningless in terms of results since it prevents the creation of two classes of workers who are treated differently in the workplace.

This is certainly beneficial, and Quebec has used all the means at its disposal to protect the workers themselves.

Looking at the situation in Quebec, and seeing the results of the measures adopted by the Government of Quebec in 1977, one can see the results are conclusive. This can be seen by the fact that the average number of work days lost in 1976, and thus before enactment of the Quebec legislation, was 39.4. In 1979, after the act came into being, the average dropped to 32.8 days. In 2001, it was around 27.4 days, or 12 days less on the average than in 1976. This

proves that the Quebec approach has greatly reduced the number of days lost.

What is the advantage of this type of measure, not only for workers, but for companies as well? We know that very often this type of measure can result in increased efficiency and productivity, and so these are not measures that benefit only the workers. In fact, they make it possible for companies to be more competitive and more productive.

● (1720)

We therefore need to realize that this basic right that needs to be added to the Canada Labour Code must be added as soon as possible.

Anti-strikebreaker legislation has also been in place since 1993 in British Columbia. This resulted in a 50% drop in time lost from 1992 to 1993. Not only is the Quebec experiment a convincing one, but what is done elsewhere, in other provinces, other jurisdictions, is also. Particularly in B.C. with its 50% drop. It can also be seen that businesses productivity can be not just maintained but even increased.

Finally, according to other figures, between 1992 to 2003 the average number of days lost was 15.9 under the Quebec labour code, while it was 31.1 days under the Canada Labour Code. This is a difference of over 95.6%. I think this is another outcome that needs to be taken into consideration.

Between 1992 and 2002, the number of days lost per 1,000 employees was 121.3 under the Quebec code and under the Canadian, 266.3 days over that 10 year period. This is a difference of 119.5%. There is certainly a wealth of experience to be drawn upon.

Today, we are hard pressed to understand the attitude of the government opposite. This fight did not begin just today with the Bloc Québécois. The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour who spoke earlier was the first member to introduce a bill on this subject. I remind the hon. members that the Liberal Party of Canada supported that bill. Obviously, the Conservatives did not agree with this Bloc Québécois bill, but the government opposite was the opposition then and it supported the Bloc Québécois initiative because it was ground breaking in many ways in labour relations, which needed improving in Canada.

Today, it is very hard to understand why the Liberals who were saying one thing ten years ago are saying just the opposite now that they are the government.

Today, we want to emphasize one thing. Essentially, we are asking the government to recognize that impressive results have been achieved in Quebec, that the Quebec model, which was designed and passed in 1977 and implemented in 1978, has had a significant impact on workers' rights. And not only that. Another positive result was an improvement in business productivity.

Private Members' Business

Today, we are asking the government opposite to be consistent with its position ten years ago and recognize that the Quebec model is promising and allows more civilized labour relations in the interests of the well-being of workers and business productivity.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the debate throughout the day and I kept hearing about finding a balanced approach with management on one side and labour unions on the other because it is the Canadian way. I heard this from the Minister of Labour, other members of the government and some Alliance members. I must tell those people that they are wrong. This is one of those times when a decision must be made about what is right. When it comes to strikebreaking legislation, to the use of scabs in the workplace, that is wrong and we must outlaw it.

I had a personal experience this past summer on a picket line in Chatham, Ontario, which will live with me for the rest of my life. In the course of that strike a truck was trying to move through the crowd and some of the picketing workers were being forced through to so-called security firm people, who in fact were professional strikebreakers. They were a bunch of goons. I had dealt with the same group of people earlier in January in Windsor. As the truck was going through it was forcing the workers to move toward a yellow line that had been painted on the ground and they were not supposed to cross over that yellow line.

As they were being forced toward that yellow line they were hit, kicked and punched by the strikebreakers, and an incident developed. One man was kicked in the chest, and when he went down he was kicked in the head by one of the strikebreakers. His wife, who went to his aid, was kicked in the chest by one of the macho strikebreakers. The real sadness of this was what happened the week following as a result of the tension on the picket line. One of my constituents was almost killed by one of the strikebreakers when he was doing nothing more than picketing there.

The government must realize that what we saw in the Chatham and Windsor areas this past year can happen anyplace in this country. All of the evidence has been heard today, particularly from my colleagues in the Bloc, about this type of legislation prohibiting that kind of conduct. It will reduce lost work days and increase the potential for peace in those kinds of relationships.

I feel very strongly that this legislation is required. It is no longer a question of consensus building or what has to be done right. If the government does not realize that, it will have the same kind of problems as we had in Windsor and Chatham this past year.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: As the time provided for debate has expired, the proceedings on the motion before the House have concluded.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Trois-Rivières advised me in writing that he was unable to introduce his motion during private members' business on Monday, April 5, 2003. Since it has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence, I am directing the clerk to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence. Private members' hour will thus be cancelled and government orders will begin at 11 a.m.

It being 5.30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN FIREARMS CONTROL PROGRAM

Ms. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Ind. BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should immediately suspend application of the Canadian Firearms Program in order to hold a public inquiry into the reasons for the Program's extraordinary cost overruns, and to submit a structured and detailed strategic plan that would have to be approved in advance by this House.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to begin this first hour of debate on Motion M-387 moved in my name, regarding the Canadian firearms control program. In addition to the fact that we are going to debate my motion, I must say how happy I am to take part in my first debate as an independent Bloc Québécois member.

On February 17, during members' statements, I promised my constituents that I would seize every available opportunity to hound this government. Today's debate is therefore a wonderful opportunity to proudly honour, without hindrance, the promise I made. I am also pleased because this debate is being held in a new context that respects and recognizes, finally, the role of members of Parliament as well as the importance of their initiatives, thanks to the implementation of a new provisional standing order that makes all items of private members' business votable.

On countless occasions I denounced the unfairness of the former procedural rules that discouraged any initiative and frustrated members. This did not further democracy and only hindered Parliament. Accordingly, I hope this new standing order will become permanent.

That said, let me return to today's subject, which is gun control. Incidentally, I have been involved in this issue since the very beginning, that is, since 1989, the year of the massacre at École polytechnique de Montréal, which led to legislation introduced by Kim Campbell, Minister of Justice at the time.

The purpose of that bill was to prohibit automatic weapons converted to semi-automatic weapons, to establish new controls that would apply to military and paramilitary firearms and to introduce greater scrutiny of those applying for authorization to acquire firearms.

Private Members' Business

Fourteen years later I am moving this motion because the issue is still important and it concerns me on three levels. First, as a parliamentarian and citizen who is interested in public safety; second as a firearm owner and big game hunter; and finally, as a taxpayer who cannot accept the government wasting our money as shamefully as it has.

First, let us be clear. In 1995, when Parliament passed the Firearms Act, and I am still very much in favour of gun control, I had to force my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois to support gun control. This was very divisive for our caucus, because many members, mainly from rural ridings, opposed gun control.

I then believed, maybe because I was too confident or optimistic, that the federal government would be able to effectively manage this program, which is under its constitutional jurisdiction.

Incidentally, before infringing upon areas of provincial jurisdiction, the federal government should make sure that it is able to effectively manage programs under its own jurisdiction.

Note that gun control is not an exception in terms of mismanagement of public funds. We only have to think about the sponsorship scandal which resurfaced only a few weeks ago, after a report from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts came to the conclusion that there had been negligence, misconduct and mismanagement of public funds by Public Works Canada. I know someone who must be very happy to be in Denmark right now.

But let us come back to the topic, because if we were to list all cases of mismanagement of federal programs and government cover-ups, it would be hours before we got anywhere near gun control.

Therefore, the purpose of my motion is not to cancel the gun control program but rather to suspend it in order to identify clearly what went wrong and what caused it to go wrong. It is sometimes necessary to take stock and then draw the necessary conclusions.

In the case of gun control, that time has come and the only conclusion we can draw is that this program was a monumental financial failure. It is no use hiding one's head in the sand. It is a tough pronouncement, but a realistic one. The figures say it all.

Unfortunately, it has become obvious that the way the government operates has nothing to do with the rigour and rationality which underlie sound management.

● (1735)

Is it because it is easier to spend other people's money? Is it because of a systemic lack of transparency throughout the government machine? Or is it because of the lack of accountability of senior bureaucrats?

To all three questions, there is only one answer: yes. This shows how deep the malaise is and that it is not exclusive to the firearms program. It is a problem common to the public service as a whole.

As a matter of fact when she published her most-recent report on the quality of financial information, the auditor general said and I quote:

—the systems, policies, and practises for reporting full cost information are not adequate.

Moreover, she stated the obvious when she said:

Being able to associate costs with results makes for more informed choices; but without knowing the full costs of delivering program, the government cannot fully assess the results of these programs.

This is exactly what happened with the firearms program. However, the government insists on keeping everybody in the dark and investing millions of dollars in this program without knowing where and when this waste will stop.

Apart from the officials at the Department of Justice, a few members threatened with expulsion by their leader and some afraid of a snap election, no manager with the least bit of common sense would have accepted to keep on putting money into such a financial disaster without first reassessing the business plan.

In this case, however, there is no business plan. Since its inception, the program has been an comedy of errors replete with improvisation and administrative blunders. As a result, when, on March 25 the government asked us to vote a further \$59 million for the management of this program, it wanted nothing less than another blank cheque while the House was still in the dark as to the reasons for this huge money pit.

Therefore, it is to prevent the government from periodically asking for more money that will only be used to fill in new money pits, or older ones that might reappear, that I am moving this motion today .

There is also another type of confusion going on. Some people confuse the objectives of the gun control program with its management. The gun control program should not be considered a bad program because of the fact that it will have cost us one billion dollars. On the contrary, it is a good program, way too expensive of course, but that is because it was mismanaged.

Of course, by itself, the program will not eliminate crime. However, combined with other measures, it will make an essential contribution to the reduction of the crime rate. The very existence of this program should therefore not be jeopardized.

Besides, apart from the billion dollar cost predicted by the Auditor General, the program has been relatively successful and we have to admit that it is still useful. As of March 8 of this year, 6,100,000 firearms had been registered by 1,446,065 owners. According to some figures, that represents almost 90% of owners.

Private Members' Business

Moreover, on December 1, 1998, the Canadian firearms registry on-line had received 2,328,360 information requests from police officers or other law enforcement representatives. In fact, last March 25, the Canadian Police Association lobbying day, all the police officers I met reiterated their support for the program, saying how useful it was for them in their work.

On another note, as far as accountability and transparency are concerned, the government has a lot of work to do and this is mainly where we have a problem. Since 1995, after the adoption of the Firearms Act, we have had three justice ministers and seen one Auditor General's report, two private reports, one action plan and eventually one billion dollars down the drain. And we still do not know whom to blame.

We are talking about millions of dollars magically disappearing. Worst still, in spite of this scandal that nobody seems to be responsible for, some senior public officials have also been given performance bonuses.

● (1740)

It is really incredible and quite disgusting. There are some very serious weaknesses in the bureaucracy. Obviously, some fundamental management principles are not known or ignored. The time might have come to seriously reassess the capabilities and knowledge of the people in charge of managing the millions of dollars we pay in taxes.

And please do not tell me that we are on the right track with the government action plan that was announced jointly by the justice minister and the solicitor general on February 21. I have never heard such a lot of empty rhetoric and meaningless clichés. In the press release he issued at the time, the justice minister stated, and I quote:

The plan I am announcing today will deliver a gun control program that provides significant public safety benefits, while setting the program on a path to lower costs. The plan will streamline management, improve service to legitimate users of firearms, seek stakeholder, parliamentary, and public input, and strengthen accountability and transparency to Parliament and Canadians.

First, to say that it will set "the program on a path to lower costs" is totally unwarranted since the government has recently approved an additional \$59 million for this program.

Moreover, we already know that the management of this program for the next fiscal year will cost \$13 million more than last year, that is \$113 million instead of \$100 million. So where are the savings? If anybody understands this, I would appreciate it if they could explain it to me because I am convinced that I am not the only one who has difficulty understanding what the minister meant when he talked about "lower costs".

Also, according to the minister, the plan is supposed to streamline management of the program. In this regard, here is the gibberish used by the minister to explain this streamlining. This is also a quote from the press release issued by the Department of Justice on February 21. It said, and I quote:

—to align enforcement operations; streamlining headquarter functions and consolidating processing sites; creating a continuous improvement plan to generate ongoing program efficiencies; establishing national work performance measurements and cost standards; and limiting computer system changes to projects that improve the efficiency of the program.

I want to know if there is a translator in the House. Management will be improved through better management. This is incredible. To me, it means absolutely nothing.

What we should have been told about are the gains and savings that will result from this so-called action plan. I doubt very much that it is by transferring people to other offices or by replacing one bunch of bureaucrats with another one that the government will improve the management of the program.

Considering the scale of the fiasco, we were entitled to expect something structured, dramatic and innovative from the minister, such as turning gun registration over to the private sector. However, it would be out of the question to replace 140 bureaucrats from the Canadian Firearms Centre, located in Miramichi, with 140 employees under contract. This would be like changing four quarters for a dollar.

What I would support instead is placing the management of the registration procedure in the hands of people who have knowledge in this field, that is gunsmiths and firearms dealers. Naturally they would be compensated for their services, as is the case when game is registered.

In short, the last action plan is a perfect illustration of the improvised management that is so typical of the federal government.

For all these reasons, it is essential and even urgent that the government suspend application of the Canadian firearms program, in order to devise a strategy that, for once, will demonstrate a long-term vision. This would be a change from what we are used to seeing from the government these past years.

Consequently, the process must start with a public inquiry into the reasons for the program's extraordinary cost overruns, to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated. Later on, we will be able to devise a strategic plan that will respect all the criteria on quality of financial information, as defined in the last Auditor General's report. Of course, to be implemented, this new plan will have to be approved by the House.

● (1745)

In conclusion, I urge all members who believe in the principles of transparency, accountability and sound management to participate constructively in this debate.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for her motion.

Since she seems to be in favour of gun control and states herself that she was involved in the battle waged by many Canadians to get real gun control after the events she mentioned, particularly the 1989 tragedy at the École polytechnique, I would like to know this. How does she think a gun control program can contribute to public safety and a reduction in the number of crimes? She just touched briefly on this.

Private Members' Business

I would like to know how, from her own experience, real gun control can make a positive contribution to public safety and a reduction in the number of crimes.

Ms. Pierrette Venne: Mr. Speaker, it has been obvious, right from the start, that police officers are asking for gun control to help them in their duties.

As I said earlier, the officers I met when they came to visit and lobby told us clearly that it helped them a lot, that they often made requests to the firearms control information office to get ideas about the people they could go and see following a request for an investigation, and so on, in that area. It has done them a great service.

Yes, I think that in this way it is excellent. I think, and I will say it again, that expenses absolutely must be cut; there absolutely must be a public inquiry so that we can find out where the money has gone and manage this properly in the future.

Yes, I agree, and I have always said so, with gun control, which, like the health services we have mentioned, can sometimes be a way to prevent suicides. Additionally, since gun control began, many applications for firearms acquisition permits have been turned down.

If they were turned down, it was because of the criteria that have been established. Here, too, there has been a lot of screening. That is also due to the registry. Thus, it is very important for it to exist, but the costs must be controlled.

• (1750)

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once more, I would like to thank the honourable member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for putting Motion M-387 forward in the House because this gives me an opportunity to talk about the Canadian firearms program and about the action plan that the government developed last February to make it more efficient and less expensive.

[*English*]

The motion before us today calls upon the government to suspend the application of the Canadian firearms program in order to hold a public inquiry into the cost of the program. Let me explain why this is not in the best interests of Canadians.

The government of Canada remains firmly committed to both major components of the gun control program; that is the licensing component and the registration component. Both are key elements in achieving the program's public safety objectives.

The government has the legal obligation to administer Canada's firearms program. Suspension of the program could not occur without repealing the Firearms Act and the related Criminal Code section which deal with firearms and which were passed almost eight years ago. This would not be in the public interest. The firearms program, as the member of Parliament for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert has herself stated, has already proven to be an effective tool to protect the safety of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind the House that, as the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert said previously, the government's gun control program has the support of the Canadian Police Association and the

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. These people are experts in the area of public security and they know that the program is working.

May I note here that the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert herself recognized the efficiency and the real positive benefits from the firearms registry program.

This program yields significant savings for police services. As part of this program, police are no longer burdened with the paperwork and administration involved in accepting firearms applications because these are now mailed to a processing site. This frees up significant police time and resources that can be redirected to investigations and policing.

The information contained in the firearms databank is very useful to the enforcement agencies, our police forces. For example, police have ready access to information on firearms, information regarding the very existence of firearms, which ensures a certain protection in potentially dangerous situations. This information is also used in countering firearm trafficking and theft. Police consult the databank about 2000 times a day for investigative purposes.

Safety training courses are integral to the firearms registry program. Anyone wishing to purchase or borrow a firearm must first pass a firearm handling safety course developed by the Canadian Firearms Centre.

• (1755)

[*English*]

The safety courses are taught by qualified inspectors who are located in thousands of communities across the country in both rural and urban Canada. Hundreds of thousands of individuals and minors have completed the required safety training. The courses teach people how to handle guns, how to transport a firearm and how to safely store firearms.

Safety training plays an important part in preventing accidents and promoting the safe use of firearms. Just as licensing and registration promote responsibility toward one's firearms, safety training ensures that those who wish to acquire firearms have the knowledge they need to do so safely.

The motion of the hon. member refers to cost overruns within the firearms program. Let me address that. It has been well established by all of the various reports, which the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert mentioned in her speech, that implementing the firearms program has been a logistical and technical challenge. Program development included many changes in the first five years as a result of evolving policy and administrative needs.

Let me give one example. After the legislation allowing the creation of the registry was adopted and as the registry was being put into place, the police community, after its own consultations, requested that it be able to access the firearm data online. Such a request meant that the program needed to be overhauled because the information system that had been put into place did not allow for that. That obviously required further funds and meant that the costs were then higher.

Private Members' Business

Higher costs were the result of several factors, one of which I just mentioned but let me mention a few others. One of the factors that created higher costs was the delay coming into force of the Firearms Act. Another was the development of the new information technology infrastructure. Another was the opting out of the program by some provinces and territories which resulted in significant one-time costs to the federal government when it had to assume responsibilities for administration in these jurisdictions. Another factor which contributed to higher costs was the loss of anticipated revenues because fees were waived as a result of a restructuring of the program and/or to encourage people to get their licences and firearm registration certificates.

[*Translation*]

Since the Auditor General presented her report, our position could not be clearer. The government has recognized the merits of these recommendations and is taking steps to improve the program's cost-effectiveness.

On February 21, 2003, as the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert mentioned, the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General announced an action plan to improve the management and operation of the firearms registry program. These improvements will make the program more efficient and less costly while improving transparency and quality of service for legitimate firearms owners.

The action plan contains several significant measures to simply the program and make it more efficient. These measures include transferring responsibility for the firearms registry from the Minister of Justice to the Solicitor General. This was done on April 14.

[*English*]

The action plan also states that national standards and performance measures for client service and program delivery will be developed and that an external advisory committee will be established to provide regular advice and feedback on ways to improve program delivery.

There are a number of features in the action plan but the crucial point here is for Motion No. 387 to go forward, it would mean repealing the Firearms Act and related Criminal Code dispositions. That is not something which is in the best interests of Canadians.

The member herself has stated that what the program and the register have done have been of positive benefits to Canadians, to the community and to public safety. I am sure she would not want to see the Firearms Act repealed, and the only way to do what she is asking is to repeal the Firearms Act.

● (1800)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the MP for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for bringing forth this very timely motion. It needs to be debated and discussed. It is a good thing also that these things are now votable.

The purpose of the motion is self-explanatory. Motion No. 387 is a votable motion calling for a public inquiry to get to the bottom of the unprecedented cost overruns in the implementation of the Canadian firearms program and to prepare a real action plan for the approval of Parliament.

Remember that members of Parliament were promised it would only cost \$2 million to taxpayers to fully implement the program. The government has known for two years that the program would cost more than \$1 billion but only provided these estimates to Parliament on March 27. The government has also admitted that the program will not be fully implemented until at least 2008.

When a program is overbudget, 500 times what it was originally slated to cost, that is reason enough for this motion to be supported and a full investigation to take place.

The estimates for 2003-04 call for spending a further \$113 million plus the \$15 million overrun that the ASD contractor has indicated is needed.

The government estimates are still grossly understated because the justice departments's plans and priorities report for 2003-04 was tabled in March with 111 blanks. These are areas where the government could not tell us how much money is being spent; 111 blanks that have to be filled in with past expenditures and future spending forecasts by departments. We have been waiting five months since the Auditor General's report for answers as to how much it will cost.

A government that is unable to give an account of how much a major program costs is another reason that this motion should be supported.

These are sufficient reasons for everyone in this House to vote yes to this motion.

Additionally, the government so far has refused to provide the unreported costs of enforcement. The unreported costs of compliance, as identified by the Auditor General, have not been reported to Parliament. The Library of Parliament estimated that enforcement costs alone could easily cost one billion more dollars.

The government has also refused to release a cost benefit analysis. A 115 page report on the economic impact of the Firearms Act was not released either because the government declared these documents to be cabinet secrets. We have a right to know.

The motion is also consistent with calls by eight provinces and three territories to have the program suspended pending a value for money audit by the Auditor General. This is what the provinces and territories are asking for. The Auditor General has stated that she will not conduct a value for money audit until at least 2005.

A public inquiry is desirable in this instance because critical questions still need to be answered before another \$1 billion is wasted and because the government persists in the policy of keeping Parliament and the public in the dark. We need this inquiry.

The motion may require an amendment to ensure that some elements of the program continue while the public inquiry is being conducted, such as background checks for people wishing to acquire firearms, amnesty to ensure persons are not criminalized for unfinished paperwork and so on.

I want to give a list of reasons as to why we need a public inquiry into the federal firearms fiasco beyond what I have just mentioned.

The first reason is the government still has not admitted what the total cost of the firearms program has been so far.

The second reason is the government still has not admitted what the total cost will be to fully implement the firearms program. That is another big reason to support this motion.

The third reason is that Treasury Board officials finally admitted that even they will not know the total cost of the firearms program until the fall.

The fourth reason is the government has been hiding the truth from Parliament and the public for seven years and has not been forthright in the last five months.

The fifth reason is the government refuses to reveal the costs of enforcement and compliance as recommended by the Auditor General.

The sixth reason is the government refuses to release the cost benefit analysis on the firearms program by declaring it a cabinet secret. There is no excuse for this.

• (1805)

The seventh reason is it is 21 months later and the Privacy Commissioner is still waiting for the justice minister's response to his many recommendations about the mishandling of private and personal information in the firearms program.

The eighth reason we need this inquiry is there are more than 500,000 gun owners in Canada who failed to obtain a firearms licence and cannot register their guns without one.

The ninth reason is more than 600,000 individuals still have to register or re-register their firearms before the end of June and the justice department officials admitted they have received only 53,000 letters of intent to register, to comply with the legislation. That means possibly half a million gun owners out there who cannot comply with the legislation legally are going to be made criminals, are criminals, and there is nothing they can do about it.

The tenth reason is the government refuses to release the entire 115 page report on the economic impact of the gun registry, once again declaring it a cabinet secret. Canadians have the right to know. The government made some claims a few moments ago about how effective the gun registry is, why we cannot put it on hold. If that is true, and I seriously doubt that because the government's impression that this is gun control is really spurious if one examines it, but we have the right to know what the economic impact is on Canadians. That should be told to us. We have the right to know what the cost benefit analysis is as well.

The eleventh reason is up to 10 million guns still have to be registered. For \$1 billion we have likely registered only one-third of the guns in Canada. There are 10 million still to be registered.

The twelfth reason is five million registered firearms still have to be verified by the RCMP. The entire network of verification was scrapped so we have a bunch of garbage in the registry system. It is totally inaccurate. The police cannot use it.

Private Members' Business

The thirteenth reason is 78% of the firearms registered have blank or unknown entries. These are errors in the system. Some 78% of the registration certificates sent in have errors on them. This error rate also is clear evidence that it is a huge garbage collection system that is really not useful to anyone.

The fourteenth reason is there are 813,000 firearms that have been registered without serial numbers. They cannot be uniquely identified. That was one of the reasons the government originally said it wanted to have this, so that all firearms could be uniquely identified.

The fifteenth reason is there are 131,000 persons prohibited from owning firearms by the courts who are not tracked by the system. There are 9,000 persons who have had their firearms refused or removed and are not tracked by the system.

The sixteenth reason is tens of thousands of licensed gun owners cannot be located in the system. Tens of thousands have information there and nobody can find it.

The seventeenth reason is eight provinces and three territories want the gun registry suspended or scrapped. The government overrode them. It did not consult with them. That accounts for the huge mess we have.

The eighteenth reason is the western provinces are refusing to prosecute Firearms Act offences. If this is criminal law and it is useful, why would the provinces want the federal government to get rid of it?

The nineteenth reason is three constitutional challenges by the aboriginal people are currently before the courts and the gun registration for the Inuit people has been stopped by the court injunction. We are going to have huge court cases in regard to this. It is going to cost us a lot more money and in the end it will likely be thrown out anyway.

In conclusion, I do not agree with all the comments made by the MP who brought this forward but this is an excellent motion. It should be supported by everyone in the House and maybe we can make some minor amendments to it. The assumptions the government makes that this is effective gun control also need to be examined. I do believe Canadians have the right to know how much this costs. We need a public inquiry into this. There should be an investigation.

I thank the member for bringing this motion forward. I hope all MPs in the House will support it.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the motion put forward by the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert states, and I quote:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should immediately suspend application of the Canadian Firearms Programme in order to hold a public inquiry into the reasons for the Programme's extraordinary cost overruns, and to submit a structured and detailed strategic plan that would have to be approved in advance by this House.

Private Members' Business

I rise today as the Bloc Québécois critic on issues relating to the Solicitor General, to inform hon. members of the position of the Bloc Québécois on the motion put forward by the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

I have been following with great interest the development of firearms program for quite a while, in my capacity as the Bloc Québécois critic for justice. First, I wish to point out that we oppose the motion as it stands. I could eventually receive our support. I will discuss later the amendment I would like to propose.

We oppose the motion, as it stands, despite the fact that we do believe light has to be shed on the mismanagement of the firearms program.

We want to make it clear that we still believe in the program. It is essential, and we support its implementation. Like the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, we feel the need for an independent public inquiry to shed light on what happened during the implementation of this program that resulted in a financial fiasco. However, this program must not be suspended for any reason.

While the Bloc Québécois supports the program, we find it regrettable that those in charge of the program did such a sloppy job implementing it, with disastrous results. We must admit that this program is a managerial disaster.

The Minister of Justice recently tabled reports designed to determine the financial integrity of the program and to improve its poor management. At the time of their tabling, we expressed skepticism about the relevance of these reports.

We were skeptical, and disappointed with how long it took to release them. Since then, we have naturally become distrustful of any explanation provided by a minister on anything having to do with the so-called transparency of this centralizing government. How are we be expected to believe any explanation regarding this government's incompetence? Let me just cite the sponsorships scandal, which opened our eyes about the reliability of ministers' explanations.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the Bloc Québécois disagrees with the current wording of the motion, because it asks that the program be suspended. This would undo completely all that has been done so far by Quebeckers under this program, and this would be very unfortunate.

I think that it is important to preserve all the work done by Quebec experts. I am thinking specifically about the expert work done by the officers and members of the Sûreté du Québec. It is important to mention that this work is recognized by all stakeholders in this issue, including the Liberal federal government. So we would be in favour of the motion, of course with an amendment that would not specify suspension, but that would call for a public inquiry. It would be very good if the wording of the motion were amended accordingly.

The Bloc Québécois has always supported the principle behind the firearms program and we will continue to do so. However, we also believe that we must know the full details of the reasons that have led to this intrusion into the management of the program.

Consequently, we cannot support the request that the firearms program be suspended, because we do not know how long such an inquiry might last, which may well jeopardize the program.

As I said earlier, we believe that this program must continue. It must certainly be reviewed, corrected and studied, but it must absolutely not be abolished or even suspended.

Consequently, we would be in favour of an independent public inquiry that would allow us to get to the bottom of what led to these uncontrollable cost overruns, provided of course that the program continues during this inquiry.

● (1815)

It is a concern to see that this problem was only discovered because of the insistence of opposition members. It is also a concern to realize that it would appear that the government was not aware of the disastrous situation. How could this be? It is also a concern to realize that if it were aware of it, it waited that long to inquire into the problem. I find it inconceivable that no one at the Department of Justice saw fit to deal with the crisis before it got out of control. However, this is exactly what happened. We cannot accept it.

This is a blatant example of the laissez-faire attitude of the federal government, which preferred to take advantage of its position of power, free from any public oversight, and, what is more, free from any parliamentary oversight. Once more, elected representatives were kept in the dark, and this too is unacceptable.

All this is very indicative of the attitude of the federal government toward the public. It would appear that public interest is no longer at the heart of its policies, something the Bloc Québécois has been criticizing for quite a long time.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the government is losing touch with the public to whom it is accountable by preventing parliamentarians from properly playing their role of elected representatives. True, this program is worthwhile and necessary, and must be maintained. However, we are being kept in the dark as to its implementation and this is why we believe it is time to an independent public inquiry were held, without shutting the program down.

Yes, the thrust of the program is good, and this is why the Bloc Québécois is also asking that it be implemented provided of course that we get to the bottom of this fiasco. It is high time to put an end to the unacceptable behaviour of the federal government, which is delighted with the inept and flawed management of such an important and necessary program.

I find it very sad that the legitimacy of this program is threatened by such systemic mismanagement. In spite of what the minister said in trying to justify this financial fiasco, this program is necessary. We must get to the bottom of this administrative mess in order to deal with the root causes of this inept management.

The Bloc Québécois emphasizes that this government needs to assume responsibility and speak out against those responsible for this administrative fiasco so that the necessary sanctions may be applied. The time for keeping silent is past. Our role as parliamentarians is to represent our fellow citizens and to take action.

Private Members' Business

The public has had enough of secrecy. The public has had enough of feeble excuses from this government for its mistakes. The time has come to do something. It is time to have a clear explanation of what happened in this administrative and financial disaster.

Parliamentarians are entitled to ask any and all questions of this central government in order to find out all the details about how this useful and necessary program turned into a questionable undertaking.

As I have said, we are opposed to any suspension, regardless of duration. We might be able to support an independent public inquiry if that could help cast some light on what lies behind the financial disaster of the Firearms Control Program, provided this does not affect its continuation.

We are therefore opposed to the motion as it is now worded, and as I have said, I will be proposing an amendment immediately after I speak. As it stands, this would endanger the very existence of the program, and its purpose of protecting the public.

Firearms control is surrounded by numerous myths, it is true, but concealing the details surrounding the financial fiasco will only create some real concerns about the federal government's credibility, concerns that are wholly justified.

In closing, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting the word "suspend" and substituting the following: "study the".

• (1820)

The Deputy Speaker: As for the wording proposed, I rule that it is in order.

I would now like to ask the member who moved the motion if she would consent to having it modified.

Ms. Pierrette Venne: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have already been consulted on this, and I fully support the amendment.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House to speak to the motion put forward by the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. We have just had an amendment placed before the House, but the original motion that was suggested by the member reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should immediately suspend application of the Canadian Firearms Programme in order to hold a public inquiry into the reasons for the programme's extraordinary cost overruns, and to submit a structured and detailed strategic plan that would have to be approved in advance by this House.

I realize that the amendment has now been put and the member has accepted it, but I did want to say that we in the NDP, while we understand the intent of the member's motion to draw attention to the need for further scrutiny of the massive mismanagement of the gun registration program, find that the motion as worded and laid out in the House today is very problematic. It is problematic for us in that it requires the whole program to be suspended.

It is important to note that two-thirds of the firearms program, although many people refer to it as the gun registry program or the gun control program, has to do with the licensing of gun owners. Certainly, from the point of view of the NDP, we support the

licensing of gun owners. It is something that is often overlooked in terms of what the program is actually about because the attention has been focused on the gun registry. It is important to note that the majority of the costs of the program are associated with the licensing.

There is a lot of information that is not known by members of the House in terms of what has taken place with the program. I have been following some of the debate, not only in the House but also in committees, and I know that the public accounts committee has been tracking and monitoring the program.

We are not talking about a small cost overrun of a program where we would go through the estimates, pick up on something, and notice there was a problem. Then through a committee we would begin to ask questions. We are not talking about a small overrun of 5% or 10%. Even that in some circumstances would be a serious issue. We are talking about a program which has a difference of about 500 times the original estimate, something with which the public accounts committee has been grappling.

As recently as March 17, 2003, our finance critic, the member for Winnipeg North Centre, was doing an excellent job in committee questioning the President of the Treasury Board as to why, when in 1999 a \$41 million contingency fund was established, this would not have set off all kinds of alarm bells to which all departments would have been alerted? Why would there not have been some sort of extraordinary program put in place immediately to deal with what was a massive contingency that the government was forced to bring forward. It is interesting, in reading through the records of the public accounts committee, what the President of the Treasury Board said on March 17:

At present, as President of Treasury Board, I transmit those reports to Parliament. They are not checked line by line by the Treasury Board Secretariat. It is only after they are tabled that some problems may come to light.

She goes on to say:

...the situation has also sent a strong message to the Treasury Board Secretariat, which has to be much more proactive in overseeing information quality.

• (1825)

I certainly appreciate the comment from the President of the Treasury Board, but it is really mind-boggling to think of a major project such as this when in fact in earlier testimony the Auditor General has made it very clear that the firearms and the gun registry program was classified as a major crown project and that as a result certain rigorous reporting requirements should have been met. Given that context and that history, it really is quite astounding that even when the first problems came to light and these massive contingencies began to emerge in terms of a financial commitment by the government to pour money into this program, still there was nothing that was done in terms of an emergency response or an accounting through the House, which could have corrected the problem at that time.

I think this has really highlighted a major problem within government operations. In fact, as I have remarked before in the House, if we had a culture and an environment where estimates were treated more seriously in the committee process, maybe again this would have been a procedure whereby these serious problems would have come to light earlier for members of the House to address.

Adjournment Debate

Clearly, the onus is on the government's side. The onus for the management of this program is on the government's side.

I would say that the need for an inquiry is something that is very strongly supported. Within our own caucus we have members who strongly support gun registration. We have other members who have serious problems with the registration aspect on a matter of principle. Our leader, Jack Layton, supports gun registration, but all of us have been deeply concerned about the mismanagement of this program and how the government itself, through its lack of foresight and through its lack of transparency and accountability, has actually created the crisis that now places this program in jeopardy. In fact, the very credibility of the government is one of the issues that we are debating in examining this program.

The amendment has been placed before the House. The motion has now been amended. We in the NDP believe that it is necessary to have a thorough investigation of what has taken place here. We want to ensure that there is full transparency and accountability to Parliament for this program and for the expenditures that have happened in the past and are now being sought for the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, the first question asked on the SARS issue in the House came from this party, me personally, on March 21 when I put the question to the health minister and the response came from her parliamentary secretary. We knew from the get-go that Canada was in trouble on this file. I want to go back to exactly how the parliamentary secretary, on instructions from the Minister of Health, answered that question.

I wanted to know what we were doing as a country to contain and control that disease. Quoting directly from *Hansard* of March 21 of this year, this is what the parliamentary secretary said on behalf of the Minister of Health:

We know that it is not a real threat because the virus has been traced back to Hong Kong. There have only been a few cases in Canada that have come from there.

We know it is a real threat. We know that the Government of Canada has not handled it well at all, the reason being that there was a total lack of leadership on this file.

You have heard this speech before, Mr. Speaker, because you were in the chair the other night when we had an emergency debate on SARS. That emergency debate was not brought to the floor of the House by the government nor any of the other opposition parties in the House. That emergency debate was brought to the floor of the House of Commons by the Progressive Conservative Party, by me personally, as the health critic.

The Prime Minister takes great delight in pointing down into this corner and saying that the fifth party in the House of Commons is the smallest party, and he is absolutely right. We are the smallest party. However we took this issue seriously and we wanted it brought to the floor of the House of Commons. We were the ones who forced that debate on the floor of the House of Commons.

Until that night, the Minister of Health never stood in her place to take responsibility for that issue. She simply did not do that. She was basically hiding on the issue. She was hiding on the most critical health issue probably in the history of Canada. The minister was not to be seen. I am not making this up as I go along. Her own cabinet colleague confirmed she was in hiding.

In addition to the health minister being in hiding, the Prime Minister himself was on an extended golf vacation in South America. There is an old expression that when the going gets tough, the tough get going, but with the Prime Minister, the expression is, when the going gets tough, the tough go golfing. There was an absolute absence of leadership on this file.

I am looking forward to hearing how the parliamentary secretary will respond this evening. I want him to specifically explain his statement when he told us in the House on March 21 that it was "not a real threat". How could it be anything but a real threat when there is no cure, when there is only containment and control, none of which the Government of Canada exercised?

• (1830)

[Translation]

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously my colleague from New Brunswick raises a question that is both relevant and timely.

I am therefore pleased to speak today, to be able to share with the House and with Canadians the meaningful measures taken by the Government of Canada, and Health Canada in particular, to deal with severe acute respiratory syndrome.

Since the first case of SARS was identified in Canada in early March, we have made a great deal of progress. We must be clear. Our priority is to protect the health and welfare—

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay: I hear some noise in the House. Is it just me? In any case, it is annoying me.

Our priority is to protect the health and welfare of Canadians.

The member, in her question on March 21, asked if the Minister of Health had met with her provincial counterparts. My main message is that the minister and all those involved at the federal level are working day and night with their provincial, territorial and international partners to ensure that measures are in place to contain the spread of SARS.

We are actively working with our partners in the six targeted sectors: investigation, diagnosis, laboratory, infection control, travel treatment and emergency response.

Let me elaborate on how the minister has co-operated not only with her provincial counterparts but also with all the authorities involved in this issue. We have implemented measures at airports, and these measures are improved as required to stop the spread of SARS.

We have sent 14 epidemiologist and infectious disease experts to Toronto to take part in the analysis. At the national microbiology laboratory and elsewhere, our experts and the scientific community are doing active research to find the cause of SARS in order to develop an effective diagnostic test while examining the possibility of developing a vaccine.

We have implemented measures to protect our blood system. We have provided detailed clinical directives to prevent infection. We have made recommendations regarding measures to be taken in public health care institutions.

We just completed today a meeting with international experts in Toronto to review what is known about SARS. This conference was called by the federal health minister. On the national stage, Canada was one of the first countries to follow up on the WHO recommendations regarding passenger screening. The WHO has recognized the transparency that we have shown in this matter.

We will continue our relentless efforts to stop the spread of SARS and to protect the health of Canadians. Obviously, other things will surface because there is still a lot of unknown with regard to this issue. However, the important thing is to continue working together to contain this disease, which we have already done since all cases have been tracked to the initial point.

• (1835)

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I can hardly believe what the parliamentary secretary said. He is the same man who, on behalf of the Minister of Health, stood in the House and on the first question from the opposition on the containment and control of SARS, said with his own two lips, "We know that this is not a real threat". How could he possibly say that? He then went on to talk about what the health minister did.

Adjournment Debate

The health minister was scrambling after the fact, trying to make up for lost time and mistakes that were made on the part of her ministry because she paid no attention to the file, along with the Prime Minister, I might add, who also paid no attention to it.

Both the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister were partners in neglect on this file. I think the record will show it, and the Canadian public will not forgive them for mishandling the biggest health crisis in Canada's history. Thank goodness it is now under control because of the good work of our health care officials, nurses and doctors, not the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide some information. On April 3, Dr. David Heymann, the executive director of the communicable diseases unit, indicated that "Canada is doing an exemplary activity and much of what has been going on in Canada, including the system of notifying airline passengers and of screening airline passengers, has been shared with other countries as an example of best practices".

Today, May 1, here is what Dr. Heymann had to say after the Toronto conference.

[English]

He also said, "Canada was doing everything right, including screening passengers as they left.

[Translation]

Obviously, when we look at the situation as a whole, we can say that an excellent job has been done and I am very proud of the minister's part in it. She was the quarterback who made sure that all the stakeholders countrywide were in place to ensure that the disease was monitored.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:38 p.m.)

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