



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, June 23, 2011
(Part A)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 23, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 11 of the Lobbying Act, to lay upon the table the report of the Commissioner of Lobbying for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2011.

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[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The Speaker: I also have the honour to lay upon the table the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's 2010 annual report.

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[*English*]

YUKON LAND CLAIMS AND SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENTS

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the 2007-2009 biennial report of the Yukon land claims and self-government agreements.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Access to Information Act (response time).

She said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to ensure that timely responses to access to information requests are made. Delays have been quite common with these requests and the Canadian public deserve timely responses to their requests.

The bill would require that a report be sent to the requester setting out a full explanation for the delay and that it include a projected completion date.

I have made many access requests and have received lots of apologies, but months and months, even a year and a half later, I still had not received the information I required.

The bill would also require that the Information Commissioner include outstanding requests in his or her annual report to Parliament.

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

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INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-254, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act and the Employment Insurance Act (severance pay).

She said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to assist people who lose their jobs and enable them to better manage their money.

First, to help people save for retirement, the bill would change the Income Tax Act to allow a taxpayer to apply for a one-time contribution of any severance pay to his or her RRSP.

The bill also calls for changes to the Employment Insurance Act to exclude severance pay from the determination of earnings when determining deductions from benefits or the commencement date of the payment of benefits. This would ensure that those who were laid off would receive their benefits sooner. It would enable them to manage to continue with their mortgage payments and to pay for their kids' education instead of waiting and waiting for the employment insurance benefits they deserve. It would also allow older workers to invest their severance in RRSPs without penalty.

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

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BREAST IMPLANT REGISTRY ACT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-255, An Act to establish and maintain a national Breast Implant Registry.

Routine Proceedings

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my former colleague, Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis, for introducing the bill in previous Parliaments. Like her, I believe the bill is very important for the health and safety of women. It is essential that there be a registry of breast implants and that it be maintained so that if there are health risks associated with any implants, the people involved can be identified and contacted.

Women have suffered dreadfully in the past. We do not want to see that happen in future.

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

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CRIMINAL CODE

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-256, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (firefighters).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce this bill.

Firefighters put their lives on the line each and every day to protect us, our homes, our families and our communities. This bill would give added protection to firefighters because it would stiffen penalties for those who would attack or wilfully harm a firefighter.

We know there are plans afoot to get rid of the gun registry. Firefighters have indicated very clearly to me that they would be very concerned if no one knew where the guns were and they were going into a situation where their lives were under threat.

The bill also provides for stiffer penalties for those who directly and purposely commit arson.

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

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●(1010)

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a reintroduction of a previous bill I had. It is timely as it would amend the Food and Drugs Act to ensure there is labelling with regard to genetically modified foods.

Some may ask why this bill is necessary. Canadians are becoming more and more concerned about the food they eat. Independent research is difficult to find when dealing with this topic. There are scientists in the world who have found adverse effects. For example, studies were done on Monsanto's MON 810 corn in Europe. As a result, this corn has been banned in a number of European countries. Bulgaria has a total ban on GMOs because of health and environmental concerns.

This bill is about the choice of Canadians to determine what they want or do not want to eat.

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

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-258, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Canada Post Corporation Act (use of resources by members).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a reintroduction of a previous bill I had. It comes as a result of tampering with previous board of director elections at the Canadian Wheat Board. It says that MPs should not interfere with any democratic process, such as electoral processes, of any organization such as the Canadian Wheat Board or other crown corporations. It is my hope that we will ensure that does not happen.

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

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EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-259, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (goods and services tax on school authorities).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill for school authorities in our country. Currently, school authorities get a GST rebate of 68%. We want to make sure it is 100%, the same that municipalities receive.

School authorities in my riding are suffering because of a lack of adequate funding from the provincial government. They often have to make hard choices which involve decisions to shut down schools, which often pits one small community against another.

This would be a small step the federal government could do to ensure that school authorities had a little more cash as they put forward their budgets and try to overcome those difficulties.

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

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STATISTICS ACT

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-260, An Act to amend the Statistics Act (mandatory long-form census questionnaire).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to reintroduce the bill. It would enshrine the mandatory long form census into the Statistics Act so that never again would we have a census without the comparable data, which unfortunately happened this year. At least in the 2016 census there would be comparable data to 2006 and we would know whether or not our programs were working.

It puts the count in accountability. We hope that members opposite who care about accountability will understand the folly of removing the mandatory long form census and will support this bill.

Routine Proceedings

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

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•(1015)

**NATIONAL HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING
HERITAGE DAY ACT**

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-261, An Act respecting a National Hunting, Trapping and Fishing Heritage Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, what an honour it is once again to introduce this bill. This will be the third time that this bill has been introduced. I am pleased that the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound saw fit to second my bill.

The member and I share a heritage that is shared by many Canadians right across the country from coast to coast to coast. That is the love of the outdoors and conservation. That means being able to harvest deer and other animals, which is a tradition in this country. Hunting and fishing are not only traditions of Canadians but to this day, first nations people subsist on them. Their main way of feeding their families is by hunting and fishing.

My grandfather was a trapper. Many first nations, Inuit and aboriginals right across the country still use trapping as a major source of income.

I am pleased to introduce this bill in the 41st Parliament in the sincere hope that it comes to fruition.

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

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[*Translation*]

HOLIDAYS ACT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-262, An Act to amend the Holidays Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (St. John the Baptist Day).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to introduce my private member's bill, An Act to amend the Holidays Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (St. John the Baptist Day). This bill is seconded by the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and would make St. John the Baptist Day a national holiday in Canada.

As Franco-Ontarians, my family and I have always enjoyed celebrating this holiday. French Canadians across the country have said that they support this important holiday.

I invite all members to support this bill, which will allow us to celebrate our rich Quebec, Franco-Ontarian, Franco-Manitoban, Franco-Albertan and Acadian culture on June 24.

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

[*English*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-263, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act (social condition).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, for seconding this bill.

This bill is important because it would prohibit discrimination on the grounds of social condition. It would prohibit discrimination against people who are experiencing social or economic disadvantage on the basis of their source of income, occupation, level of education, poverty, lack of adequate housing, homelessness, or any other similar circumstance.

There are people in our society who have been economically and socially discriminated against based on those various grounds. They face terrible discrimination, whether it is with respect to housing or employment, or accessing public services or community services. It is important that the Criminal Code be clear, that it would be against the law to discriminate against someone on the basis of poverty.

I am pleased to introduce this bill today. I hope that all members of the House will support the bill, because we recognize discrimination as a serious issue in our society that needs to be addressed.

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

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•(1020)

CRIMINAL CODE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-264, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (social condition).

She said: Mr. Speaker, this is a companion bill to the bill that I just introduced that would amend the Human Rights Act. This bill would amend the Criminal Code on the basis that we need to stop discrimination against people who are poor, disadvantaged or face homelessness.

This bill would create an amendment to the Criminal Code to establish an increased sentence where there is evidence that the offence was motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on the social condition of the victim.

Unfortunately, we do have these kinds of cases in our society, and they are all too common. Therefore, it is important that there be recognition in the Criminal Code that it is a heinous crime and that a sentence be added to address when poor people are bashed, assaulted or discriminated against simply on the basis of their social condition.

I hope that if this bill is enacted and supported by the House, it will prevent that from happening. We need to have equality in this country so that people who have low incomes or who are poor will not face this kind of discrimination.

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

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CANADA POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-265, An Act to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for post-secondary education programs in order to ensure the quality, accessibility, public administration and accountability of those programs.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this bill comes from the history of how our education system is right now. Post-secondary education is not something that is easily accessible and affordable for all Canadians. This bill would enshrine the principles of good quality education and make post-secondary education accessible and affordable to all Canadians.

I sincerely hope that this House will adopt this motion during this session of Parliament.

I am proud to introduce this as my first private members' bill in the Canadian House of Commons.

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

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PETITIONS

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since July 1999, the Chinese Communist Party launched an eradication campaign against the practitioners of Falun Gong. Its policy is to destroy their reputation, bankrupt them financially and eliminate them completely. It has led to the arbitrary detention and torture of hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners for their beliefs.

Eleven Canadian members are serving jail terms of up to 12 years simply for their belief in the Falun Gong faith.

The medical community, the UN Committee Against Torture and many other organizations have shown great concern that living Falun Gong practitioners have been slaughtered en masse for their vital organs for organ transplant tourism.

Free and democratic nations have a responsibility to condemn crimes against humanity and the shameless disregard for human life wherever they occur.

These dozens of petitioners publicly condemn the Chinese Communist regime's illegal persecution against the Falun Gong and ask for help to rescue the listed family members of Canadians who are incarcerated simply for their belief in the Falun Gong faith.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise to present a petition on behalf of literally thousands of Canadians from all across the country calling upon Parliament to recognize that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. They point out that more people die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined and yet, they point out,

Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world.

This petition calls upon Canada to stop spending millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry, as well as to stop blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for any asbestos workers or miners and the communities in which they live in, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

• (1025)

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many families here in Canada have attempted to get family members from abroad, particularly in countries like Philippines and India, to come to Canada to visit.

This petition asks the government to look at the way in which visitor visas are being issued and, in particular, how they are being denied. They ask that the government take more action so that family members from abroad are better able to come to Canada and participate in things such as funerals, weddings and other types of family celebrations. There are so many reasons.

It is with pleasure that I table this particular petition here today.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

RESUMPTION AND CONTINUATION OF POSTAL SERVICES LEGISLATION

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the consideration of Government Business No. 3, I move:

That the debate be not further adjourned.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1 there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their place so the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in this question period.

Given the number of members who have expressed an interest, I will ask members to keep their questions to one minute and the minister's response to one minute. In that way we will try to accommodate as many as possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are all aware, unfortunately, that Canada Post locked out its employees, even though they wanted to go back to the bargaining table to ensure that Canada Post would honour the previous collective agreement and give Canada Post workers the benefits to which they were entitled.

The government refused to ask Canada Post to go back to the bargaining table, stating that it did not wish to interfere in the negotiations. But at the same time, it introduced back-to-work legislation and imposed wages that were lower than those that Canada Post had offered the workers.

My question is for the government. Why is the Conservative government imposing legislation that will give workers lower wages than what had already been agreed to by Canada Post? Why does the Conservative government have such hatred for the workers of this country?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the back to work legislation that is before the House today has a number of different aspects to it. Some are guiding principles.

Indeed, the government has set wages in this bill, wages that had been negotiated at the table between the largest public sector union in Canada and the government. We feel that those are appropriate and fair wages, which is why we put them in there.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think what this House has seen over the course of the last week or so is the government tilting negotiations and labour-government relations completely toward the corporation.

We saw it with the Air Canada legislation and we are seeing it again here today with the heavy-handed approach that the government has taken. Any kind of objectivity or any kind of impartiality has certainly been compromised with the presentation of this legislation.

The point made by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst is absolutely true. To put forward legislation that identifies far less of a wage increase than what was offered by the company makes no sense at all.

Does the minister see the folly in her ways in that she has absolutely kicked organized labour in the teeth? With her actions in the last week, she has sucker-punched organized labour in this country. Is that what we can expect to see over the course of the next four years?

• (1030)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I am a little concerned that the member uses such violent imagery with respect to introducing back to work legislation when his party in 1997, in fact his colleague from Prince Edward Island, introduced the almost exact legislation, supported by the official opposition, which included wage rates that

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were lower than what was contemplated by the parties at the table at the time.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, we in the NDP are deeply disturbed that the government has gone to such extraordinary lengths to, in effect, cut out collective bargaining.

I have heard various ministers, but certainly the Minister of Labour, say in the House that workers can go back to the table and bargain while we are debating this legislation. The reality is, and she said it herself in speaking about the legislation and referring to what happened in 1997, that because the back to work legislation includes wages that were lower than what was offered by the employer, what incentive is there at all for Canada Post to go back to the table?

This has been done deliberately to preclude any collective bargaining taking place. Anybody can see that. How can the minister stand here and say that she hopes they go back and bargain?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, we put this legislation on the notice paper last week and from that point in time there were 72 hours of very intense negotiations. Unfortunately, as has been the case with these parties throughout the time since October, they were unable to conclude a deal. They were unable to even get close.

The issue of wages was not on the table at all. Defining issues had to do with pension, new employees and short-term disability. There were significant issues on the table that they simply could not close the gap on in a short period of time. It is affecting the Canadian economy and Canadian citizens and we are acting.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I proceed with more questions and answers, so that everybody understands the rules, I am advised by the Table that we will operate more or less like question period where questions are primarily given by the opposition, but I will recognize some members of the government. I want to ensure there is an understanding of the rules and fairness.

The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister just said that wages were not the primary issue on the table. Why then would she feel compelled to bring in a wage package lower than what the company had already agreed to? It makes absolutely no sense.

We are now dealing with a closure motion before we have even had a single minute of debate on the bill itself. How can closure be moved on something before debate has even started? It is contempt of the rights of members of Parliament, of Parliament itself and of democracy in this country.

The minister needs to bring this bill forward and have it debated for however long it takes without moving a draconian closure motion before we have even started the debate.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I will answer the second part first. We are moving this motion, of course, because the service is not moving. No mail is being delivered. It is a necessary means by which we can get people back to work.

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With respect to the first part of the question, setting the wage has been done in the past. It is something that makes a lot of sense because, at the end of the day, Canada Post is a crown corporation and we want to ensure there is future viability for the corporation as well.

• (1035)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of my constituents wrote to me. She does not always agree with the government's position or mine. She says that she would like to see the legislation passed and passed quickly. This is what she wrote:

We own a small newspaper business...[of course in my riding]...and we are unable to mail our newspapers to our readers this morning. ... We have staff employed whom we need and they need to be employed. We have customers buying ads which help pay for a community newspaper. All of these Canadians are being inconvenienced.

She personally thinks that we need a government that will legislate for the good and the health of all Canadians. I am sure there are many Canadians facing the same concerns. What would the minister have to say to them and are their concerns part of the reason for taking the action that the minister is taking today?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Souris—Moose Mountain for all his work with respect to employment and labour that he has given to the House, specifically in the last session of Parliament. I am very grateful for the time and for his question.

That is the crux of the issue. We receive thousands of pieces of correspondence, as MPs, as ministers and as the government with respect to the concerns of small business. We heard them, we have introduced the legislation and we will commence the debate today.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister has introduced a wage lower than the collective agreement that was introduced to the workers. I would like the minister to address the families of the postal workers, including those of Windsor and Essex County, who have relied upon this as a job to raise their children, to be able to send them to school and to be able to participate in the local economy. I want her to specifically talk to those families who are now going to get a wage cut and have actually been locked out and have not received a paycheque. Maybe she could address those individual people and their families who are getting a rollback right now, at a time when they actually need support from the government.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, as I have indicated in interviews, I have a family member who is a postal carrier as well. I am fully aware of the impact of the rolling strikes, the lockout, the breakdown of collective bargaining and indeed that the ending of the collective agreement has on families.

However, what we are talking about here is not a wage rollback. What we have indicated is the fair and appropriate wage. The wage we have put in the legislation has been negotiated in both the private and public sectors. It shows what the intention of the government is with respect to the wage and to encourage the parties to collectively bargain, which has not happened. We have not had a collective agreement.

However, at the end of the day, we are responsible to the great taxpayers of Canada. They have the responsibility of being on the

hook for Canada Post. We want to ensure the viability of Canada Post Corporation and these are the appropriate ways to do that.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to correct something the minister said. Back in 1997, the Liberal government did in fact introduce back-to-work legislation after almost two weeks of strike. We do believe that sometimes there is good reason to put in an arbitration process when it is clear that the bargaining process is not working.

Here we have Bill C-6 which makes a mockery of arbitration. It is very prescriptive. It does not allow arbitration in good faith in the normal sense. Why does the government not implore the management to lift the lockout, get the unions to get people back to work on a full-time basis and allow the bargaining process to occur? If it does not work after a reasonable amount of time, unlike the NDP that does not believe in arbitration, we do believe there is a place for it. Why does the minister not allow that process to occur?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I believe the theory with which we both approached this analysis is one that the member pointed out, which is when it is clear that collective bargaining is not working. There is no more clear analysis of the situation that collective bargaining is not working. We have had rolling strikes since June 1. We have a lockout now. The parties are at an impasse and that is why we have introduced this legislation.

One last point is that I do recognize that the Liberal Party introduced back-to-work legislation in 1997, but we have learned from the flaws that were inherent in that legislation. That is why we have final offer binding selection in the document. The Liberal Party's bill led to two years and millions of dollars of mediation arbitration that did not work at the end of the day. The parties settled themselves and the taxpayers ended up paying for that entire process that did not resolve anything.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two quick questions for the minister. I am trying to understand why she is rewarding the employer that locked out its employees by giving them even lower wages.

My constituents in Gatineau, who were very eager to hear members on both sides of the House speak to this motion, asked me why members are being prevented from speaking, which is a fundamental right for all members in this House.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, the wages in the legislation are ones that have been negotiated in the private and public sectors and they are ones that a majority of Canadians across Canada would very much enjoy receiving on a continuous basis guaranteed over the next four years, as well as the opportunity to have a cost-of-living allowance attached to it.

What is important is that the assumption is there that the arbitrator will be choosing necessarily to the benefit of Canada Post Corporation. I want to remind the House that this is final offer binding arbitration. The selection of the arbitrator could be either the union or it could be Canada Post Corporation.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the minister, on behalf of the people in my constituency, one of the largest constituencies in Canada, with many rural communities that not only depend on the postal service but on the wages, the income that postal workers make. I would like to specifically speak to the young people, people of my age, friends of mine, who work in the postal service who are looking ahead at building a future, hoping to invest in a home, hoping to getting their families started.

What can the minister can say about the draconian measures being put forward by the government when it comes to a cutback in their wages and, ultimately, the silencing of their voices in this critical debate where they are speaking up for nothing more than fairness?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, for some clarity in the House, the opposition seems to think that we are cutting wages when, indeed, if the members would care to read the act they would see that we contemplate increases of wages and we have put in there the increases in wages that the workers would be receiving over a period of time.

Indeed, I would direct the hon. members to paragraph 15 of the act, where it says salaries will be increased effective January 31, 2011 by 1.75%, increased again in 2012 by 1.5%, increased again in 2013 by 2%, and increased again in 2014 by 2%.

These are increases that are not guaranteed for the majority of Canadians. These are guaranteed wages.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am amazed at the kind of shell game that the minister is playing on this important issue. There is one thing that is absolutely clear. The government is not moving to arbitration in a way that is fair and equitable, and that is where the government should be.

I would encourage people to read the old Bill C-24 that was introduced by the Liberal Party. It did not have the kind of draconian measures the minister has put in this one.

Yes, the minister talks about increases in wages in the bill, but the increases in wages that are in the bill are less than the wages that were already negotiated. That is taking the side of management, and the government should not be doing this.

We recognize this is an extremely important issue to business and the mail needs to get moving again. I have Veseys seeds company in my riding which depends on Canada Post to move its seeds around the world and it is finding it difficult.

The best way to get a solution that is going to work in the future is allow arbitration to work in a fair and equitable way. If that were in the bill and it was arbitration that was fair and equitable, it would be quite easy for us on this side of the House to support it.

I ask the minister, why is she taking the side of management in terms of this issue and why is the government not coming forward with arbitration that is fair and equitable to both sides and let them negotiate?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, as we have indicated in the past, the parties have had an ample amount of time at the table. In fact, since last October, the parties have been at the table, trying to come to a solution on the matter.

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With respect to the choices in the legislation, there seems to be two issues that the member brings up. One is the fact that we have chosen to put in the legislation binding arbitration final offer selection which we believe is the most appropriate way to deal with the matter, in that we have learned from 1997. The process took over two years and indeed, at the end of the day, was a great cost to Canadian taxpayers and we had to proceed to ensure that we paid for those costs associated with it.

We would like to have a clear, crisp decision in the matter and have it settled so that the mail can continue to move and Canada Post Corporation can go on to fulfill its mandate.

• (1045)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the minister for her work on this very important file.

Since the rotating strikes started a few weeks ago causing Canada Post to institute the lockout, and we all know the history of that, I have been inundated from rural constituents, small businesses in particular, which are suffering greatly because of this. We have already suffered an economic recession. Also, since the minister tabled the legislation earlier this week, it is clear that 70% of Canadians support this legislation. What I cannot get my head around is why the opposition continues to battle this legislation when most people want it. Perhaps the minister could explain that to me.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with the hon. member's assessment of what is happening in his riding. It is happening in my riding as well. Indeed, I received an email from a small business owner who is so concerned that it is thinking of moving the business to the United States because at least it can get service there. That is something that is of great concern because it shows the importance to small business in Canada for the mail service to continue.

I am disappointed that the opposition is not co-operating with the government in passing this quickly, predominantly because in 1997, with very similar terms within the legislation of going back to work, of setting up a process, of setting wages, the NDP did support it. In fact the member from Winnipeg was very clear why members were supporting it, one of the issues being small business.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister mentioned that mail not being delivered is an important thing.

My question is multi-tiered. Why is it that you forced a lockout when workers were willing to work? I spoke with many workers in my riding who told me that they want to work, that they do not want to be living without a wage, that they do not want to be suffering to feed their children right now. That is why the workers instituted a rolling strike. Why is it that you pushed for a lockout?

You also mentioned that—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would just ask all members, especially in what can be a very tense debate, to direct their questions through the Speaker. I ask the hon. member to conclude her question.

S. O. 57

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: My apologies, Madam Speaker, I will ensure my comments are directed through the Speaker.

I will rephrase my question. Why is it that the government pushed for a lockout situation for the workers and has not allowed them to work?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member from the greater Toronto area for her question and welcome her to the House.

Perhaps for some clarity on the matter, the rolling strikes commenced on June 1. The lockout commenced soon thereafter, 13 days after. Through introducing this legislation we are attempting to actually stop the lockout so that people can go back to work, have their salaries, their benefits, so they can get on with their lives and the mail would continue to be delivered.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, the bill seems to be completely focused on the employer. A number of my colleagues have mentioned the fact that the wage increases imposed in the bill were lower than what the employer was offering. If the government wanted to legislate employees back to work, it could have included other provisions. It could have forced the two parties to accept the collective agreement that was already in force, as the union had agreed to do. It could have decided to eliminate the override clauses and ensure that they are not included in a collective agreement. It could have decided to ensure that employees were able to maintain defined benefits instead of defined contributions. It could have put an end to the lockout, while still upholding the employees' right to strike.

I would like the minister to explain why this bill is so biased in favour of the employer.

• (1050)

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, the concept of final offer selection binding arbitration is that both parties put forward their best and final offer to the arbitrator. After they determine what is not in dispute and what is in dispute, they put their final offers on the table. An arbitrator, taking into consideration the guiding principles that we have in the legislation, will choose between one or the other. The parties have that opportunity to ensure that they are within the spirit of the guiding principles.

Having spoken to both sides of the table, intellectually and logically, both the union and management want Canada Post to remain viable, to do better and to ensure that pensions will be available for everyone. That is why the guiding principles are drafted in this way and both parties agree to those fundamental concepts. We want to make sure that the arbitrator understands that those are things that are important to the Canadian public and those are the things we want him or her to consider when looking at both offers on the table.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what I find humorous in all of this, what I find shameful, is that it is as though the public were on one side and workers were on the other, as

though the workers were not part of the public, as though they were not taxpayers. I find that a bit simplistic.

In 1997, I was on that side of the House. When we voted on back-to-work legislation—and it is normal to do so—it was because a national strike had been going on for two weeks. A rotating strike is not a strike, it is a pressure tactic used to force a negotiated settlement. The employer decided to provide mail delivery three days a week, even though the workers wanted to continue delivering the mail. Then came the lockout. What the minister did with Air Canada is part of a pattern. And there is no way she can make me believe that a crown corporation, which belongs to the government, is not talking to the government.

The question is, why play into the employers' hands? Why not ensure that there is a negotiated settlement? Let the arbitrator do his job. If he were to do it, there would at least be a possibility that the workers would get a little something, but this is take it or leave it, one or the other. Why take that stance and hang a sword of Damocles over the heads of the workers, denying their right to a negotiated settlement?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I should not be surprised that a member of the Liberal Party would find it a source of pride to allow the economy to be put in a desperate situation and proud of the fact that his party has let a two week national strike go on, possibly harming the economy.

We on this side of the House do not share that view. We believe that the risk to the economy is a great one, especially when it comes to any kind of work stoppage at Canada Post. That is why we acted as quickly as we did in the matter. We have heard from small business, charities and Canadians. They all have valid points of view regarding our great national economy, including the concerns of constituents.

The act place takes into consideration that 45,000 employees at Canada Post want to go back to work and want a fair deal. We included the wage rates to ensure that in the case of a final offer selection, there would be a fair wage agreed to outside of the two selections currently on the table.

What we have put before the House is very appropriate. We are thinking about Canadians in the long term and Canada Post as well.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, like my colleagues, I have received a number of emails that support this government's position. Many of them are actually from postal workers and some are from small business owners. I would like to read one of those emails:

I am truly hoping that you and fellow reps are serious about getting Canada Post back to work. The union and all its members and the press need to know seriously their strike hurts small businesses and the self employed, which is the backbone of this country's economy.

Many are virtually without a source of income as long as the strike continues. They cannot receive cheques in the mail, cannot send out invoices or statements. What happens to them, is the union going to help them???

As we know, the union and management are far apart on making a deal. They have spent an enormous amount of time at the table. However, while all of this has been going on, small businesses have been worried about how they are going to survive.

Could the minister please tell us why this legislation is so necessary to protect hard-working Canadians who are involved in small businesses?

• (1055)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I received similar emails while the rolling strikes were occurring across Canada. Although we did not have the enormous outcry that we heard with the lockout, we certainly did hear from Canadians about the possibility of increasing rolling strikes and the snowball effect these were having after 13 days. That is why we acted. We heard from Canadians. We saw the effect.

We also saw the effect on Canada Post. It felt the rolling strikes. Economically, Canada Post felt the difficulties associated with the rolling strikes, especially when Toronto and Montreal were targeted on the same day. That is why it acted with a lockout.

The government is acting in order to return everyone to work.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am also hearing from constituents. The *Island Tides*, a wonderful local paper in my area, cannot be delivered. I have received a heart-wrenching email from a woman who is waiting for a child support cheque from her ex-husband. However, I also recognize that this legislation is draconian and violates union rights, and I am deeply troubled by all of this.

I am particularly troubled about the fact that while collective bargaining rights are what we are talking about at this moment, we do not seem to be negotiating with each other. We have a piece of legislation before us that is clearly not going to enjoy the support of the House.

I would ask the hon. Minister of Labour if she would entertain amendments. Would she be prepared to meet with leaders of the major parties in the House to come to an agreement so that the back to work legislation will be fair? Since we have put a gun to the head of the union, I think we might want to do the same to management and demand that a fixed percentage of Canada Post's profits go to CUPW in the future.

Is the minister willing to entertain negotiations here?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, we can see the work stoppages affecting everyone from coast to coast to coast.

I would point out that this legislation does not violate anyone's rights at all. It is very much within the confines of what happens in fair collective bargaining. It is unfortunately the final solution with respect to the matter, in that Parliament is being asked to intervene in a dispute between two individual parties. It is a shame that it has come to this.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 10:57 a.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

S. O. 57

[Translation]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1135)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 22)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunoogoe
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney

Government Orders

MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Poilievre
Preston	Raïtt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wilks
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Williamson	Yelich
Woodworth	Young (Vancouver South)
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer— 157	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Footé	Fortin
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
Layton	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	Mai
Marston	Martin

Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rae
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaesan	Stewart
Stoffler	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Tredeau
Turnel	Valériote— 134

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.*[Translation]*

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, given that June 24 is the national holiday of Quebec and since this House has recognized that Quebecers form a nation, I would ask that you seek unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of this House, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings on Government Business No. 3 at 5:30 p.m. and put forthwith, without further debate, every question necessary to dispose of the motion and that the House suspend, as soon as the motion is disposed of, until June 25 at 8 a.m.

● (1140)

[English]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the proceedings on the closure motion, government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS MOTION NO. 3

The House resumed from June 21 consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has 19 minutes left to conclude his speech.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to stand for a few more minutes and share some of my thoughts on the direction the government is taking in relation to the negotiations between Canada Post and the postal workers.

Government Orders

When I last was on my feet, I said that I was somewhat surprised and perplexed that government members were justifying their decision by saying that small businesses in their constituencies were being adversely affected by the decision of Canada Post to completely shut down mail delivery. Their response was not to deal with the executives who made that decision and fire them, or bring in legislation that would rescind the decision to shut down mail delivery; instead they directed their anger, venom and frustration at the workers who, under a very difficult set of circumstances, tried to maintain the emergency delivery of mail. The workers tried to keep things operating while exerting pressure on Canada Post to get negotiations moving in a positive direction. That was why there were rotating strikes.

I have heard from some constituents in the last day or so about a situation which really underlines the extent to which the workers at Canada Post have gone to rectify the consequences of the decision by Canada Post to shut down mail delivery. The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship was organizing a trip to Kazakhstan and seven passports were caught in the mail. One of the people involved in organizing the trip went to the postal outlet in Wolfville, spoke to one of the workers and explained the problem.

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but there are many side conversations happening. Out of respect for the member who is speaking, I would ask all members to take their conversations out to the lobbies.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that intervention.

As I said, members of a university Christian fellowship group were organizing a trip to Kazakhstan and their passports were caught in the mail because Canada Post, the employer, decided to completely suspend mail delivery. One of the trip organizers explained the problem to a postal worker who committed to try to track down the passports and intervene in order to rectify the problem. After his efforts in Wolfville in dealing with members of management, the worker went to union officials in Halifax and they identified where the passports were. After some insistence by the union officials, they were able to get into the postal station and retrieve the passports and get them into the hands of the people who were going to travel to do important work on an important exchange with Kazakhstan.

The point I am making is that the government is introducing legislation that pounds on the rights of the people who work for Canada Post when, in fact, it has been the people who work at Canada Post, the workers represented by CUPW, who have done everything in their power to try, at the same time as putting pressure to get negotiations moving forward, to not adversely inconvenience Canadian citizens and small business. In the case I mentioned, they even went so far as to intervene and make sure people could get their passports that were being held up as a direct result of the employer's decisions.

Again, I say to the members opposite that it was Canada Post that shut down completely the mail service in this country. The government should be directing any action toward the employer to either get rid of the members of the executive who are making

decisions that adversely affect that operation or have them change their decision. However, that is not what the government is intending to do.

What the government has in mind is to engage in a direct attack on the rights of working people in this country. As a worker told me last night, workers across the country are not going to stand idly by and watch the government do away with rights which have been fought for so hard over the last century. That is an important thing to remember.

I was in Nova Scotia on June 11. That day is officially known as William Davis Miners' Memorial Day to recognize miners who have died on the job. In 1927, William Davis, in a dispute with the coal company, was shot dead. It is an example of the commitment that workers, women and men, have made in this country to ensure that they have some rights over their wages, benefits and working conditions. That is why unionized workers in this country are so discouraged, animated and angry at the attempt by the government to take away those hard-won rights.

● (1145)

Unions do not only exist to protect the rights of their workers, although if they did, that would be important, and to improve the rights and benefits of the people who are represented by that union. The history of the trade union movement in our country and around the world has been to make an important contribution within its community. Unions have played a significant role in the advancement of women's rights. They have worked diligently and tirelessly to bring forward universal medicare and to support and protect it. They have worked to protect public pensions for all.

The CPP is an initiative unions strove for and supported. Many union workers have negotiated pensions in their workplace, but unions recognize that all workers deserve to have a pension and deserve to live in dignity when they retire. That is why, to this day, we have a proposal coming out of the trade union movement to expand and strengthen the Canada pension plan. It has not asked the government to pony up and put all the money into it. It has asked the government to come up with a proposal, which we have endorsed on this side, that would see the Canada pension plan expanded. It would see the increase of premiums on behalf of the employees and the employers in a gradual fashion that would be sustainable. It would ensure that at the end of the day, once this plan is put forward after five years, people who have contributed for their full working lives would recognize a doubling of benefits from the Canada pension plan. People who are not now covered by the Canada pension plan would have access to that.

Those are some of the important things that unions do in order to support the community, pushing for better occupational health and safety and for an increased minimum wage, a livable wage for all workers, not just union workers. Those are the kinds of initiatives that benefit society and all our communities, and unions have been and will continue to fight for that.

Government Orders

This is important because the initiative undertaken by the government to strip away the rights of the workers at Canada Post is just the beginning. If the government can walk in and unilaterally make changes, which will inevitably change the Canada Labour Code that affects all federal employees, that will be just the beginning.

I suggest that the government is inserting itself in the greater public sector and in the private because it has decided, and it will decide in this case, that these negotiations have gone on too long. It has decided that the conditions under which the collective bargaining positions are being determined are not sufficient. Contrary to the Canada Labour Code and, in fact, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the government is stepping in to make these unilateral changes and, frankly, it is just the beginning.

As an aside, I think the government will have some trouble moving this forward in the court, given what has happened in British Columbia and other provinces, where the Supreme Court has struck down attempts by those provincial governments to insert themselves into the collective bargaining process, basically taking away rights enshrined in the charter, to ensure that workers have the right to assemble and to bargain collectively and freely, without the interference of the state.

● (1150)

We need to recognize these things.

It was interesting when we talked the other day about the successful motion by my colleague from London—Fanshawe to properly fund and raise all seniors out of poverty. We talked about people who had reached retirement age being able to live in some dignity.

Frankly, the disputes that the government has inserted itself into with Air Canada and Canada Post has some considerable significance regarding pension plans. The government members opposite support companies that say they cannot afford the pensions they have freely negotiated with their employees. Therefore, they want to change, dilute or ensure that new employees are not eligible for the same level of pension benefit.

Surely the consequence of that is clear to all members. We are now dealing with 250,000 to 300,000 seniors living below the poverty line because they have inadequate pensions. If we continue to push down the pension levels of working people, that problem will only be exacerbated. What will the government do then?

I believe the government does not think too far into the future other than maybe beyond the next election. In many cases, the people of small businesses in my community support the rights of working people to earn a fair wage and to get their benefits so they can live in some dignity when they are in their later years.

It is important that all businesses recognize that if we continue to allow the government to push down wages and pension benefits, people will be unable to afford groceries, furniture, condominiums, nice apartments, cars, or the goods and services that make our communities work. If we continue to shove everything down to the lowest common denominator, the workers will not have enough money to pay for decent lodgings, for fridges and stoves, or to have

their lawns cut, those services that are so important to small businesses, in my community anyway.

What will happen then to those small businesses, some of which are now urging members opposite to start putting the strap to working people, hammering away and taking away their rights, their benefits and their ability to function appropriately and live in dignity, or to contribute to their families, their communities and their organizations?

What will the end result be? I ask the members opposite to think about this.

I suggest that in many jurisdictions the balance that has been struck in the Canada Labour Code and the Trade Union Act of Nova Scotia, as well as other statutes dealing with labour relations in the country, is already outweighed by employers. Having said that, the Canada Labour Code has existed for many years and continues to operate.

● (1155)

If the government inserts itself so clearly on the side of the employer to completely tip the balance in that regard, the Canada Labour Code, as we know it, will no longer exist. Why would any federal employer, or any employer that operates under the Canada Labour Code, come to the table in good faith and be prepared to negotiate with its workers? Even in non-unionized situations, why would employers be willing to negotiate a good wage, a fair wage, a good pension plan, a good health plan if they know the Conservative government would be willing to help them out any way it could to shove down their costs and, in many cases, reward inefficiency?

That is another bizarre thing about this situation. Canada Post, because of its workers, has shown itself to be very successful in generating revenues.

We will have the opportunity to speak more about this and I will certainly stand as many times as I can to talk about this legislation.

● (1200)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member and what I did not hear from him was discussion about the workers themselves and perhaps where they stood on this dispute. He gave the position of the union bosses.

However, I have received a number of emails from postal workers in my riding, friends of mine, and I would like to share a few words from one of the emails with the member and get his response.

It is addressed to me and the subject is, "VOTE YES TO BACK TO WORK LEGISLATION". It states, in part:

I am a postal clerk and I feel that legislation is our only hope to keep our jobs. Our union has not allowed us to vote on any of the revised offers that CPC has made. Most of us think the final revised offer is fair and wanted to vote but were not allowed to by the union

On this side of the House, we actually understand.

Government Orders

Yesterday, we had a motion on small business from the NDP. We know those members do not really believe in supporting small business or they would understand that Canada Post is an essential service and this commands responsibility from the House.

However, does the member know that the big bosses, the people who are really intimidating people right now, are the union bosses? That is who he is standing up for, not for the workers.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's intervention. I saw him paying close attention to what I had to say. I hoped he would rise to his feet and engage in this because this place is all about that, a democracy and people participating in the discussion.

Speaking of democracy and democratic organizations, trade unions are one of the most democratic organizations in our society. The decisions taken by the union are as a result of majority votes and as a result of consultation with employees. That does not mean there will not be dissent within the organizations. There is dissent in many democratic organizations, as opposed to the Conservative Party, where we do not hear any dissent on the prevailing wisdom of the Prime Minister's Office because that is not allowed on the government side. The Conservatives are not allowed to oppose. They are not allowed to dissent. They are not allowed to speak their own minds.

Good for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for allowing its members to express their opinions, while at the same time respecting the democratic wisdom of the majority.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments that were made by my colleague from Nova Scotia. What came out during his presentation was the fact that both opposition parties understood full well that there was an inconvenience to the Canadian public and to small business. However, it is because of a lockout by Canada Post. That is what has to be underlined here. It is because the corporation locked the workers out and I think it did that understanding full well that this legislation would end up making its way to the House.

It certainly is not a level playing field and that level playing field has been taken away by the actions of the government

Today nurses at IWK have signed a contract with their employers. Their contract had lapsed October 31, 2009, but due process was followed.

In this case, the contract of the postal workers lapsed January 31 of this year. Does the member agree that if due process is followed, if given the opportunity, both—

• (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would ask all hon. members to look to the Chair for guidance in terms of keeping their questions within a reasonable period of time.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, the point my colleague made was absolutely right. What gives the government the right to decide what is a reasonable time to negotiate a deal? I have to watch my language, and I will in respect to you, Mr. Speaker, and the House and the member opposite.

I do not think members opposite understand the process. It is about two parties that have conflicting interests. The point is that negotiations are done through a process in order to bring the parties as close together as possible in order to reach an agreement. Sometimes that takes longer than others but we need to let the parties work it out so they are both in agreement once the document is signed and then there is peace in the workplace for the duration of that collective agreement. That is key.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I spent a lot of time knocking on doors during the federal election, especially in the afternoon, and I met a lot of seniors and people on fixed income. These people were often dressed in jackets, hats and mitts. The reason they were dressed that way is because they could not afford to turn on the heat. I know that seniors, people on pensions and people on fixed income are having a hard time paying their bills, especially with the rising prices of food, oil and gas.

Pensions are becoming a major issue in this country and now the pensions of postal workers are under attack. Does the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour see pensions becoming more of a major issue facing Canadians?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl is absolutely right about pensions, and I spoke to that a bit in my speech.

It is so important that we not take pensions away from those people who now have them. We should be strengthening existing pensions and creating opportunities for more Canadians to have access to pensions.

Instead of driving everything down to the lowest common denominator, we should be raising things up so that all Canadians have an income that will provide them with the opportunity to house themselves, feed themselves and live in dignity.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his comments.

What people seem to be forgetting in this debate, despite the importance of the situation, is that this is about more than just Canada Post. It is about all employees working in various situations. What sort of precedent will be set if this is how the government acts whenever it is confronted with such a situation?

I would like my colleague to go into further detail about the following issue. It is very important that seniors have pension plans, but many workers have young families, and we are here to protect them too. I wonder how important it is to have a good argument in order to ensure that we do not set a precedent that might negatively affect workers' rights.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, that is the real concern when I talk about this being the beginning. This is the slippery slope.

Government Orders

If the government is allowed to continue forward, stripping away the rights of the workers at Canada Post, who will be next? What rights will be taken away next? It is not just workers' rights, but the rights of people in our community to live a fair and equitable life, to make a living and to contribute to their community. It is all the hard-won rights that we, our parents, grandparents and the generations before have fought world wars to protect our rights.

What is next once the government gets beyond this point, feeling that it can take any right away from anybody it decides to?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I commence my speech, I want to pick up on something the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour said.

He mentioned Davis Day, which is on June 11, and it is celebrated in mining communities across Nova Scotia. It is a very important day in the culture that I come from. However, it is also important to note that it is a day when a very tragic incident happened. It was the day when William Davis was shot in cold blood as a result of protests at the mines because employees were not receiving wages and, indeed, were being asked to take a further cut.

My take from Davis Day, however, is one that is even more important, which is that it only escalated to that level of violence after the government refused to intervene, even though the families and the men asked it to do so. That is valid. The Government of Canada should intervene when it is appropriate to do so in the public interest.

This government has been given a strong mandate by Canadians to complete our economic recovery. As Canada's labour minister, it is my view that the Government of Canada must take decisive action now before further damage is done to our economy. That is why our government introduced in the House Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services.

After eight months of collective bargaining and mediation, a labour dispute between Canada Post and more than 50,000 employees, represented by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers Urban Operations Unit, has resulted in a work stoppage. It is an event that, if left unresolved, could jeopardize Canada's economic prosperity.

Today I will discuss the specific details of this proposed legislation, but, first, there are some important facts that will help put this extraordinary legislative measure in its proper context.

Canada Post is one of Canada's largest corporations and delivers a service that many Canadians count on. It supports 70,000 full-time and part-time employees and contributes \$6.6 billion to our country's GDP. A reliable postal service without interruption is an important part of what keeps our economy running smoothly.

As a result of a labour dispute between Canada Post and more than 50,000 of these employees, the service is now interrupted and at a standstill. However, this labour dispute has been simmering for many months and, now that postal services have stopped, this dispute is having more of an impact on the Canadian public, not just Canada Post and its employees. It could affect the livelihood of many Canadians across the land.

Contrary to the assertions of the opposition, we do not take back to work legislation lightly, but this measure is necessary. All other avenues have been exhausted. This is the right thing to do. There is too much at stake for Canadians and our economy on the whole. We must and we will act now.

I will take a few minutes to outline the potential economic risks entailed by this work stoppage. I will also talk about the intent of the proposed legislation.

As I indicated, a reliable postal service is far more than just personal mail. It is a fundamental part of doing business in Canada and the economic risks of no longer having that service are significant. Canada Post is an integral part of what keeps Canada in business and what puts money in the pockets of its citizens. Many small and large businesses rely on Canada Post to issue bills, to process orders and to receive payments. This is a service that matters.

There are Canadian families waiting for their tax refunds or HST rebates to arrive. There are citizens in the far north who rely on the mail for essential goods, like prescription eyewear, dental products, drugs and legal documents, and there are those who still make payments by mail. They will tell us that there is much at stake in this dispute.

Quite frankly, Canadians and businesses should not have to deal with this kind of uncertainty. They should not be the ones expected to bear the brunt of a labour dispute that shows no sign of being resolved through the collective bargaining process.

● (1215)

Just as important, our economy cannot afford to deal with a postal disruption brought by the lockout. Consider the costs that we are all having to pay. It has been nearly 14 years since Canada last had a work stoppage at Canada Post. A work stoppage could result in losses to our economy of between \$9 million and \$31 million per week. That means every day, more jobs at risk, more productivity lost, more challenges for business and more uncertainty for consumers.

Therefore I ask the following question. Can we afford to have this happen, especially when Canada's recovery from the recession is really starting to gain speed? I think the answer is clearly no.

As I said, every other avenue has been exhausted to help bring a full and lasting resolution to this dispute. Let me tell the House what has transpired over the last eight months.

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On October 4 of last year, the union, CUPW, served the employer notice to commence collective bargaining for the purpose of renewing their collective agreement, the first step in the process. The parties negotiated directly from October 2010 to January 2011. On January 21 of this year, the union filed a notice of dispute and requested services of conciliation from the federal government. I appointed a conciliation officer on January 31 to help the parties reach a resolution. Through February and March, the conciliation officer met with the parties and on April 1 the conciliation period was extended until May 3, 2011 to get us through the general election. During that time, the conciliation officer continued to meet with the parties. As per the Canada Labour Code, the parties were released from conciliation in early May, and on May 5 a mediator was appointed. Throughout the month of May, the mediator from the labour program's federal mediation and conciliation service met very frequently with the parties. Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, an agreement between the parties remained elusive.

We need to take decisive action now. Canadians deserve no less.

This act provides for the resumption and continuation of mail services at Canada Post. First, it brings an end to the growing uncertainty that has characterized so much of this dispute in the last several months. As well, consistent with the recent settlements in the federal public service, it imposes a four-year contract and provides new pay-rate increases. The pay outcome will be a 1.75% increase as of February 1, 2011; a 1.5% increase in February 2012; a further 2% increase in February 2013; and a further 2% increase again in February 2014.

The act also provides for final-offer selection, which is a binding mechanism on all matters still in dispute and outstanding. Furthermore, in making this selection of a final offer, the arbitrator is to be guided by general principles that take into consideration the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries and that provide the necessary degree of flexibility to ensure both the short- and long-term economic viability and competitiveness of the Canada Post Corporation. It also takes into consideration the need to maintain the health and safety of the workers and to ensure the sustainability of their pension plan.

More specifically, the terms and conditions have to take into account two things: first, that the solvency ratio of the pension plan must not decline as a direct result of a new collective agreement; and second, that the Canada Post Corporation must, without recourse to undue increases in postal rates, operate efficiently, improve productivity and meet acceptable standards of service. It is a decisive approach and it is aimed at resolving this labour dispute.

● (1220)

In the absence of solution that is crafted by the parties themselves, which we have spent many hours trying to achieve since the rolling strikes of June 1 and which we would have preferred to see, this proposed legislation takes the steps that are necessary to safeguard our recovering economy and to ensure that Canadian families and businesses do not wind up suffering as a result of a dispute they had no part in creating.

Our government has put procedures in place to ensure the efficient delivery of services and benefits to Canadians, such as the use of

courier delivery, early release of some benefit payments and in-person delivery through regional Service Canada centres. These are things we needed to do to ensure that Canadian citizens are still served by the Government of Canada during this postal stoppage.

However, by introducing this proposed legislation, we are not taking sides in the matter. What we are doing, and what all parties in this House have a responsibility to do, is working on behalf of all Canadians because that is what they expect of us. We are showing leadership in this matter. That means taking decisive action to keep business in Canada moving.

In conclusion, I would reiterate that we are taking extraordinary measures. We are doing so because no workable solutions have been found to resolve the dispute at Canada Post. Parliament has an obligation to respond in turn and we have to act in the best interests of the country. Canadians, quite frankly, deserve much better than delays or excuses or random rhetoric. They have a right to expect that Parliament will do the right thing to protect our economy and to ensure that the business of Canada keeps moving.

I would ask all members of this House to join me in meeting our collective responsibility to Canadians and support this proposed legislation.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning the minister said in the House that the arbitration between Canada Post and CUPW in 1997 had cost the taxpayers many thousands, probably millions, of dollars. However, from the information we have, all of the arbitration costs were paid by the union and Canada Post, not by the taxpayers of this country. Therefore, I would like the minister to correct her statement.

Second, the minister said she was not taking sides. How could she say that when in the last proposal of June 9, 2011, Canada Post offered its employees 1.9% for 2011, 1.9% for 2012-13, and 2% for 2014, or 3% below the inflation rate, and the Conservative government has come up with 1.75% for 2011 and 1.5% in 2012, or 0.4% less?

What have the workers done to the government that it hates them so much? How can the government say it is not taking sides?

● (1225)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, on the comment I made with respect to payment, that was the information I was given. I will correct the record if I am incorrect on the costs associated with that. I will do that this afternoon. I will just get more information on it. I thank the member for bringing that to my attention.

With respect to the wages, we believe these wages are fair. They are wages that have been negotiated within collective bargaining processes both in the federal service as well as in the private sector. They match what has been going on in industry. These are good increases that would happen over four years, as I indicated in my remarks.

The other point to remember is that we have an obligation to the taxpayer with respect to the ongoing viability of Canada Post, and that is an important aspect of this too.

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Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for her speech, but after listening to it and to some of my colleagues from the NDP, we now know more than ever before why the Liberal Party is needed. Both parties are obviously picking sides. The government has chosen to be on the side of management, and the NDP is on the side of labour. Meanwhile, the Liberal Party has to defend Canadians.

I listened carefully to the minister's speech. She started by saying that all avenues had been exhausted, and yet all we heard about was why we needed Canada Post. I am glad I became a member of Parliament so I could sit in this House and learn about Canada Post. Meanwhile, she is the labour minister. I did not hear how she had intervened or become involved at all in trying to resolve this issue.

What has the minister done for Canadians? I did not hear that in her speech. The only thing the minister was able to tell us is why we needed Canada Post. I think we are all aware of why we need Canada Post. Let us get the mail delivered, but it does not have to come about through a lockout.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, the importance of talking about Canada Post was that it set out the economic reasons that we felt it was necessary to move as quickly as we have.

With respect to what Labour Canada and I have done with the dispute, we have been engaged on the issues from very early on, since we returned to the House in May. I have met with the parties about six, seven or eight times each. I brought the parties together on June 1 and June 3. I have spent that last 72 hours working with the parties.

I know their issues and I know exactly how far apart the parties are. That is the concern I have, and why I see no prospect of a resolution either. Indeed, last evening, competing press releases came out from both Canada Post and the union indicating that their collective bargaining was at an end and that they saw no hope of a resolution.

We tried very hard to bring the parties together, to narrow and define what the dispute was. However, at the end of the day, there was no will at the table to do the deal, and the will of Canadians is, of course, for the service to resume.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the minister and prior to that I listened to the comments by a member of the official opposition. I heard him mention the word "rights".

I want to ask the minister about the right of Canadians to receive their mail. What about the right of the single owner, the taxpayer who owns Canada Post? What about their right to make sure that the service is provided?

Could the minister talk not only about the rights of Canadians to receive their mail but also how this is affecting the Canadian economy, in particular small- and medium-size businesses who are the generators of our economy and how they are being affected by this strike?

•(1230)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question and all the work he has been doing with small business, especially in his area.

As a member indicated this morning, we have heard from groups as diverse as a seed company to magazine delivery companies to people who produce nutritional bars to people who operate in very niche industries that rely upon the mail service. They are indicating that they are hurting with respect to the actual delivery of their product to their consumers. We know in this day and age that if companies are unable to deliver a product or provide a service, the consumer will go to the next company, especially in this competitive world we are in.

The other aspect, too, is the actual doing of business, the collecting and making of payments and companies being good to their receivers and to those who owe them money, so the business can continue. They need those profits to look after their families and to give back to their communities.

It is a very large issue that has been brought to our attention. After all, the government indicates all the time that it is on the side of small business. It is here to make sure that small businesses are able to operate efficiently and as well as they can.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister. Why is the government in such a hurry to impose back-to-work legislation? We know that Canada Post officials were the ones who imposed the lockout. The Conservatives talk about the best interests of Canadians, but are the workers not Canadians? Are those workers not part of Canada? Why do the Conservatives always want to protect employers' rights while abandoning the workers?

Why are they trying to violate workers' rights and open the door to privatization through this government's insidious actions?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the rights of workers, this government supports the Canada Labour Code and supports the charter section 2(d) that provides for freedom of association.

The courts have been very clear. They indicate that a collective bargaining process needs to be in place, and I think members can agree with me that eight months for a collective bargaining process is indeed a very long period of time. That is an ample amount of process for the parties to reach a deal. They have been unable to do so and third party harm to the Canadian economy and to the public is just too great for it to continue. We had to act. We acted decisively and that is why we have introduced this legislation.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Bourassa in the debate today.

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We had the chronology from the minister, but one thing she did not identify or point out was the political chronology that paralleled the negotiations through the last number of months, that being the fact that we were approaching an election during those contract talks. We had the election and now the minister is certainly buoyed by the fact that she is in a majority situation and the Conservatives will deal with it like they would have liked to deal with it a number of months ago. Their fingerprints are all over the final outcome of this labour dispute.

We do not doubt in any way, and certainly the government members have said time and time again throughout the course of this debate, that it is important to get Canada Post workers back to work. They have said that businesses, charities and individual Canadians are being inconvenienced. The opposition parties do not dispute that.

I had the opportunity to speak with a number of the striking workers in Sydney this past weekend. CUPW members had made it perfectly clear that they were willing to go back to work. They wanted to go back to work. They had a meeting with Mr. Chopra. They identified three particular points, one of those points being that they would go back to work under the past collective agreement. They would be willing to go back to work under those terms. However, the corporation knew full well that it was supported by the government and that the government, in tabling legislation, would reinforce its position, its seat at the bargaining table. He asked, "Why would we do that? We will get the legislation coming forward from the government and we will maintain this lockout?". Let us be perfectly clear, this is a lockout. It is not a strike by CUPW. This is a lockout by Canada Post.

The workers wanted to get back. They were content to go back under the terms of the last agreement. They were willing to do that. We in the opposition understand that. Government members portray it like this is a nefarious plan to really jig up Canadians by not delivering cheques or not providing services. Anyone who has been in any strike before, whether it was on the union side or on the management side, knows that strikes are absolutely no fun.

I remember as a student working with Nova Scotia Power Corporation and being a casual member of the pool. We were members of CBRT & GW. In the work term one summer there was an information picket and we were out on the picket lines for a couple of days. The first day was a little bit of fun. It was almost jovial the first couple of days, but I was a student and all I had to worry about was putting a few bucks together to go back to school the next year. But by day two, day three, people really started to feel the impact. They had to provide for their families and a tension is created because those people had to go back to work in that environment again. There is a tension created through the course of a labour dispute that does no benefit. There are strikes which have taken place and the scars still remain from past union-company management disturbances that take years and years to heal.

CUPW workers offered to go back. They wanted to go back, but again, the company maintained the lockout. That is why we are in the situation we are in today.

●(1235)

I shared with my colleague from Halifax earlier that union-management negotiations and collective bargaining follow their own path.

Today the nurses at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax signed off on an agreement that should be ratified. Their past contract lapsed in October 2009.

The last CUPW agreement finished on January 31, 2011. That is not a long time. Both Canada Post and the union should be encouraged to sit down in good faith, agree on what they can, sign off on what they agree on, and then take outstanding issues to arbitration mediation. That would make more sense than what is being rammed down the throats of the workers right now under this legislation.

The workers were having rotating strikes and getting attention to their issues, but Canada Post went forward with the lockout and that caught some people by surprise.

The fact that the government has come forward with this type of legislation should not be a surprise to anybody, because we have seen this movie before. We saw the action taken by the government during the Air Canada strike. Air travellers had numerous opportunities to take other flights to get around this country. Even with this private corporation, the government felt obliged to bring forward back-to-work legislation. The government did that to a private corporation, so none of us should have been surprised when the government presented back to work legislation once Canada Post locked the workers out.

I think the common view in this chamber is that Canada Post would not have proceeded had it not been given some indication by the government that it would present back-to-work legislation. We would be naive to think that Canada Post did not have that in its back pocket before it went ahead with the lockout.

Coming forward with this legislation is equivalent to someone with a broken wrist walking into the doctor's office expecting it to be put in a cast, but instead the doctor cuts it off at the elbow. The government has done exactly that by presenting this legislation. Rather than encouraging the parties to get back to the table and bargain in good faith, the government has pushed that all aside. It has cut off the arm at the elbow.

It is obvious that this legislation is loaded on the side of Canada Post. With the final offer arbitration, the government has handcuffed an arbitrator who will have to find a resolution that is fair to both sides. We just need to look at the salaries in this legislation. Canada Post had offered far greater than what is being offered in this legislation. The government felt compelled to send a message out to organized labour in this country that workers' rights are no longer going to be respected, it is back to work and this is what they are going to get. It is unfair. This legislation is not fair. Other avenues should have been pursued before the government came in with a hammer, before it cut the arm off at the elbow. Shame on the government for this particular piece of legislation.

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•(1240)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get some clarification on a couple of the member's points.

The rotating strikes at Canada Post were clearly affecting mail delivery and in some ways affecting the health and safety of workers at various depots across the country. Is the member suggesting that the rotating strikes that could have gone on for a prolonged period are acceptable, but a lockout to protect workers' safety and the interests of Canada Post, which the taxpayers of this country own, is unacceptable? Are rotating strikes ad nauseam acceptable? Is that the member's position?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member from Mississauga—Streetsville. We have spent some time together on the human resources, skills and social development committee. It may not have been brought up in his briefing, but he should know that rotating strikes are a perfectly legitimate tactic that can be undertaken during the bargaining process. It is written in the Canada Labour Code.

There was talk about undue hardship regarding the rotating strikes that were taking place over 25 different sites. Certainly, the actions taken by Canada Post far exceeded simple inconvenience. When it talked about reducing the service to Monday, Wednesday, Friday delivery, that was a far greater inconvenience than the rotating strikes that occurred across the country. It was purposeful.

Workers did not mean to bring any inconvenience. They wanted to bring attention to the issues. They wanted to bring attention to their plight. Certainly, it is absolutely acceptable. It has been an accepted tactic. It is recognized under the Canada Labour Code.

The member should understand that before he asks a question like this.

•(1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have noticed something. I am sure that all across the country, in every bar, kitchen and living room, there are people who do not have a pension plan, there are people who do not have job security, and there are people who have lousy salaries. They will all say that union workers have it good and that they are overprotected. They will make comments that do not take every aspect of the situation into account.

We can expect to hear that type of argument being made over a beer, but not in Parliament.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, let me elaborate on some of the offhanded comments that have been made by members on the other side.

The members figure that the postal workers in this country have some soft, cushy jobs and that the perks are elaborate. They should know that anything that the postal workers have is as a result of negotiations over years and years of bargaining. They may have given up wage increases in a particular contract in order to get a benefit in another area. That is just due process. Every organized

labour group in this country finds itself in a different reality and a different situation.

We just came through an election so we had five weeks of going door to door knocking on doors. It is not a whole lot of fun. Think about letter carriers carrying 40 pounds of letters while being chased by dogs or dealing with whatever the weather might be.

I would like to share this story. I spoke with a guy in Sydney who was delivering mail and as he went up to a property, a dog came around the corner and jumped at him. He fell off the step, shattering his arm. It is a tough job. Postal workers deserve our respect and deserve the respect of the government.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ironically, 14 years ago I took part in this same debate, but there were significant differences: after two weeks of strike action by Canada Post postal workers, the Liberal government of the day wanted to introduce back-to-work legislation. That is obviously when an arbitrator is appointed. However, unlike what we are seeing today, the arbitrator spoke to both the employer and the union. A binding agreement was reached. Having an arbitrator makes the decision binding. It ends the strike and people return to work.

I would say, for the benefit of the thousands of people watching us on television, that a number of things are going to happen today. First, since the government has a majority, it will not matter who tears their shirt over this; the bill will pass. Then, the official opposition will tear its shirt and engage in what we call a filibuster: it will take all the time in the world in order to look good to the workers and the union. The opposition will have done its job, but the bill will pass nonetheless.

I think we must take this opportunity to help people understand what is really happening and how dangerous this bill is. This tactic is often used by this government. It is important to remember that we are not just talking about Canada Post. The government showed its true colours in the case of Air Canada; in less than 24 hours, the government was ready to introduce a bill. It was a warning. That means that, as of now, the government no longer believes in bargaining power. The government no longer believes that employees and unions can sit down and talk with management. The government is on management's side and that is that. There are no more collective rights.

What is troubling is the way this bill is being introduced. I want to talk today about respect because, as the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle said earlier, the government is also starting to label: unions are bad and management is good. The bad guys are the greedy employees who have a very big collective agreement and who, when it comes right down to it, are well paid. Does the government need that? Now, it is going to try to make the public believe that this bill is important because some people are losing a lot of money and others are not receiving their cheques, etc.

Can we put things into perspective? The Liberal Party believes that we must take a pragmatic approach. Yes, it is true that Canada Post is an essential service and is linked to an economic reality. However, it is also important to understand that, unlike 14 years ago when the strike lasted two weeks, this time the workers were not on a general strike but, rather, a rotating strike. Service was still being provided. It was the employer itself that decided to reduce the number of days that the mail would be delivered: three days a week rather than five. In addition, according to the union—and this information must still be verified—a little bit of mail was being set aside. This made it more difficult to deliver all the mail. Then, after 12 days, Canada Post declared a lockout.

The problem is that Canada Post is owned by the government. It is a crown corporation. I refuse to believe that the Minister of Labour was not speaking directly to Canada Post's management. In summary, this whole situation does not really hold water.

The Canadian public must understand that, yes, the mail is an essential service; yes, the mail must be delivered; yes, there are economic considerations, particularly in rural regions. We understand all that.

To demonstrate the good faith of the Canada Post workers, I note that some people were to receive their cheques last week. They received them because the postal workers did deliver social assistance cheques, for example, and cheques for seniors. That shows that there is some element of good faith in this situation.

What exasperates me in this kind of debate is that everything is black or white. Unfortunately, the NDP is dogmatic, with its all or nothing approach. We heard the member for Acadie—Bathurst who was fit to be tied. We are also fit to be tied, but he should watch his blood pressure.

Even on the Conservative side, just now, there was a member who did not understand that in the Canada Labour Code there is a right to stage rotating strikes. Things are not going well.

That is why this debate is important: people have to understand how things work.

• (1250)

What I find even more disrespectful, as a Quebecker and a French Canadian, is that with the NDP's symbolic obstruction and the way the Conservative Party is proceeding, it has been decided that even though June 24 is the national holiday of Quebec, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, we are going to sit anyway. The national holiday is being treated as something of no importance. I agree with the Bloc, as I mentioned this morning, that we could have adjourned. If we believe Quebec is a nation, we should respect the Quebec nation. I do not see why we would sit on that day. In any event, let us not panic; on the 24th, there is no mail delivery in Quebec, and so we would not have received any, in any event. At some point, we have to have some principles.

That being said, it is unfortunate to see a bill offering employees a lower wage than what the employer had offered in the first place. We have an arbitrator who is essentially being held by the throat and told what he has to impose, how he is going to achieve it, that it is either the employer's package or the union's package. The way things are working, I would find it very surprising if the union's package were

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accepted. We are on a very slippery slope in Canada. At some point, the issue is one of rights and values.

Certainly if there had been a general strike for two weeks in the same circumstances as the strike 14 years ago, the situation would be different. After two weeks of a general strike, the bill could have given the arbitrator some latitude and the binding authority to look at both sides of the coin and pick some things from each side. When there is an arbitrator, there are losers on both sides, the employer's and the union's. I have seen enough examples in my lifetime to know that. But in this case we get the clear impression that the dice are loaded.

I think it is really very sad that we find ourselves in this situation. The government is going to try to tell us how awful it was during the Liberals' time, and that this government believes in the economy. We believe in the economy too. In 1993, when we took power, the Conservatives had left us with a \$42 billion deficit, and we balanced the books, as my former leader Jean Chrétien said. And now we have another deficit.

It is odd; Canada Post is earning a profit. They cannot pick and choose. The hot topic concerning the economy this fall will be the future of pension plans for those who have them. Look at what is going on with the City of Montreal and others. All collective agreements are being reopened. There is something going on with pension plans. Furthermore, young people are entering the labour market. They will notice they do not have the same working conditions and will perhaps not have any pension plan.

Bullying tactics, like the action being forced down our throats, will not solve anything. They are simply sweeping things under the rug. It looks good, people return to work, but the problems will still be there. The government could have been more creative and respectful of collective rights, while still respecting individual rights, by creating appropriate legislation. I hope that the minister will want to make some amendments.

As a member from Quebec, I will not be here on June 24. If we are still sitting on June 25, I will be happy to return, but out of respect for Quebeckers and French Canadians, I will not be here on June 24. If there is something on the 25, we will be here. We believe that we must have just as much respect for French Canadians and Quebeckers as for workers.

The Liberal Party has a pragmatic approach. I congratulate and thank my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso, our labour critic. He has shown how different our approach was compared to the NDP's and the Conservatives'. At some point, any government, regardless of the political party, will introduce back-to-work legislation. There must be a balance to help the general public, but we must not ignore the fact that workers also have rights and that, above all, they deserve decent working conditions.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will first address the orthopedics analogy that was used earlier by the member for Cape Breton—Canso.

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I am a pediatric orthopedic surgeon and it is not as he depicted it. This is more like a patient being brought into the emergency department, fast-tracked to the trauma room and treated immediately. That is what we need to do. We are taking action to act for Canadians and Canadian businesses and to keep the economy moving in this fragile time.

I have a question for the member. There have been numerous instances in history, as the member commented on, when the member's party introduced and supported back to work legislation, including in 1997 when wage rates were imposed. Why is the member so decidedly against this particular back to work legislation? Does he not feel that Canadians deserve to continue to receive mail in a timely fashion?

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it makes sense to use waiting rooms as an example, but I know that this will disappoint some people even more. Given the number of people in waiting rooms, it is pretty sad to think that there is a fast track. That would explain why the government is in favour of a two-tier or two-speed system.

I said earlier that I agree with back-to-work-legislation, but that each situation is different. A balance needs to be struck between collective rights and individual rights. Bargaining is normal, as is tension between employers and employees, or between unions and employers. I believe that the rotating strikes were a good choice. It was a pressure tactic, not a national strike. I have been involved with unions enough to know that.

The NDP member spoke about how democratic unions are. As an aside, Local 144 is one example that contradicts that idea of democracy, and there may be others. It is true that talks can sometimes be difficult, but they work. Disputes are normal. I find it sad that we are imposing this sort of thing, especially given that the current context is entirely different from 1997.

•(1300)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bourassa for his speech.

He says that this situation is different from the 1997 strike. From experience I know that negotiations are never identical. The Liberals are using the excuse that the strike lasted 12 days and that they had every reason to legislate employees back to work. I would like the member to explain what was different in 1997. In their legislation, the Liberals also stipulated lower wages than what had been offered by Canada Post. It is exactly the same problem that we are facing today with the Conservative government. That was in 1997, under Jean Chrétien's Liberal government, and I believe that the hon. member was in the House at the time. They voted for a bill that included lower wages than Canada Post was offering. I have a problem with that.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. His blood pressure is fine today. I am pleased to see that he did not explode. I do like him personally.

You have to be pragmatic when it comes to bringing in back-to-work legislation. All governments, even provincial NDP governments, have introduced back-to-work legislation. A dogmatic

approach should not prevail. It looks good, it will be make a good news clip, we can rip our shirts to shreds over it—the shirtmakers are the only ones doing all right in Parliament during the recession. We show our anger and that works, but we must find a balance between respect for the rights of workers and those of the general public, because it is an essential service.

Naturally, circumstances lead us to make decisions. In 1997, there was no lockout or rotating strike. After 12 days, the employer had not taken the action that it has at this point. Thus, decisions were made and it was right to do so at that time. I am saddened by the NDP's dogmatic approach. It is clear that only the Liberal Party has a pragmatic approach.

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When I was on my feet earlier, I may have misspoken some dates. I was talking about Davis Day, also known as Miners' Memorial Day, and now, since November 25, 2008, officially known as William Davis Miners' Memorial Day. At 11 a.m. on June 11, 1925, William Davis was shot dead in a protest against the mining company. It is a day that has been recognized. I have had the opportunity to attend numerous services in both Glace Bay and Springhill. It is a very important day to me and to many Nova Scotians. I would not want anyone to think that I did not appreciate how important it is to ensure the record is clear.

•(1305)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services.

This bill would bring an end to the work stoppage involving Canada Post and about 50,000 members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Urban Operations Unit, or CUPW.

As my fellow members know, the government has used every tool available under the Canada Labour Code to bring the two sides together, without success. This legislation would end the strike. It would impose a four-year contract and new rates of pay. The legislation also provides for final offer selection, a binding mechanism on all outstanding matters.

Furthermore, in making the selection of a final offer, the arbitrator would be guided by the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries and that would provide the necessary degree of flexibility to ensure the short and long-term economic viability and competitiveness of the Canada Post Corporation, maintain the health and safety of its workers and ensure the sustainability of its pension plan.

The terms and conditions of employment must also take into account that the solvency ratio of the pension plan must not decline as a result of the new collective agreement, and that the Canada Post Corporation must, without recourse to undue increases in postal rates, operate efficiently, improve productivity and meet acceptable standards of service.

Government Orders

The best solution in any dispute is always the one that the parties reach themselves. It is always better when employers and unions can negotiate contracts at the bargaining table without the need for Parliament to intervene. We have come a long way since the 1920s.

No member of this House is pleased about having to vote on this kind of legislation. However, it is absolutely vital that we do intervene. Parliament must act. In a moment I will talk about what is at stake for our national economy, but first I will take a little time to summarize the events that brought us to this point. I will start with some background on this dispute.

Canada Post is a crown corporation that employs more than 70,000 full and part-time employees. Every business day, Canada Post delivers approximately 40 million items. That adds up to 11 billion pieces of mail every year. Canada Post has to be reliable and efficient and offer services at a reasonable price if it is going to keep its customers. It also has to generate revenue and control expenses, like any other business.

For its part, the union, naturally, wants the best possible deal for its members in terms of salary and working conditions. The dispute between Canada Post and CUPW relates to the renewal of collective agreements covering some 50,000 postal workers, plant and retail employees, letter carriers and mail service couriers. The latest collective agreement expired on January 31, 2011.

Negotiations for a new agreement began in October 2010. Major and complex issues had to be addressed at the negotiating table, including the introduction of a short-term disability plan and Canada Post's interest in moving toward a two-tiered wage approach.

On January 21 of this year, the parties informed the Government of Canada that they had reached an impasse. The Minister of Labour immediately appointed a conciliator to help the parties resolve their differences. When no progress was made after the initial 60-day conciliation period, it was then extended by another 32 days.

A solution was still not forthcoming and on May 5 a mediator was appointed. Throughout the month of May, an officer from the labour program's federal mediation and conciliation service met frequently with the parties.

• (1310)

Despite this lengthy process and the breadth of federal government support, on May 30, CUPW gave 72-hours notice of its intent to strike. On June 3, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers started rotating strike action and, on June 15, 2011, the employer declared a lockout.

I heard the member opposite talk about what our minister and our government have done with respect to this matter. This gives a very good idea of the lengths that have been gone to over many months to attempt to resolve this dispute in a different way.

The postal workers have been without a contract since the end of January of this year despite many rounds of bargaining. The two sides have been unable to close the gap between their positions. It is unfortunate when employers and unions cannot find a way to reach settlements that are in their mutual interest.

However, the reality is that sometimes collective bargaining fails. When that happens, the parties have several options. They can jointly request that the Minister of Labour appoint an arbitrator. Employers can also bring pressure to bear on the union by locking out workers and trying to continue business without them. Workers can pressure the employer by withdrawing their labour. All of those options are of course legal as long as certain conditions are met.

Under normal circumstances, the Government of Canada does not intervene in labour disputes of this kind. We respect the right to free collective bargaining, which includes the right to strike or lockout. Parliament will stand aside as long as the people most affected are the parties to the dispute themselves and there is no threat of serious harm to the national economy or public health and safety.

When employers and unions choose a course of action that has serious consequences on the country as a whole, this situation changes. Parliament can no longer stand aside. Parliament may then decide that the right of the parties to exert pressure through a strike or lockout has to be weighed against the rights of all Canadians in all provinces and territories.

The losses caused by a shutdown of postal services are not borne only by Canada Post and its employees. They are borne by hard-working Canadians and their families across the country. Jobs are at stake and businesses are on the line. Whole sectors of the economy will be affected and the ripple effect will reach everywhere.

Bringing in back to work legislation is always a difficult decision, but in this particular case we feel we have no alternative. We must do what is necessary to keep Canada and the Canadian economy running. That is the strong mandate we were given in the last election.

We need to consider what a strike means in the mail order sector. By definition, these businesses depend on reliable postal services. They could hardly exist without them. Many of these enterprises are mom and pop operations run out of someone's home. Not all of them can afford to switch to courier services. If the strike continues, many small businesses will go under. As all parties in the House have been expressing support for small businesses, they should support this government initiative.

This is not speculation. Interestingly, my notes have me saying that I am sure everyone here remembers the mail strike of November 1997. However, mindful of many young parliamentarians, I would say that everyone over a certain age perhaps remembers that mail strike of 1997. It lasted for 15 days and many small and medium-sized businesses suffered or went under.

Reliance on postal services has diminished somewhat since 1997 due to the advent of the Internet and the increased use of faxes, email, electronic billing and electronic funds transfers, but small and medium-sized businesses still rely heavily on postal services for billing and order fulfillment. A work stoppage at Canada Post is hitting small and medium-sized businesses much harder than large corporations.

• (1315)

Again, if the opposition members are determined, as they have stated, to champion small business, I encourage them to proudly support the legislation.

Government Orders

Is it fair that hard-working Canadian entrepreneurs are held hostage by a postal dispute? Small- and medium-size businesses are engines of growth, and every day they make a significant contribution to Canada's recovery from the recession, a recovery, by the way, that is still fragile.

The 15-day strike in 1997 did a lot of damage. The strike we are now experiencing could cost our economy a lot more. I will give some figures.

Members of the House may not be aware that directly or indirectly Canada Post contributes \$6.6 billion to this country's GDP. We know that past mail strikes have had a crippling effect on the economy in a very short period of time. Can our economy afford such a heavy blow when some sectors are still struggling?

The Canadian direct marketing industry, for example, suffered serious financial losses during the economic downturn. How would it cope with a prolonged postal strike?

What about the Canadian magazine industry? Those businesses have no practical cost-effective way to get their product to customers in the absence of postal service. For them, this postal strike could be nothing short of a disaster.

I could go on and on. If we do not do something soon about the postal strike, Canadian businesses will suffer. They already are. Canadian consumers will suffer. They already are. People who just want to communicate with family and friends will suffer.

I have a couple of examples of emails that I have received from constituents in my riding. One of them, which is addressed to me, says:

Canada Post does definitely affect the economy! A good portion of Canadians many of them Seniors, and the disabled, rely on Canada Post to deliver cheques, bills, bank statements, etc. Without the mail, they are stuck.

Another email came from a resident of Vancouver, B.C. I assume she thought that this might fall on deaf ears with her Liberal member of Parliament. She wrote in the subject line "I really need your help", and said in the email:

I live in Vancouver, BC, I have a big problem, my young sister is going to marry on 01 of July this year in Mexico, in 15 days. My husband and I appl[ied] for visas to go to Mexico. Citizenship and Immigration Canada [says that] you need to send an Xpresspost from Canada Post to receive your documents faster. After 20 days of waiting they are all ready but I have a stranded envelope in a Canada post office in London, Ontario...with the passports and visas [for] my daughter, my husband and [me]. For the decision of putting down the labours in Canada post, I'm going to lose the opportunity to see my family and go to my sister's wedding. I have very important documents that are going to Mexico my country. Please help me to receive this envelope. I hope you understand....

She also said:

I really care about the problem between Canada Post and the CUPW but they really need to think of mine too.

We cannot do everything, even in this modern world, by email. For the sake of all Canadians, we must act now and pass the legislation. We must not wait until jobs are lost, until businesses start closing, and until the damage is too severe to be repaired. We must act now.

I hope all members of the House will join me in supporting the legislation.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest as my hon. colleague went through the chronology. She very accurately job laid out the events over the last number of years. She was accurate about the fact that there are a great many members on this side of the House who probably do not remember the strike of 1997, which is a good thing. It actually livens this place and brings a breath of fresh air to this Parliament and the country.

After very accurately laying out the chronology, she switched to the second part of her presentation and continually referred to "the strike". I would remind my hon. colleague that this is no longer a strike; indeed it is a lockout. The employer, not the union or its workers, but the employer has decided to terminate all of the business of Canada Post across the country because it has locked out all of its employees.

Partway through the rotation strikes, the postal union said to the employer that this was going to take a long time. The union leaders said that because, as the member has outlined, it has a history of taking a long time to get to an agreement. We saw that at Vale Inco in Sudbury where it took over 14 months.

I would say to my hon. colleague that if the government had taken the advice of the union leadership who said it would return to work and just go through the bargaining process and leave the agreement in place, the person the member talked about would be going to the wedding in Mexico and small businesses would be getting their transactions done. Canada Post should have been ordered by the minister to adhere to what the union wants, let the workers go back to work and get back to the bargaining table.

• (1320)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that in the labour environment we have in Canada, workers have the right to strike and employers have the right to lock out. These are balancing rights that they have. This is strike and lockout have been evolving over time. I gave the history of it, as my friend opposite acknowledged, as accurately as I could and now is the time for this government to act.

The parties have been unable to resolve this dispute, much as we would have hoped they would. Now it is time to get back to work.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in business generally the parties want a level playing field. They want to be able to negotiate in a principled manner back and forth across the table, whether they are dealing with government, competitors, industry, or employees. The proposed legislation ties the hands of the arbitrator. It says to the arbitrator that wages are not negotiable, they are imposed. It says to the arbitrator that pensions are not negotiable, they are imposed. It says that the arbitrator is going to look at how postal services are delivered in other countries because there is no comparable postal service in Canada.

Why is it that the legislation has to show such disrespect to the intentions of the parties and the integrity of the collective bargaining process in this country?

Government Orders

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, this government has been not only patient but actively engaged in trying to help the parties come to a mutual settlement, which is always preferable. However, that has not occurred.

The proposed legislation includes wage rate increases which are consistent with other recent federal public sector collective agreements. The wage rate increases are the result of concessions in the public sector negotiations and take into consideration the future economic vitality of Canada Post.

This government was given a strong mandate to shepherd a fragile economy and continue to do the good work it has done and intends to continue to do.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an important debate. I have thought long and hard about this whole dialogue. I appreciate the contribution the parliamentary secretary is making in this important discussion. It is critical for Canada's economy.

I am going to ask her, in just a moment, to help me, Canadians and this House better understand what, by not ultimately bringing these people back to work, impact it would have on our economy.

All parliamentarians have received many letters. I want to share one of the letters that I have received:

As a small business owner I depend on the mail to run my business. While there are alternatives to using the mail service, we do not have the resources to use them. Using the courier, as well as the labour costs of contacting my customers to make alternative arrangements are additional costs that we just cannot afford at this time.

My payroll depends on the mail, if this continues for any length of time I will likely be forced to close my doors...

I am also sure that I do not have to stress to you that any of the small gains made in our economic situation in general over the past year will be quickly lost if this does not end ASAP.

Because of the critical importance it has for communities like London, Ontario, and while we are the tenth largest city in Canada I will also tell members that we are as impacted as anyone by this, could the parliamentary secretary indicate the impact this has on business right across our country?

•(1325)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is a major economic enabler of the Canadian economy. Through its postal services, marketing is conducted, contracts are signed, long distance sales are made, and goods, bills and cheques are reliably delivered.

It is estimated that the Canada Post group itself spends \$3 billion annually on goods and services, thereby supporting an additional 30,000 jobs in the national economy.

Canada Post is also one of Canada's largest employers. Some 69,000 Canadians in urban and rural areas work at Canada Post or its subsidiaries. These employees spend billions in the economy annually.

As I set out in my comments earlier, small and medium businesses are the ones taking the brunt of the hit, along with individual Canadians in the hon. member's riding, in my riding and in ridings in all 10 provinces and the territories. This is a matter that needs to be addressed now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I fully understand that the workers will eventually have to return to work. However, why is the government so intent on using this special act to give workers less than what Canada Post's management sought to offer its own employees, and opting instead to set its own limits?

On Facebook today, I was asked whether there might be a conflict of interests, given that Canada Post is a crown corporation, whose profits go to the Conservative-led Government of Canada.

[*English*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, over the past five months, there have been proposals and counter-proposals exchanged. As the minister said earlier, unfortunately, the parties are still far apart. Therefore, it is time for our government to act.

As I stated earlier, the wage rate increases that are being proposed are the result of concessions in the public sector negotiations and take into consideration the future economic liability of Canada Post, which is an enabler and a large part of our Canadian economy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sometimes debate influences a government's actions and also public perception.

If Canadians initially had the impression that the Conservatives were a heartless and untrustworthy bunch who flouted human rights and freedoms, well, the government's actions are now giving credence to this perception.

If there is one area where good faith must prevail, it is labour relations. The Supreme Court has told us that labour relations are guaranteed by the charter because they constitute a subset of our economic rights, our freedom of expression, and our freedom of association.

What have we seen over recent weeks from this Conservative government? Why does Canadians' mistrust of the Conservatives now appear justified?

Let us consider the government's concrete actions, and the response we have heard here today. To begin with, this is a crown corporation. The government owns the corporation on behalf of all Canadians, and it has the last word when it comes to what Canada Post Corporation does. Throughout the bargaining process—with the government on one side, and employees and their union representatives on the other—everything was going along swimmingly. There were a number of attempts by the employees—legitimately and according to their rights—to voice their point of view through rotating strikes, for example, which did not significantly affect service to the public.

That was one way for the employees, who had the right to strike, to say that the bargaining process had gone off track, and to give us a sense of the steps they intended to take to make management see reason.

Government Orders

What happened then? The very same Canada Post Corporation, owned by the government, locked out its own employees. They locked their doors, with the employees on the outside. The government, through one of its own bodies, a crown corporation, has shut its employees outside and is keeping them there. Then they turn around and look at the situation they just created and pretend to be surprised, saying, "For God's sake, this cannot go on like this. Look, these people have stopped working." That is how one of the Conservative backbenchers just put it.

• (1330)

[*English*]

"We have to bring these people back to work".

[*Translation*]

Those creeps, those things, as if they were not citizens endowed with all due rights, which they are exercising in a calm, practical way under legislation duly passed by the House of Commons. That is what we are talking about here. These are people who exercised a right guaranteed by legislation passed by this House. Not content just to trifle with this, showing their usual bad faith, the Conservatives are going so far today as to tell us that they are not only going to throw these people out but they are going to lock the doors and come up with a solution to the problem they just created themselves by throwing these people out. Special legislation will be passed to deprive them of their rights, even though those rights are guaranteed under the Charter and in legislation passed by the House of Commons.

This is not a new way of doing things. My colleague from Vancouver East already showed us how the very same thing was done in 1997 by a Liberal government. It was very interesting the other day to hear certain leading lights of the Liberal Party pretending to be outraged by the tactics employed by the Conservatives when they are a carbon copy of Bill C-34 passed by a Liberal government in 1997.

Governments change but the tactics remain the same. When it comes to showing respect for working people and their rights, what the Conservatives are doing is clearly in line with all the social and economic policies of the Conservative government. It is as if we were in the early 1980s, in the Reagan era with the air traffic controllers. What could be better for a government of the far right than to flex its muscles at the expense of working people, look at its Reform Party base and say, "Finally you can see why you supported us from the beginning. We will put working people in their place". The Conservatives will do that, even though the bad faith is as obvious as it is right now.

It is the Conservatives who are imposing a lockout, bolting the door themselves, throwing everybody out, and saying how terrible it is that these people are not working anymore. But it is the Conservatives who locked them out, and now because they are not working any more, the Conservatives want special legislation to force them back to work. The funny thing is that the Conservatives are even going so far as to copy from the Liberals' legislation the part where the Liberals lowered the salary offers already on the table. Several of my colleagues, including the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, asked about this. But as we all heard, there was no answer.

They cannot answer because this makes absolutely no sense. If the objective is to settle a dispute between an employer and its employees, they would have at least put on the table what the two parties had already agreed on. But no, the Conservatives are rubbing salt in the wounds of workers who were just locked out and telling them not only that they are the bad guys for getting locked out, but also that they are being punished and getting less than they managed to agree on with the employer. They are being told they should have been happy with the crumbs they had been offered. Now even the crumbs are being taken away, because they did not appreciate the fact that their employer is a good employer and they should have accepted whatever they were offered. So it is their fault.

To understand what a mistake this is, both economically and socially, one only has to look at everything the Conservatives have done over the past five and half years since they came to power. This is part of their right-wing ideology, which is at odds with the impression they like to give, since they always talk about families and future generations. In reality, however, all of their actions have been harmful to future generations, no matter what rhetoric they like to spew.

Let me put this into context. As this time, by eliminating all guarantees of a decent pension, the Conservatives are dumping a huge social debt on future generations. Who is going to pay for the people who cannot afford to meet their own needs once they retire? Future generations will pay.

• (1335)

What has been happening since the Conservatives have been here? They are in the process of leaving future generations with the most significant environmental, economic and social debt in our history. These three elements are interconnected and constitute the three pillars of sustainable development. This bill and all the Conservatives' actions are the antithesis to sustainable development. What they are doing is not sustainable.

Let us take a close look at what their approach to developing our natural resources means. Take the oil sands for example. They have decided to take everything they can immediately and export the jobs. A pipeline like Keystone exports 16,000 jobs to the United States because we do not have what it takes to do the processing and refining here. We are exporting crude. With the Keystone pipeline alone, we are exporting 16,000 jobs to the United States without internalizing the environmental costs. Cost internalization is one of the basic principles of sustainable development. We are leaving it up to future generations to clean up the soil, water and air that we are polluting with the way in which the oil sands are being developed. The Conservatives likes to exaggerate things and say that we are against the oil sands development. That is not true. We are against the way in which the oil sands are being developed because it is disrespectful of future generations. As a result of this failure to internalize the environmental cost, we end up importing an artificially high number of U.S. dollars since the cost has never been included. This artificially high number of U.S. dollars is raising the value of the Canadian dollar, which, for a while now, has exceeded the value of the U.S. dollar.

Government Orders

Such a high Canadian dollar makes it increasingly difficult to export our manufactured goods. The result is that, since the Conservatives came to power in January 2006, Canada has been experiencing what economic textbooks and writings refer to as the Dutch disease, named after what happened in the Netherlands in the 1960s. The Dutch were thrilled to discover large offshore gas deposits. It was a windfall. It was going to be good for the economy because everyone was going to buy gas from them. They were right, except that this occurred before the euro. Every country in Europe had its own currency. The Netherlands used the guilder, which began to shoot up in value because everyone was in fact buying gas from them and other countries' currencies were coming in. The value of the guilder spiked and completely destroyed their manufacturing industry.

Statistics Canada has indicated that we are experiencing exactly the same thing here in Canada right now. Our manufacturing industry is being gutted. Since the Conservatives came to power, they have been gutting our manufacturing industry because they are not applying the basic principles of sustainable development. The Conservatives will deny it and say that they have created so many hundreds of thousands of jobs since the crisis began. And that is true. However, they are replacing jobs in our manufacturing industry with jobs in the service industry, which are often part-time and insecure. I do not wish to take anything away from someone who works in a shopping mall and sells clothing for \$12 an hour, but someone who worked for GM, which used to be on the west side of the Laurentian Autoroute in Boisbriand before it became a mega-mall, earned enough money to take care of a family. That person also had a pension to live on after he or she retired. Simply put, what the government is doing is replacing these well-paid jobs that had retirement pensions—and this is yet another attack on retirement pensions—with lower-paying jobs in the service industry that do not give employees enough money to take care of their families and, of course, do not provide them with retirement pensions.

● (1340)

The government is responsible for sustainable development every time it makes a decision. It must look at the environmental, economic and social aspects of a problem. If basic environmental principles are not respected, there is a negative impact on the economy. We have lost hundreds of thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector. The social issue is that hundreds of thousands of people will retire without enough money to live on. What will happen? They will have to be supported by the government. Who will the government be then? Today's young people. They will be stuck paying for these people because we did not abide by the basic rules of intergenerational equity, our obligations to future generations.

That is exactly the philosophy that is on the table today. The government is going after not only existing benefits, but also wages and working conditions. I urge everyone here to speak to a letter carrier, with someone who delivers the mail, with someone who does that job. They have been pushed to the limit. There is nothing left to squeeze out of them. Hours of work, working conditions, occupational injuries: everything will get worse because from now on, they must sort for themselves as they go. What they are being asked to do is unbelievable. But the government, still riding the same general wave that they created themselves—an anti-worker, anti-

union one—says that it is no big deal, that they can surf the wave and that the public will support them. That is a lesson they learned from Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s. The more you go after the unions, the happier you make a certain segment of the population, particularly the Conservatives' base. They are playing this game for the benefit of their Reform base.

They have never delivered anything. What is being left for future generations is very serious in terms of the economy. They are simply gutting the industrial and manufacturing sector. Look at what they are doing with the largest deficit in history. The largest deficit in history has been delivered by the Conservatives. They just beat the record set by the Mulroney Conservative government. They hold the deficit record and yet they claim to be such great managers of public assets. We saw that again this week.

Auditing services within the government ensure, on our behalf, that government spending follows the rules. When it came time to trim excess fat from the government, where did they start? With the 92 people who audit and monitor government spending. How on earth are we supposed to monitor spending when they fired the people who monitor that spending? It is absurd, but that is where the Conservative logic leads.

They are telling us that there are serious issues with government spending and that cuts will have to be made. It is funny: since these same people—who claim to be such wonderful public administrators—came to power five and a half years ago, the annual rate of inflation has been about 2%. Plus, government spending has increased at three and a half times the rate of the cost of living. Did you hear that? Annual spending has increased by 6% to 7% each year since they came to power. Now—and this is similar to what they are doing to postal workers—having created the worst deficit in history, never having managed to control government spending, they are saying that it is terrible, that there is a deficit, that there is waste, that public money is being thrown out the window, and that this needs to stop.

Can we have a reality check here? They are the ones who have been running the country for five and a half years. Every time they say that public money is being wasted in government administration, they are criticizing themselves. They are the ones who have been managing this money for five and a half years. They are the ones who are responsible for the situation they are currently criticizing; however, that will not stop them. They are unable to take an honest look in the mirror. They are convinced that they are always right about everything.

It is no different here today. The government's only problem is when they are asked clear and specific questions. They are never able to answer them. The system for negotiating working conditions must be based on good faith. How can they justify the fact that they are the ones who locked the doors? How can they justify their complaints that the employees are not working when they are the ones who locked out the employees?

● (1345)

They do not have an answer. We are asking them how they can make an offer that is not as good as what management was prepared to offer, if the system is in fact based on good faith and if they are not playing a political game.

Government Orders

At the beginning of my speech, I said that the right to negotiate working conditions, the right to join forces with other workers to negotiate working conditions, and the right to collectively withdraw the offer of work in accordance with the law when the collective agreement has expired and all other conditions have been met are rights that are guaranteed under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and recognized by courts across Canada.

There was initially some indecision in this regard, particularly in terms of the RCMP's right to unionize, but all these issues are currently being upheld by the courts. These rights are a subset of the rights guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I am thinking of our freedom of association, our freedom to work with others to ensure that these same rights are respected and our freedom to speak out when those conditions are not met.

The moment the government enters into the negotiations, a major conflict of interest is created. When that same government controls the employer and the tools through a majority government in the House, it is a complete conflict of interest. The basic obligation to demonstrate good faith in all negotiations is even more important when this clear conflict of interest exists.

Rather than rising above the fray, the Conservative government is playing a shamelessly partisan game. That is why the New Democratic Party, which has always understood the role it plays in defending the rights of workers, will stand up and do everything in its power to stop this despicable and draconian bill from passing.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech. While I am sure he feels he has given a very thoughtful speech to the House, there is a major chunk missing when he talks about workers. He does not talk about all workers such as all workers in my riding, all workers in his riding, all workers in anyone else's riding in the House. He is talking about a very select group.

All these other workers, by the way, are not at the bargaining table, but they are paying a price and that price is going to impact them at home. It is going to impact whether they can pay their bills. It is going to impact whether they can have a summer vacation with their kids this year because they are going to be concerned about the effects of the Canada Post stoppage.

He has not thought about that at all. He has not thought about the impacts on the economy. That is why Canadians entrusted the Conservative Party with the leadership of the 41st Parliament. They know that only we will be responsible to act in the best interests of all Canadians.

Does the member know that CUPW has refused to allow Canada Post workers the opportunity to vote on Canada Post's most recent offer? Does he support that? Does he think that is democratic? Does he really think he is standing up for those workers?

• (1350)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, sometimes Conservative demagoguery goes beyond the limits.

When the member says "Canada Post stoppage", what he forgets is that the workers have been locked out. It is not the union that has locked out. The workers have been locked out and they have been locked out by their employer, which is a crown corporation, and crown corporations are run by the government.

The government has locked the workers out to allow the member to stand, rend his garments and say, "This is terrible, they're not working, let's force them back to work". The problem is the Conservatives are the ones who have stopped them from working.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

We have to remind Canadians watching this debate that this is a lockout. CUPW has been engaged in something that is absolutely legitimate and has been part of bargaining for years in our country, and that is rotating strikes, bringing attention to their cause and issues.

For Canada Post to go to the lockout, and I know this may be conjecture but I would appreciate the member's opinion on this, does he not think Canada Post would have had some indication from its insider sources that the government would support this by coming forward with back to work legislation?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the question is well posed, but I will take a slightly different tack in answering it.

What incentive remains for an employer to settle? What incentive remains for an employer to act in good faith? What incentive remains for the employer to sit down, bargain and get a result in the public interest, because that is what we are all here to defend?

However, Canada Post has their gang on the other side saying not to worry, even though the union has not broken a single law. On the contrary, it has respected every letter of every law, but we should not worry about that. It locks the workers out, then blames them and then special legislation is brought in because it is good for its base.

This is Ronald Reagan politics 101.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about the position in which the workers have been put.

The intervention that the government has taken is like using a sledgehammer on the workers. These men and women have served ably under a government-run business for a number of years. They have been committed to our country and to their work. We actually have one of the best recognized postal services in the world. The government has decided to use this approach to undermine the bargaining process and reduce it to the point where they are in the back seat. Would my colleague expand upon that?

Not only has the government not allowed the workers to have the process take place, it has interfered to ensure their wages, their values and also their pensions are diminished. It is a strategic plot by the Conservatives.

Again, it is important to recognize that these workers are locked out. They want to be at work, but they need a fair and just agreement.

Government Orders

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Windsor West makes the point extremely well. In fact, the workers had been using their rights under their collective agreement, under existing legislation. They had been showing their determination to get a settlement that would work for everyone.

At the same time, not only is the member right when he says that Canada Post employees are among the best of any post office in the world, which is a subjective evaluation, the objective fact is the price of a stamp in Canada is a lot lower than in most comparable countries with an economy similar to ours.

It is an extremely well-run operation, and that is thanks to the men and women who do the work there.

• (1355)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I have very simple questions, and I would hope that democracy within the NDP works better than it does within CUPW.

Is the member aware that there have been three contract offers made by Canada Post over a series of months and the workers were not allowed an opportunity to vote of any of them, and that includes Canada Post's most recent offer? Is the member aware that there are salary increases in there for the workers? Is he aware that there is pension security in there for the workers? Is he aware that the issues that matter to the members of CUPW are addressed in that contract? Is he aware that they have not, as workers, been given the opportunity to vote on that contract offer?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, is the member aware that we will not get a chance to vote on those salary and pension increases because the government has lowered them and removed them from the specific legislation that is before the House?

CUPW has respected every article of every statute. All the workers' rights are being defended by CUPW. The problem is that the employer's offers are being lowered because of the interfering, manipulative government that wants to pick a fight with the workers.

The workers were locked out and the government pointed to them as being the problem. It is lowering the offers of the employer and pointing to the workers as being the problem, but it is the government that is the problem.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have some concern as I listen to the Conservative's attempt to turn the postal workers of Canada into the kicking dog of their ideological campaign.

I ran a small business that was dependent on mail service. I ran a magazine for 10 years. Every day I was at the post office to see if cheques had come in to get our product out.

A number of magazine owners have contacted me. They said that they did not want this lock out to be used as an excuse to attack the postal workers, even if it affects their business. People at various magazines are saying that they trust the workers at Canada Post. They understand that the government has picked a fight and it figures the public will turn away from the postal workers.

If the government gets away with this with the postal workers, then folks back home should know that it will come after every other bargaining sector and do the same thing. This is the line in the sand.

Could my hon. colleague comment on that?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely right. If Canada Post gets away with locking out its workers and then blaming the same workers for not working, if the government gets away with tabling a lower offer than was already negotiated and then turns around and wonders why the workers are not voting on it when the workers are not able to vote on it because the government has just lowered the offer, then that is their goal.

The government's goal is to put so much pressure on honest working men and women in this country that no one will stand up for their rights any more.

I can guarantee one thing. There is one party that has been standing up for workers' rights for the past 50 years and will continue to do so. It is the New Democratic Party of Canada.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I would view that last statement somewhat differently. There is one party beholden to big union bosses in this country. That happens to be the New Democratic Party of Canada.

When it comes to being responsible, when it comes to being accountable to Canadians, I would note there was virtually identical legislation brought to bear in this House in 1997. There is precedent for this.

However, I would argue that if the member feels that what is being proposed is so outrageous, how can he sit in this House and claim that he supports CUPW when it will not even allow its own members to vote on contract offers?

Is that what he supports, an organization—

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Outremont.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, here are the facts.

The union respected every single rule every step of the way. The union is using a right guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, something that the Conservatives apparently know nothing about. The workers were unable to get the same offer in this legislation.

What is happening is this. We have an employer that has locked out the workers. They are pointing to that as being the problem. It is a problem created by the government.

When one deals in good faith, one negotiates in good faith, visor up and takes it straight on. When one is a bully, one does not respect the law and then changes it on behalf of the boss who is not negotiating in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order please. It being 2 o'clock, we will move on to statements by members.

The hon. member for London West.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year the YMCA of Western Ontario awards the Women of Excellence Awards to some of the many outstanding Canadian women who call London home.

This year, as in all years, its decision has not been an easy one, but I congratulate it on choosing an exceptional group of women to honour. Each of these women has worked tirelessly to improve the London community. They include: Ramona Lumpkin for education, training and development; Judith Rodger for arts, culture and heritage; Helen Connell for business, professions and trades; Ruthe Anne Conyngham for community, volunteerism and humanity; Donna Bourne for sport, fitness and recreation; and Sandy Whittall for health, science and technology. Moreover, the Olympians Tessa Virtue and Christine Nesbitt were celebrated for their outstanding achievement.

This annual event is a celebration of excellence and a small way in which Londoners can thank these remarkable women for their contributions.

On behalf of all Canadians, and especially those in London, let me thank them once again for making a positive difference to so many lives.

* * *

FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, along with farm groups from 66 countries, Canada's supply managed sector is calling for coherence between trade agreements and international treaties on poverty, hunger, climate change and biodiversity so that countries can better meet food security requirements.

Our farmers are saying that trade agreements must not take precedence over food security.

It is no secret that the Canadian Council of Chief Executives has formally called on the Prime Minister to sacrifice the Canadian Wheat Board and our supply managed sector. We see the government already moving to destroy the wheat board by 2012. We also know that if the current WTO Doha round is signed, each dairy farmer stands to lose approximately \$70,000.

I am asking the government to respect the underlying principle of food sovereignty as laid out in the international call for coherence. It could begin by rejecting any proposal that would weaken our ability to maintain supply management or our Canadian Wheat Board, both of which are vital to our long term national food security interests.

* * *

WILLIAM TELESKE

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, William Teleske fought with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment in the Italian campaign. In late 1943 he was in the Battle of Ortona, called

the Stalingrad of Italy for its ferocity. Christmas was a short reprieve from the front lines to a bombed out church for dinner.

In Christmas 1998, Bill returned to Ortona with 30 veterans of his regiment and of the Three Rivers Regiment, Royal 22nd Regiment, Provost Corps and the Seaforth Highlanders. They visited their 1,400 fallen comrades resting at the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery and wondered: "So why not me?"

Then they shared Christmas dinner in the rebuilt church, this time with their foes of old, a wonderful expression of the hopefulness for world peace in the season of Christ meant for such reflection.

Bill passed away on Sunday, June 19.

Bill Teleske was respected for his service to his country and will be missed by his family and his many friends. We will not forget.

* * *

*[Translation]***SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD SUMMER GAMES**

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Special Olympics World Summer Games begin on June 25. Some 151 Canadian athletes and coaches will be in Athens to represent our country. They will do so with dignity and in the Olympic spirit.

● (1405)

[English]

Dignity, acceptance and a chance to reach one's potential, these are human rights that will drive our young Canadians through this competition.

For more than four decades, the Special Olympics has been bringing one message to the world: people with intellectual disabilities can and will succeed if given the opportunity.

I would like to congratulate our athletes for making it to Athens and I wish them great success at the games, but most of all I thank them for representing us well and making us so very proud. Go Canada go.

* * *

LETHBRIDGE

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the people of Lethbridge and Southern Alberta for electing me as their new member of Parliament. They put their trust in me because they have grown to trust the Conservative Party. They know that we are the party of the hard-working working class.

They know that they can count on me to work hard to reduce taxes and to strengthen the economy, to continue to let parents choose for themselves how to care for their children and to work toward a more just justice system.

Southern Albertans also know that Conservative policies are the only sure way and the most compassionate way to help the poor and lift the downtrodden.

We offer families real choices, real assistance and real results.

Statements by Members

I am here to listen and to serve and to ensure that Southern Alberta remains a place of rich diversity and independent thinkers who work together within a strong, vibrant community.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RAGWEED

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to commend the entire community of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield for its involvement in the fight against ragweed. Over 400 partners, including the City of Valleyfield, public health workers, the health and social service centre and the people of this city in my riding, have all joined forces for the past three years to take part in a study on pollen concentrations.

Ragweed is systematically cut down every year in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, and as a result, the intensity of allergy symptoms has dropped by over 58%. This goes to show that, by working together, it is possible to positively influence people's health. I would remind the House that 25% of Canadians suffer from this kind of allergy. I therefore invite all communities in Canada to follow the example set by Salaberry-de-Valleyfield in order to improve air quality and everyone's health.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the people of my riding and everyone in Quebec an excellent Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

* * *

[*English*]

PRINCE ALBERT

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 2, the constituents of the federal riding of Prince Albert honoured me by re-electing me as their member of Parliament.

I want to thank them for the trust and confidence they have placed in me. I also specifically wish to acknowledge the commitment and hard work of my campaign manager, Larry Brewster, and my entire campaign team, who are too many to mention in this short statement.

Most of all I would like to thank my wife, Jerri, and my children, Broc and Alicia, for their continued love and support.

The voters of Prince Albert sent a clear message on May 2. They want to see the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry repealed. They want the ability to market their grain as they fit, just as producers in Ontario have the right to do. They want to see a Senate that is democratically elected. They want to see the economic policies of our Conservative government continue, policies that kept Canadians working during the global recession, and a balanced budget by 2015.

Most of all, they want Canada to be governed by a Conservative majority led by the Right Hon. Prime Minister, and thanks to the leadership of our Prime Minister, their wants will be our realities.

* * *

ANNIVERSARY OF UKRAINIAN SETTLEMENT

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 2 the voters of Dauphin—Swan

River—Marquette bestowed on me the honour of representing them in the House of Commons by re-electing me.

On June 14, parliamentarians from all parties elected me as the chair of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group. I succeeded the former chair, the member for Langley, whom I thank for his distinguished service.

In 1891, the first wave of Ukrainian settlers arrived on Canada's shores, and the rest, as they say, is history. This year marks the 120th anniversary of that settlement.

Western Canada was a destination for many of these settlers who yearned for a farm of their own. The Ukrainian culture is alive, well and thriving in my constituency, as is the case in many regions of Canada. The many manifestations of Ukrainian culture in my constituency range from beautiful churches to lovingly tended cemeteries, thriving dance groups, beautiful gardens and, of course, productive farms.

I am honoured to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Ukrainian settlement, a testament to our great land of hope and opportunity.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this first opportunity in the House to thank my constituents for the confidence they placed in me on May 2. I want to wish them and all Quebecers a happy Quebec national holiday and tell them I will be with them in spirit, as I will not be joining the festivities. Let us face it, the Prime Minister refuses to respect the holiday of a nation he claims to recognize.

I look forward to returning to my riding and taking part in many summer activities with the extraordinary people who live there.

I also want to add that I am proud that the NDP, unlike the current government, supports workers. I chose this party for its values, which I share, as do a vast majority of Quebecers. I will continue to represent these values when it comes to social and affordable housing, for which I am the critic, because every citizen, without exception, has the right to have a decent roof overhead.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

CAMP NATHAN SMITH

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a momentous day in Kandahar province, Afghanistan.

The Canadian flag was lowered for good at Camp Nathan Smith, where Canadian civilians have been serving for the last six years.

Statements by Members

This solemn moment marks both the achievements and sacrifices of all Canadians who have served in Afghanistan. It is a step forward in the transition of that country's future to the Afghan people. It is also a chance to pay tribute to all those who have sacrificed, some with the ultimate price, in the fight against the Taliban and terror generally.

Afghanistan today is a better, freer place than Canadians found it when they first arrived at Camp Nathan Smith. The people who have used the camp as a base for their work have helped tangibly to improve the lives of people in the region and the country as a whole. Canada's commitment to Afghanistan's future continues.

I would ask all hon. members to join me in saluting the men and women who have served with honour and distinction at Camp Nathan Smith. Theirs is an impressive legacy, indeed.

* * *

[Translation]

RIDING OF TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one minute to talk about the important events in my riding is not very much. But I would like to mention a few situations that reflect the best things, and in some instances the worst, that are on the minds of the people of Trois-Rivières.

First, I would like to wish all Quebeckers a happy national holiday. I apologize for not being able to participate in the festivities for reasons known to everyone and approved by very few.

After the bundle of English-only documents that were presented yesterday, the battles to be fought in Ottawa are more urgent than ever.

I also wish to reassure Claude Mercier and Louis Poisson of CUPW in Trois-Rivières that I will work relentlessly to defend their rights to fair and equitable bargaining.

In another vein, I would like to congratulate Marie-Ève Nault and the entire Canadian women's soccer team, who are bringing us honour in the final round of the tournament in Germany.

* * *

[English]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were horrified to learn of the savage beating inflicted on Rumana Manzur, a barbaric act of violence. Our thoughts and prayers are with Ms. Manzur and her daughter, but prayers are not enough.

Violence against women destroys families and weakens the fabric of society. Canadians know we are addressing violence against women and girls.

Since taking office, our government has invested more than \$30 million in projects to end violence against women and girls in communities across the country. We have increased funding to end this violence to its highest level ever.

We are addressing these barbaric crimes by supporting programs like the Indo-Canadian Women's Associations' elimination of harmful cultural practises project. This initiative will empower immigrant girls and young women.

Violence should not be and will not be tolerated.

* * *

AIR INDIA

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, early this morning, on the coast of Ireland, a few families will be lighting candles and sending them into the water.

In Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver today, people will come together and reflect on the terrible events of June 23, 1985 when hundreds of people were killed by bombs that were built and set in Canada.

The Air India bombing stands as a terrible act of violence and terror, an event that took Canadians far too long to recognize in its full significance.

We recognize the courage and dignity of those who died and those who lived. We dedicate ourselves to the struggle against extremism and against violence, and we remember the words that are found on each monument memorializing these lives:

Time flies, suns rise and shadows fall,
Let it pass by, love reigns forever over all.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in June we laid out the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, a positive plan that will keep taxes low and stimulate jobs and growth.

Canadians supported this budget and the important economic measures it contains. We are asking the NDP and the opposition to work with us to support Canada's forestry, mining, manufacturing, agriculture and aerospace sectors; to increase the guaranteed income supplement for Canada's poorest seniors; to bring health care and social transfers to record levels; to provide tax breaks to family caregivers, families with children involved in arts activities, and volunteer firefighters; and to attract doctors and nurses to rural areas.

But the NDP voted against all of these measures. Let us work together for a strong Quebec within a united Canada.

* * *

SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE DAY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to wish my dear friends in Quebec a happy national holiday. It is a time to celebrate our language, our culture, our heritage, our history and our nation.

Quebec has a great deal to offer and many reasons to celebrate. On behalf of the entire NDP team and caucus, and especially the 59 members from Quebec, I wish all Quebecers an excellent national holiday.

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out that francophones across Canada will be celebrating Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day tomorrow. May the French culture, history and language be at the heart of our celebrations from coast to coast.

* * *

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in June, we presented the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, a positive plan to keep taxes low and support jobs and growth. Canadians supported the budget and its important economic measures.

We asked the NDP and the opposition to put aside politics and to work with us to support Canada's forestry, mining, agricultural, manufacturing and aerospace sectors; to increase income support for Canada's most in need seniors with a GIS increase; to bring health care and social transfers to record highs; to provide tax relief for family caregivers; to provide for families with a children's art tax credit; to provide for volunteer firefighters; to help attract doctors and nurses to rural areas; and much more.

The budget won praise among many Canadians but the NDP voted against it all.

Why did the NDP and the opposition members vote against seniors, vote against forestry, vote against record money for health care and much more? It is because they are in it for themselves and not for Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, negotiations between Canada Post and its workers have broken off. After locking the doors of post offices and sorting stations, Canada Post has no reason to negotiate in good faith because the Prime Minister is doing the dirty work on its behalf. He is preventing a healthy bargaining process, and imposing a labour contract with lower wages.

Where is the Prime Minister's good faith?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the role of the federal government is to act in the best interests of the Canadian people and the Canadian economy, and not in the interests of those at the table. The reason for the legislation is to put an end to this situation that threatens our economy. The wage rates being imposed are identical to those offered in negotiations with our federal public servants.

Oral Questions

● (1420)

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister likes padlocks. He locked the doors of Parliament when things were not going his way. He has locked the post office doors. He is punishing the workers who were trying to get better conditions while continuing to deliver the mail.

Why is the Prime Minister punishing the workers for the decisions made by his government and his obedient servants at Canada Post?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the opposition that decided to padlock Parliament for months for an election. For that reason, the Canadian electorate decided to give this government a majority so that it can govern this country and act in the interests of the electorate.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government shut down the post office and is now trying to impose wages that are lower than the management was offering the workers.

The Prime Minister has rendered collective bargaining pointless in this country. He is signalling that if employers cannot get what they want at the bargaining table, never mind, Ottawa will legislate it for them. Why bother to bargain? It is a terrible precedent.

Will the Prime Minister at least remove the wage section from this bill and let an arbitrator decide on this particular important matter? It is only fair.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the wage rates, as set in the bill, are only fair. They reflect what we have negotiated with federal public servants.

However, we need to be absolutely clear on the difference here. The government, unlike the NDP, is not beholden to one of the parties at the table. The government represents the wider interest of the Canadian economy. This strike is bad for the economy and we will act.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Hélène Lavergère (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the surface, the documents revealed by the Afghan detainee committee yesterday contain little new information.

After all this time and money, we are right back where we started. Torture and extrajudicial executions are not unusual in Afghan prisons, and Canada has handed prisoners over to these torturers.

Why does the government not do what is right and demand a public inquiry?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is and has always been committed to handling Afghan Taliban prisoners in accordance with our international obligations. We have just been through a 12-month \$12 million process where an unprecedented amount of information has been put before a number of parliamentarians of this place. It has been ruled upon by former members of the Supreme Court who have done an outstanding job for this country.

I think Canadians have a clear picture that our men and women in uniform fully accepted all our international obligations and have done a heck of a good job representing this country.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is clearly grasping at straws here.

What the government spent \$12 million on was trying to suppress the truth. Less than one-tenth of the documents were reviewed by the panel of ex-judges and less than half were even looked at by the back-room committee of MPs. For what? It was so the government could put this off for a year and now falsely pretend that judgment has been rendered.

Why did the Conservatives choose a process that hid the facts from Canadians and why not hold a public inquiry now?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was, as I am sure many members in this place were, tremendously disappointed when the New Democratic Party refused to participate in this committee of parliamentarians.

Yesterday some 4,200 pieces of documentation on this important issue were released. We offered a briefing to all three of the opposition parties and let me say that I was even more disappointed that not one person from the New Democratic Party bothered to show up for that briefing to have this information explained.

* * *

●(1425)

CANADA POST

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): We would have come if we had been invited, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the current postal dispute, I wonder if the Prime Minister would—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I cannot even hear the question there is so much talking going on from that end of the chamber.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Bob Rae: They are an unruly bunch, Mr. Speaker, and there is not much we can do with them.

I wonder if the Prime Minister would recognize that one feature of the legislation that he is proposing is in a sense unprecedented. The way in which the arbitration process is set up is extremely interventionist. I wonder if the Prime Minister might consider, even at this late hour, some modification of the arbitration clauses in the legislation which might in fact provide us with the possibilities of a resolution of this conflict.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not accept that there is anything unprecedented here, but what I do stress is the fact that this is a dispute that has gone on for some time. It is increasingly damaging to a wide interest of the Canadian economy, small business, charities and ordinary working people. This is not acceptable and the government is acting to ensure that postal services resume for Canadians.

* * *

THE SENATE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on another topic, the question of the Senate, the Prime Minister seems to be fixated on continuing with a proposal which has now aroused the opposition of the province of Ontario, as well as the province of Quebec, as well as former Premier Getty of his own province, who points out that having an elected Senate in Alberta with only six members in fact seriously discriminates against that province.

I wonder why the Prime Minister is persisting with a proposal that is unconstitutional, that is opposed by major provinces in the country and that does not have a hope of success?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the election possibility raised in the legislation is an option for provinces. Some may choose to participate, some may not, but it is important in this day and age that we move forward with reform.

I know the Liberal Party will go to any lengths, including making completely false statements, to try to justify the status quo in the Senate of Canada and that is simply not acceptable to Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take the Prime Minister's insulting comments they way he intended.

The reality is that it is not the Liberal Party; it is the Province of Ontario, the Province of Quebec and the other provinces. It is also the former Alberta premier, who clearly shows that this proposal discriminates against his own province.

The question remains. The Constitution protects the status of the Senate; not a party in the Parliament of Canada.

What does the Prime Minister have against the Constitution of Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly clear that the changes proposed by this government fall under the constitutional authority of the Parliament of Canada, the federal Parliament.

[English]

It is very clear that the changes are within federal constitutional authority. I know that the Liberal Party, in both chambers, believes it is entitled to its entitlements, but we believe it is time to move forward with some reform.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ASBESTOS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the finger is being pointed at Canada for its indefensible position on the Rotterdam convention.

Two days ago, the minister explained that Canada's position was justifiable since other countries were preventing chrysotile asbestos from being included on the list. A number of those countries have since changed their minds and now Canada stands alone.

Will this government explain once and for all why it is bent on refusing to add chrysotile to the Rotterdam convention?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, for more than 30 years, the Government of Canada has been arguing for the safe and controlled use of chrysotile at home and abroad. What is more, recent scientific studies clearly confirm that the fibres can be used safely in a controlled environment. Our position on the convention reflects the position adopted in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, former Conservative cabinet minister Chuck Strahl recently said that it was “logical and right” to list asbestos as dangerous.

Tuesday, the minister stood and told Canadians that there was no need for Canada to get up in opposition to the listing because other countries would do our dirty work for us. However, when India and Ukraine stepped away, Canada was left alone in the spotlight, defending what the world knows to be wrong.

Will the minister stop defending the asbestos lobby and realize that the time has come to do the right thing, to list asbestos as dangerous, as the world has come to agree?

• (1430)

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the International Trade Union Movement For Chrysotile represents hundreds of thousands of workers who have taken a position in favour of the safe use of chrysotile because they know recent scientific studies show that chrysotile can be used safely in a controlled environment.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, India, which is the main importer of asbestos from Canada, has thrown its support behind adding chrysotile asbestos to the Rotterdam convention. India could thereby control the harmful effects of asbestos and guarantee that the risks associated with using this product are clearly identified.

Why is this government putting its energies into opposing a convention that could save lives instead of implementing a plan that would allow asbestos workers to move toward industries of the future?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, for more than 30 years, the Government of Canada has been arguing for the safe and controlled use of chrysotile. According to recent scientific studies, this can be

done in a controlled environment. Canada's position on the convention reflects the position adopted here in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known. More people die from asbestos than from all other industrial causes combined, yet Canada continues to be one of the largest producers and exporters in the world.

Without exaggeration, we are exporting human misery on a monumental scale and yet we are taking active steps to ensure that companies do not even warn their customers, the third world and developing nations, where we are dumping hundreds of thousands of tonnes of asbestos. Conservatives do not think it should even have a warning label on it.

Our position is morally and ethically reprehensible. Do they not realize the black eye they are giving our country—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Industry.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that recent scientific studies clearly show that chrysotile fibres can be used safely in a controlled environment. Today, the International Trade Union Movement For Chrysotile, which represents hundreds of thousands of workers—again, hundreds of thousands of workers—reiterated this position in support of the safe and controlled use of chrysotile.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's debt represents 34% of its income, but household debt represents approximately 150% of household income.

The government is constantly talking about its own debt, but it is not helping Canadians deal with their debt. The best cure for this is a good job.

When will the government create real jobs instead of part-time solutions and help Canadians get rid of their personal debt?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the job creation record of our government: nearly 560,000 net new jobs created since July 2009, of which more than 80% are full-time jobs. This is the best record of any country in the G7. Our country has been through a difficult time, a recession that came from outside our country, but we have managed our way through it and Canadians are doing well.

Oral Questions

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is just not credible. The government talks about an economic recovery, but it has no plan to end the jobs crisis. That is not a recovery. We still have hundreds of thousands more unemployed than before the recession, a recession the government did not even see coming.

Today, we learned that only 42% of the unemployed can access employment insurance, the insurance they paid into.

Why is the government continuing to make working families pay for its failure to create jobs?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economy has grown for seven straight quarters now since the recession ended in July 2009. I do not know where the member opposite gets her information, but not only have we recovered all of the jobs that were lost during the recession, we have also restored all of the economic output that was lost during the recession. Only one other country in the G7, that is Germany, has a comparable record.

* * *

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government's lack of compassion for people living in poverty is shocking.

The Conservatives want to cut nearly half a billion dollars from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, but they are refusing to say which programs will be affected.

Canadians have a right to know.

Which programs does this government intend to cut?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave us a clear, strong mandate. They want us to respect the money they make, the money we receive in taxes, and they want us to spend it very wisely. That is what we will do. We will eliminate waste.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not good enough. Twenty years after Parliament passed a New Democratic motion to end child poverty, Canadian children are still being left behind.

Statistics released yesterday show that over 100,000 children in British Columbia are still living in poverty. That is 100,000 kids who are not getting a fair start in life. This is an urgent national problem.

How can the government waste millions on gazebos and billions on tax giveaways to profitable corporations while leaving families to fend for themselves?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government really is reaching out to help families right across this country, especially those in need. That is one of the reasons that we introduced the universal child care benefit. We have increased the national child benefit as well.

These are all initiatives aimed to help low income families get over the welfare wall, just like the WITB that we introduced and then increased.

Sadly, the NDP voted against every one of those initiatives to help the most vulnerable families.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities more than four years ago.

The Conservatives have yet to do anything to implement the principles of this convention.

Considering that there are more than four million people in Canada living with disabilities, when will the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development submit an action plan to implement the convention?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the hon. member to the House.

However, she should know that we have done a lot for persons with disabilities in Canada. We have introduced a number of programs.

[*English*]

For example, it was our government that launched the registered disability savings plan, one in which some 45,000 families are now perpetuating their ability to look after their disabled loved ones.

Not only was it our government that signed the convention, but we also launched the enabling accessibility fund that has made over 600 new facilities across Canada accessible. Her party should have supported—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ASBESTOS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a pack of cigarettes very clearly warns us that tobacco causes cancer. Asbestos also causes cancer and yet this government refuses to put it on the Rotterdam Convention list of carcinogens.

Nevertheless, other exporting countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam and Kazakhstan have done so. India, which imports our chrysotile, has done it.

Why is this government not doing the right thing?

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, the Canadian government has been promoting the safe and controlled use of chrysotile fibre, not asbestos in general as the hon. member mentioned, but chrysotile fibre. Recent scientific studies have shown that this fibre can be safely used in a controlled environment. This is the position that was taken by the previous government.

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that it is very difficult to use chrysotile in the proper working conditions. The procedures, training, complex equipment are all needed to be able to use it in a safe way so that fibres are not accidentally breathed in. The minister knows this full well. He cannot assure us that it is not being used improperly in third world countries that import it.

Why is the government deceiving Canadians and pretending that there is no problem? This is wilful blindness. The government is washing its hands of its responsibilities.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking here about risk management. We know that chrysotile fibre can be safely used in a controlled environment. I would like to remind the hon. member that the International Trade Union Movement for Chrysotile, which represents hundreds of thousands of workers, supports the safe use of chrysotile. These people know what they are doing. They are experts in the field and are supported in the safe use of chrysotile. Canada's position with regard to the convention therefore reflects the country's position.

* * *

[*English*]

G8 SUMMIT

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to its mission statement, Treasury Board Secretariat is supposed to ensure that “resources are soundly managed across government with a focus on results and value for money”.

By that criteria, the first program that should be audited is the G8 legacy fund where \$50 million which Parliament authorized for border infrastructure ended up in gazebos and washrooms that had nothing to do with the G8.

Is the President of the Treasury Board refusing to call for a value-for-money audit because he knows it would lead right back to him?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General looked at this initiative and made some helpful observations about how we could move forward in a more transparent and clear way in terms of the estimates presented to Parliament. The Auditor General also made some observations with respect to the administration of the program.

The good news is every dollar is accounted for. All 32 projects came in on or under budget. In fact, the program itself was underspent by some \$5 million.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka approved \$50 million worth of projects that benefited his friends. This is so suspicious that the RCMP is investigating. Today, members representing ridings that did not benefit from this preferential treatment are asking legitimate questions.

Can the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka stop hiding behind his spokesperson and explain to the members from other ridings how and why the projects were approved in his riding?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to correct the record. Those projects with which the member opposite claimed were approved by the now President of the Treasury Board were in fact approved by the minister of infrastructure. I am happy to correct the record.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a figure that is of interest to all of us. Had the President of the Treasury Board approved \$50 million worth of projects in all of the country's other ridings, it would have cost the public treasury \$15 billion. This gives some idea of the extent of the dubious spending that occurred in his riding.

But, above all, does the President of the Treasury Board understand that by favouring his friends, he is creating a two-tier democracy—one for his friends and one for other Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at what some of these infrastructure funds were spent on.

They were spent on rehabilitating the airport in North Bay. They were spent on fixing up a provincial highway. They were spent on building a community centre that was used during the summit. These are all public infrastructure projects which add great value to the municipalities that recommended and submitted these projects.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report shows how the member from Muskoka got away with giving out \$50 million without any oversight. He deliberately froze out any accountable body. He blew off the checks and balances of Parliament. That is why we are having a police investigation.

Do the Conservatives really think it passes the smell test that three amigos—the minister, a mayor and a hotel manager—were allowed to lord over 242 projects without any documentation? When will the minister stand up and produce the real paper trail?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, much of what the member opposite said is not true. It is not fact. The fact that he has to exaggerate suggests that the facts cannot present a powerful enough argument.

Oral Questions

The reality is there were three individuals who reviewed the submissions, but in fact they had no decision-making authority in this regard.

The good news is that all 32 projects were completed on time. We did get some very helpful observations from the Auditor General. We thank her for her work and are fully accepting the good advice and counsel that she has provided.

• (1445)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they pilfered \$50 million from border infrastructure and the police have been called in, but that is just a start. The member raided FedNor. He raided the community adjustment fund. He raided the stimulus fund. He created a \$100 million personal legacy project that was blown on sunken boats and paving the bunny trail.

Now the guy is in charge of Canada's treasury. Why are the Conservatives showing such contempt for Canadian taxpayers by putting him there?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have accepted the challenge of the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Winnipeg Centre to make this place more civil, to debate issues and not bring about insults.

The reality is that the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, the Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC), has provided great leadership over 14 years in public service. He has done a heck of a job for the people of Ontario, a great job for the people of Canada. He has a lot to be very proud of.

* * *

AIR INDIA FLIGHT 182

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our Prime Minister marked the seventh annual National Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Terrorism.

We honour and remember the victims of the Air India Flight 182 atrocity which occurred 26 years ago today.

Would the Minister of Foreign Affairs give the House an update on what the government is doing to combat terrorism and mark this important day of remembrance?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his interest in this regard.

On this day we pause to remember those who lost their lives through acts of terrorism here in Canada and around the world.

On June 23, 1985, as my colleague has said, Canadians experienced the worst terrorist attack in Canada's history when a bomb on Air India Flight 182 killed all 329 passengers and crew members on board, most of them Canadian.

Earlier today the Prime Minister unveiled the fourth and final memorial for the victims of this tragedy. This memorial and three others in Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver will ensure that their deaths and the loss experienced by their loved ones will not be forgotten.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's record of deporting refugees to torture is troubling. The Benhmuda family, including two Canadian-born children, lived in Canada for eight years. The family was deported into the hands of Moammar Gadhafi and the father was tortured for six months.

The family was able to escape to Malta. They are not safe there, and the UN has asked the government to repatriate them.

Will the minister bring these Canadian children and the family back to Canada, where they belong?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, I have to take serious objection to the preamble of the hon. member's question. He knows full well that no Canadian government of any political stripe deports people to torture. We have the fairest asylum system in the world. Any one who our courts, our IRB or decision makers determines could face risk overseas is not returned to face risk.

Having said that, this is a particularly complicated case. I cannot comment on the details because of the Privacy Act. If we receive an application from that family, I can assure the member it will be given every humanitarian consideration and dealt with on an accelerated basis.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBYA

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Libya are currently under a huge amount of stress. Right now, there are a number of students of Libyan origin studying in Canada. The freeze on trade relations with Libya is putting their scholarships and student visas in jeopardy.

Will this government extend the temporary exemption granted to Libyan students living in Canada, and will it ensure that they receive financial assistance immediately?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has acted quickly and decisively to approve an exemption from the sanctions so students would not suffer.

It is now time for the Libyan government to release the necessary funds to support the students and their families. We will continue to press Libya to provide the funding as soon as possible.

We will continue to work with these students to ensure they can complete their education in Canada.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 34 immigrant settlement agencies have lost their funding after \$43 million was cut. It hits places like Toronto and Scarborough the hardest where 80,000 new Canadians are hurt by these service cuts.

These cuts come at a time when Toronto schools are also cutting settlement staff, further eroding available services. Both the House and the immigration committee have voted to reverse these funding cuts, but Conservatives have ignored this.

Why is the government putting up barriers to the integration of immigrants into Canadian society and our economy?

• (1450)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his election, but not on his question, because every single assertion was false.

In point of fact, this government has more than tripled the federal investment in integration and settlement services for newcomers. It was \$200 million five years ago. It is now over \$600 million. It has increased in Ontario.

It is true that there are now more newcomers settling in places like Atlantic Canada and western Canada than in Ontario, and the dollars are following them, because we have a responsibility to make sure that all newcomers get an equal chance to succeed in Canada.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer shows that he either does not get Toronto or he does not care.

When he cut this funding, not only did he abandon new Canadians, but he took decades of on the ground knowledge and tossed it out the window. In my riding of Davenport, the South Asian Women's Centre and the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre lost \$1 million in funding, despite passing their official assessment.

If these agencies are getting a passing grade, why is the government steamrolling ahead with cuts and ignoring immigrant families in Toronto?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me make this very simple for the NDP.

We have tripled the federal investment in settlement services for newcomers. There are hundreds of organizations that deliver those services on our behalf, but we receive applications from thousands of organizations.

I know the NDP believes that money grows on trees. I know the NDP thinks we can keep raising taxes to spend money without any limit. However, we cannot actually fund every one of the thousands of organizations that make an application. We have to make an assessment on their track record and on the quality of the applications and fund the best ones. That is exactly what we do, giving taxpayers value for the money.

Oral Questions

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the newly released Afghan detainee documents have much to reveal. Transfer notifications to the Red Cross took up to a month. We lost track of hundreds of detainees. When the Afghan authorities claimed detainees were released, we did not verify. Our own monitoring was erratic and allegations of torture were numerous.

How can the Prime Minister say nothing is wrong, knowing he failed to protect people under his watch?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we spent 12 long months providing a significant number of documents to the parliamentary committee. We spent a considerable amount of money, \$12 million. Regrettably, the member opposite did not find the damage he expected to find.

What I was terribly disappointed about was with these 4,200 pages of information we had from professional people in the public service, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, from men and women in uniform, from the Department of National Defence, why did the Liberal Party and the member not take advantage of the briefing? There was only one single member who—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I will ask hon. members to allow the minister to answer the question. There is not much point in asking a question if you do not listen to the response.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the next time the minister wants to invite me, he should tell me.

[Translation]

Among the information in these documents, there are allegations of torture, such as a case in which a detainee we transferred for interrogation by the Afghan secret service may have been subjected to abuse and death threats; yet we did not follow up.

What will this government do to ensure that in the future, our mechanism for protecting detainees is transparent, effective and worthy of Canada?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was likely. There were no facts that brought the conclusion that any Canadian transfer detainees were. Let us look at what certain detainees had to say.

One detainee, whom I will call Bob, indicated that the food and water he was provided and the things he was given to eat included meat, rice, fruits, bread and beans. He indicated that he was treated well. That is what some of the documents released yesterday said.

*Oral Questions***DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very sad to say that floods and forest fires continue to devastate large segments of western Canada. Millions of acres of farmland have been flooded or have gone unseeded. Cattle producers may have to reduce their herds because of pasture damage and entire communities lay devastated.

The western provinces cannot handle this alone. What will the government do to help western farmers, businesses and workers deal with the aftermath of these natural disasters?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are following, together with the provinces, with great interest the difficulties many are facing in the west due to these floods. Canadians can count on us to assist when disaster strikes. Because of this year's unprecedented floods, we have also offered to pay for half the costs of permanent mitigation measures constructed ahead of this year's floods that are not otherwise eligible for disaster financial assistance arrangements. We think it makes a lot of sense to put in place permanent mitigation measures to prevent damage like this from happening again, where possible.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the provinces are saying is that they are looking for leadership and the government is not stepping up to the plate.

Western premiers are calling for the federal government to have a national disaster mitigation plan and extra help for those whose livelihoods have been damaged. They see the need for federal help but the Conservatives seem content to stand idly by.

Will the government listen to the premiers and develop a plan that includes a special compensation program for families and communities devastated by the floods and forest fires?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really must disagree with the hon. member. We have been quite impressed by the leadership the western premiers are taking in their jurisdictions where it is their primary responsibility to manage these affairs. We think they are doing a pretty good job.

We are certainly willing to do our bit to assist with permanent mitigation measures arising out of this incident specifically, and to discuss a national mitigation plan in the long term.

Again, we think it does make sense to put in place permanent measures to avoid problems from happening again when we have the opportunity to do that.

* * *

[Translation]

SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE DAY

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, a holiday celebrated by all descendants of New France. I would like to take this opportunity to send greetings to all proud Franco-Ontarians, who, like myself, celebrate this day with love and dignity.

For our cousins in Quebec, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day is celebrated as a national holiday, a day off on which people get together with family and friends to celebrate the rich language of Rabelais and the French culture.

Can the Minister of Industry, the government's Quebec lieutenant, tell us what the government has in mind for Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, since arriving on this continent over 400 years ago, we have been fighting to preserve our language, our culture and our values. One of our most cherished values is democracy.

That is why I ask the Leader of the Opposition to let democracy prevail in the House, because by voting sooner rather than later, instead of sending good wishes for Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day from the House, we could return to our constituencies to celebrate Quebec, to celebrate our culture, to celebrate our nation and to celebrate French Canada.

* * *

[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the second time in this young Parliament, I would like to ask the minister of transport about the federal rail service review.

After four years of study, that review was completed last October. It identified the key problem as an unfair imbalance in market power favouring railways, harming shippers and resulting in globally inferior service.

There is no excuse for more delay. Will the minister guarantee that the legislation to meet the needs of shippers will be presented in this House and enacted before the end of this calendar year?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rail freight review is an important part of the overall economic potential growth of western Canada. The government has received the review and will be taking a close look at its recommendations.

We look forward to working with all parties and stakeholders to ensure we get the best results for Canadians.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night, the Prime Minister spoke with the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and, despite objections from everyone, except, it would seem, the hon. member from Labrador, the Prime Minister confirmed that he has no intention of reversing the decision to close the search and rescue centre in St. John's.

This so-called decision reduction measure will reportedly save \$1 million a year.

Could the Prime Minister tell us exactly what price he is putting on the safety of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated on more than several occasions, this decision in no way will compromise the safety of mariners whatsoever.

I must say that we have invested heavily in Coast Guard resources in Newfoundland and Labrador with a 33% increase in personnel alone and the deployment of two icebreakers to Newfoundland. We are very proud of the investments that we have made.

* * *

• (1500)

CANADA POST

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hard-working Canadians across the country are calling for an immediate restoration of mail services.

I have heard from many of my constituents who are strongly supportive of the government's clear and decisive action to proceed with back to work legislation and bring an end to this unfortunate work stoppage.

Could the Minister of Labour please update the House on the status of this important bill?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his unique input and insight into the matters regarding labour issues here in our caucus.

The government received a very strong mandate from Canadians with respect to ensuring that we had an economic recovery. The parties at the table were unable to reach a deal among themselves toward a resolution. As such, we have introduced this legislation.

That is why I am calling on all members to support and join me on the quick passage of this very important piece of legislation to get—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor West.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, the then minister of transport said that the Windsor-Detroit border crossing could no longer wait, that it had to move forward. The minister acknowledged the importance of this infrastructure and also acknowledged that it was actually one of the most historic opportunities to build infrastructure for the prosperity of our country.

However, now it hangs in the balance. It will cost thousands of jobs, affect the viability of our economy and put one of our most important trading partners at risk.

I want to know why the Minister of Transport has not addressed this issue. Why has he not publicly backstopped the problems in Michigan and ensured that the time, money and effort to solve this problem do not go to waste?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is still a very important issue for us. We are working

Oral Questions

with our American partners on this issue and with MPs in the area. It is a very serious issue and we will manage it as such. Hopefully the member will help us and we will be in a better position in the future.

* * *

[Translation]

ASBESTOS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with all members an excerpt from an international newspaper about what happened yesterday in Geneva.

[English]

As opponents to listing chrysotile became sparse, the elephant was left with nowhere to hide. Tempers flared as Canada confirmed it would not join any consensus on listing chrysotile.

When will, in the name of God, the government change its mind? I ask you in the name of your friend Chuck Strahl. Twenty-four hours remain. Change your position.

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member to address her comments through the Chair and not directly to colleagues.

The hon. Minister of Industry.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, for more than 30 years, the Government of Canada has promoted the safe use of chrysotile, which can be used safely in a controlled environment. Today, the International Trade Union Movement for Chrysotile, which represents hundreds of thousands of workers, came out in support of this position because it believes that chrysotile can be used safely. That is the position reflected in the convention.

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[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Right Honourable John Turner, 17th Prime Minister of Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Premier of British Columbia and two ministers: the Honourable Christy Clark, Premier; the Honourable Barry Penner, Attorney General; and the Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Points of Order***POINTS OF ORDER**

CANADIAN FORCES CEREMONY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning around 10:30, I happened to be in the foyer of the Centre Block and I saw a wonderful ceremony whereby three ministers of the government, surrounded by about 20 Conservative colleagues, were honouring our armed forces on behalf of Parliament and transferring a flag to, I believe, a chief warrant officer. There were a couple of other members of the armed forces as well.

I am also a very proud member of the armed forces. The Liberal Party also believes in honouring our men and women. I would like to know why we were not notified and invited to this ceremony.

● (1505)

The Speaker: Unfortunately, question period is over. The hon. member had a chance to ask that question during question period. It is not a point of order. Perhaps it is a matter he can ask the minister.

1997 POSTAL MEDIATION COSTS

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, in my remarks, I indicated in the question aspect of my debate that the cost of the 1997 mediation arising from the legislation at the time was in the millions. I was asked for further clarification and I have that now.

The cost of the mediation arbitration process in 1997 was \$2,321,952.65. Each party was charged half. In this case, the employer paid its half. However, litigation had to be resorted to by the Government of Canada in order to obtain a decision rendered in 2004 to recover the monies from the union.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this would normally be the end of the current session. As we know, the Parliament of Canada can do as it pleases. Last Thursday, we sat as though it were a Friday. Tomorrow, Friday, we will sit as though it were still Thursday. In fact, this could end up being the first-ever week of four Thursdays.

The government has mastered the art of this type of transformation. It can turn losers into winners. If someone loses in an election and is not chosen to create legislation in the House, they can always be appointed to the Senate and sit as a parliamentarian. During question period, the Conservatives spoke about the importance of respecting the Quebec nation. Yet tomorrow is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day and they still want us to sit.

With all of these contradictions—in particular, the fact that they decided that the best way to monitor public spending is to fire those who monitor public spending and that they locked out workers and are now blaming the workers for not working—are there any more surprises like this in store for us this summer?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments from the member for Outremont. He did speak of respect.

I hope he will take a look at his comments, have in mind Standing Order 18, and reflect upon how his comments fit into Standing Order 18.

Since today is the last scheduled sitting of the House before members return to their constituencies for the summer, my answer will be relatively brief.

[Translation]

When this bill is passed, the House will adjourn until September 19.

[English]

As for the business of the House upon our return in September, I will advise my counterparts of the government's plans closer to that time.

In case this is the last time I am on my feet this summer, let me thank the staff of the House and the clerks at the table for their support and their usual kind assistance, in addition to the pages, who I acknowledged fully yesterday.

Finally, I thank all hon. members for the very productive sitting we have had this month. A great deal has been accomplished in just about 12 sitting days. I hope they will all have happy and productive summers with their constituents.

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POINTS OF ORDER

DOCUMENTS REGARDING AFGHAN DETAINEES

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know from the House leader why he did not invite me to the technical briefing yesterday when he communicated to me about Afghan detainees?

The Speaker: That is not quite a point of order, but I see the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs is rising to respond. I will allow that.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am told that he and his party were invited to a briefing held yesterday by senior officials responsible for the transfer of Taliban prisoners.

I am told invites were in the opposition lobby. One member of the opposition did attend the briefing, the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. We had an ambassador there who was familiar with the file. We had members from the Canadian Forces to provide detailed briefings for the members.

Regrettably only one member did attend.

● (1510)

The Speaker: If there are any further questions, I encourage members to take that up with the minister. It is not a point of order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

RESUMPTION AND CONTINUATION OF POSTAL SERVICES LEGISLATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent my government in its support of Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services.

This legislation, once enacted, will bring an end to the work stoppage at Canada Post. The labour dispute between Canada Post and CUPW relates to the renewal of collective agreements covering some 50,000 workers, including plant and retail employees, letter carriers and mail service couriers.

It is always better when two parties can reach a collective agreement at the bargaining table without the need for Parliament's intervention. The best solution in any labour dispute is one where the parties resolve differences on their own.

The Minister of Labour has been clear and has, at every occasion, encouraged both parties to reach an agreement on their own. In this case, however, the parties are too far apart, and that is too bad. The last thing we want to see is the situation deteriorate and see business—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

DOCUMENTS REGARDING AFGHAN DETAINEES

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the member for Brant. I am told that the copies that were provided to each party in the House, the 4,200 pages of documents, included an invitation to attend the briefing. Officials were there. It was on top of the binders that were provided to each party.

I thought that would add further clarification, and I thought you, Mr. Speaker, would want to know it, too.

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RESUMPTION AND CONTINUATION OF POSTAL SERVICES LEGISLATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was at the point of saying that the last thing we would like to see is this situation deteriorate any further and see businesses fail, unemployment increase and our economy go into a tailspin. Canada Post, a crown corporation, has more than 70,000 full and part-time employees. It is one of the largest employers in Canada. Every business day, it delivers service to 14 million addresses. Canada Post spends about \$3 billion a year on goods and services and it contributes \$6.6 billion to the country's GDP.

Government Orders

The Canada Post direct marketing sector accounts for \$1.4 billion of its revenue. During the recent economic recession, this sector suffered financial losses. So many businesses still rely on Canada Post to get their business done and connect with their clients and customers across the country and internationally. While many aspects of business can often be accomplished online, not everything can be done in the absence of the mail. Mail service is still essential to the functioning of many small and medium-sized businesses and even large corporations.

Canada Post provides a crucial connection for Canadians in rural and remote areas.

Seniors are finding this work stoppage very difficult to deal with. Many of my colleagues have heard from seniors in their constituencies who would like to see an end to this work stoppage. A prolonged work stoppage at Canada Post may well affect some of the most vulnerable sectors of our economy.

How would Canada Post be affected as a viable business? Over the past decade, with the growth of the Internet, email, electronic billing and electronic funds transfers, there has been a corresponding decline in personal mail. However, small and medium-sized businesses still rely on the postal service for direct marketing, billing and filling orders. It is this sector of the business that could be jeopardized with a long-term work stoppage. Right now there is co-dependence. Now is not the time to put them at risk.

What is at stake is our economic recovery. All the job losses incurred during the global economic recession have been recovered. Our government has a responsibility to act on behalf of all Canadians to ensure the momentum continues. We have a process in place to deal with labour conflicts in the federal domain. It is called the Canada Labour Code and it has been followed each step of the way in this conflict.

The collective agreement covering CUPW and Canada Post expired on January 2011. Both parties have been bargaining since October 2010.

When those talks stayed at an impasse, a reconciliation officer was appointed. Throughout the month of May, a mediator from the labour program's Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service met frequently with the parties. The Minister of Labour even met with both party leaders. Despite all these efforts at mediation and conciliation, CUPW announced, on May 30, its intent to strike. On June 3, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers walked off the job. On June 15, 2011, the employer declared a lockout.

The postal workers have now been without a contract since January 2011, despite many rounds of bargaining. Of course, there are always cases when collective bargaining hits an impasse and the parties involved reach a stalemate. When this happens, the parties can request the Minister of Labour to appoint an arbitrator.

It is certainly not the preference of the government to intervene in labour disputes. Our government respects the right of free collective bargaining, which includes the right to strike or a lockout. However, when employers and unions choose a course of action that has harmful effects on the economy and the country as a whole, then it is incumbent on Parliament to stand up for the country and to protect our economic recovery.

Government Orders

That is why our government has introduced Bill C-6. We are taking decisive action on behalf of all Canadians.

• (1515)

What would the act do? It would impose a four-year contract and new pay rate increases. That would mean a 1.75% increase as of February 1, 2011, 1.5% as of February 2012, 2% as of February 2013 and 2% as of February 2014.

It also means, for final offer selection, a binding mechanism for all outstanding matters. In making the selection of a final offer, the arbitrator is to be guided by the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries. It will also strive to ensure the short and long-term economic viability and competitiveness of Canada Post Corporation, maintain the health and safety of its workers and the sustainability of the pension plan.

The terms and conditions of employment must also take into account: (a) that the solvency ratio for the pension plan must not decline as a direct result of the new collective agreement; and (b) that the Canada Post Corporation must, without recourse or undue increases in postal rates, operate efficiently, improve productivity and meet acceptable standards of service.

As we recover from the economic downturn, it is more important than ever that we encourage co-operative and productive workplaces.

Let us recognize that this has not been an easy situation for the postal workers and for Canada Post. Our hope is that both parties can now turn this around and make the most of this agreement. I would urge them to focus on making Canada Post relevant to Canada for the 21st century.

I also ask my hon. colleagues to join us in supporting the bill.

• (1520)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend from Brant for speaking very calmly and rationally about what Parliament is being asked to deal with today. We have a situation that none of us, I believe, wanted. We certainly do not have a situation that the government wanted to step into.

However, we do have two parties that clearly cannot come to an arrangement. They have been negotiating since this contract expired in January. We have a very difficult situation on our hands today, with millions of Canadians clearly affected by this.

Perhaps my hon. friend could share a bit more from his riding's perspective. I have been to Brant, but I do not know the riding particularly well. Perhaps he could give some more specific examples of the types of individuals who have been directly affected by the fact that mail is not flowing.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, many of us in the House would prefer not to be in this situation. I think that is the case on all sides.

However, we must take action to protect especially the small and the medium-sized businesses, like the ones in my community.

I have heard from, and many MPs have heard from their constituents, the owners of these companies. One in particular is a

small rural weekly newspaper. This particular newspaper, the *Burford Times*, relies on the post office for the delivery of its revenue from advertisers. Also the businesses of that small community rely on getting their word out. Therefore, they are suffering as well. These are the one, two, three or five-person operations, which are affected the most.

I received another interesting email from another individual who totally relies on the postal service for his revenue into his company. He said that if this went on for another seven days, he would be out of business.

This is especially hitting the small operators.

Yesterday, we heard about the call for respect of the workers. We are calling for the respect of all small and medium-sized Canadian businesses.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the member opposite know the names of the postal workers who deliver the mail to his home? Does he know their families and their situations? Does he know how they live their lives? Does he know their families and the condition of their families?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is completely relevant to my personal situation. I have two nephews and a niece who are postal carriers. I also understand that many postal carriers prefer that this situation had never arisen. They would like to have more control of their own job situations.

I do have a relationship with a lot of people. I was a small employer and I know what makes for success. It is the people who are on the ground and are actually doing the work.

A lot of people in this country, including postal workers, would prefer not to be in this situation. I do know their situation personally. They are somewhat upset that we must be here to face this for our economy. However, we must do this to protect their rights.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former speaker would know that we are talking about a lockout as opposed to postal workers going on strike, and many believe that the government had a good idea that the lockout was going to happen.

Could the member give the House any assurances that cabinet had no idea that Canada Post was going to lock out its workers, or did the government have an idea that this was going to occur? Could he provide some information on that point?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position to have any of the information the member is asking for, but I do know many of the people in my community who are being directly affected by this, as I mentioned earlier. In fact, I have received numerous emails not only from businesses but also from seniors and people who live on disability allowances from government sources, who are being greatly affected by this.

This is a situation that is untenable for a lot of the individuals who rely on mail service for the money they need to sustain themselves. Frankly, right now there are certain people who are panicking because of this.

This government must take action. We are being decisive and we will pass this legislation.

Government Orders

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since this morning, our Conservative Party colleagues have been shedding crocodile tears over the fate of small and medium-sized businesses, while forgetting the fundamental fact that the current dispute at Canada Post is a lockout. That makes all the difference in the world. The unions had planned to use moderate pressure to raise public awareness, by taking action for just 24 hours in one city at a time. Canada Post was told to put an end to the dispute and only aggravated the situation by imposing a lockout. It got out the bazooka and shut everything down across the country.

I would like to ask our hon. colleague if he cares at all about the interests of the small and medium-sized businesses that are suffering because of the lockout imposed by Canada Post. Would he be willing to stand up and ask Canada Post to lift the lockout?

[*English*]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, even before the lockout I was receiving emails from business people, the ones who own the three or four person operations, about the rotating lockouts that were happening. In my community we rely—

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Strikes.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Yes, they were strikes, Mr. Speaker. There were walkouts by employees or strikes in various centres, meaning that the mail was not moving. Invoices and things that people needed to get out were not being received at the local rural post offices.

There was such disruption to the system at that point before the lockout happened that this government had to do something decisive to make sure that our economy was protected, that the jobs in those small companies were respected and that we got this country back to work.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member for Brant agree with me that the rotating strikes before the lockout were just as crippling to the system as the lockout itself?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question underscores what I said previously, that this is not just because of the lockout, as the opposition would now characterize the situation, but of an ongoing series of disruptions right across the country.

The issue then from a management point of view is, how do we prioritize? How do we tell some people that we will get mail through and others that we are not, and to give those directions to the people on the ground?

If one has a sense of business and knows that one has a responsibility to all business customers, not just to a certain few that are regarded as more important than others, a decision must be made to deal with the larger picture in a quick and decisive fashion. That is what our government is doing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I find most irritating is that the Conservatives do not seem to realize that they are violating the rights of workers. Over the noon hour today, I spoke with a Canada Post union steward who turned up in my office on the Hill. He told me that the workers feel

as though this government has sided with the employer. The workers want to negotiate. They were locked out by the employer and, more importantly, they are saying they that contribute to the profits.

Why punish the workers when their duties are constantly increasing and they have already gone through staff cutbacks?

• (1530)

[*English*]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, nothing can be more distorted than that comment. Obviously, the member did not listen to the fact that although the workers have the right to strike, the employer also has the right to a lockout.

By all means, let us get them back to the table. We are not siding with one side or the other. We are saying, let us get both parties back to the table, let us make sure that we can get this resolved, hopefully without this kind of legislation. We have been saying that for a long time.

The member needs to get her facts straight.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like first to say I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Today is a dark day for Canada. The tabling of Bill C-6 is a blot on respect for democratic rights and workers' right of association. This day will not go down in history as one where the government showed great respect for Canadians and for the rights of union members. The good news is that maybe the Conservative government has finally been unmasked. The mask has fallen away, revealing its true face. Unfortunately, it is not a pretty sight to behold. What we see is a government that is authoritarian, arrogant and contemptuous of working people, who just want to do their jobs in a reasonably healthy, safe environment. Instead of extending them a hand and pushing for real negotiations with the postal workers' union, the government gets out its bazooka and bludgeon and tries to force the employees back to work by means of a special act, which even imposes salary conditions while not allowing the arbitrator to make a decision in full knowledge of the facts after drawing comparisons with the market and the economic situation at Canada Post.

I want to emphasize that this is a crazy, surrealistic, even Kafkaesque situation. I would encourage my colleagues to read *The Trial* by Kafka. It is very interesting and there are some strong parallels with the situation in which the postal workers now find themselves.

Government Orders

Since their negotiations were going nowhere and the employer was insisting on cutbacks in the collective agreement—I will talk a little later about the health and safety problems and the discriminatory treatment, especially in regard to the pension plans, which are a topic of great concern to many Quebeckers and Canadians these days—the union wanted to start applying gradual pressure. It did not want to launch a general strike because it did not want to paralyze the system. It wanted to use gentle pressure tactics at first, affecting one city at a time for 24 hours. The rest of the country would continue to function. This would get the employees talking and raise the awareness of Canadians, and the media would take an interest. That is how a dialogue is started with the public to move the issue along while pressuring the employer in a way that is legal, peaceful and progressive.

After only a few days, what did the employer do? The employer is a crown corporation and the government is ultimately responsible for it. The employer imposed a lockout. It shut down Canada Post across the country. It created the problem itself. The Conservative government is telling us that this is a terrible situation that is jeopardizing the economic recovery and the economic health of the country. But it is the one that created this situation by locking out the employees. If it is responsible for this paralysis, why is the government now riding in like a knight in shining armour to save the day and solve the problem, saying that everything will be fine, that it will bring in special legislation to force workers back to work? That is absurd. The Conservatives are the ones who stopped the delivery of regular mail across the country. Why do they not stand up and urge Canada Post to put an end to the lockout and to return to the bargaining table? This would enable members from Quebec to return to Quebec to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day tomorrow with their constituents.

I would imagine that Michel Chartrand is rarely quoted in the House of Commons, but the Conservative government cannot invoke its own turpitude. It created this situation. It must take responsibility and put an end to the lockout in the interests of the unionized workers and their rights, and also in the interests of the people and the small and medium-sized businesses of this country.

The situation is even more absurd, since Canada Post is a remarkable, efficient, economical and profitable public service. Let me be clear: the private sector does not offer an alternative way to move such a high volume of mail every day from coast to coast. This is the best way we have to ensure that Canadians can send mail to other Canadians and to people around the world.

● (1535)

As well as being efficient, it is economical, because it is a public service that does not cost a lot of money. If we draw comparisons with many other countries, like Finland, Germany and the Netherlands, the price of regular stamps to send a letter in Canada is lower than in most other OECD countries. Furthermore, and this needs to be emphasized and repeated, last year, Canada Post made about \$281 million in profits.

Why attack the rights of workers? Why create a pension plan that will be less beneficial for new employees? Why risk the health and safety of workers when we have a public firm that works well and makes money to boot? Where is the problem? Why does the

Conservative government want to force these people to take a step backwards? Why attack the working conditions of 50,000 people across the country? Why attack the living conditions of 50,000 families across the country? Is that how the Conservatives plan to treat workers and their families over the next four years? Is this how the Conservative government envisions the future for workers and the working class: moving further and further backwards? That is unacceptable.

Another very important aspect of all this, beyond working conditions, is that we are dealing with the fundamental issue of respecting people's rights. In the Canadian federation, certain rights are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think it is important to remember this. Canadians have the right to associate. They have the right to organize. They have the right to express themselves. They have the right to negotiate freely and to exert pressure, as set out in the Canada Labour Code. And that is what the Conservative government is attacking. It wants to destroy these rights. It wants to sweep them under the rug and tell people, "Hey, you have no choice; now get back to work".

This is a threat to respect for the rights of all Canadians. All of the groups that are making demands, talking, protesting, getting organized and trying to peacefully improve things are worried today. Has history taught us that this is how progress is made? Is this how we moved past the middle ages, the industrial age and the widespread exploitation of workers? No, those things happened because people got together, joined forces, organized themselves and defended themselves, which resulted in social policies, social rights, the right to unionize, to bargain collectively, to have a labour contract that the employer must respect and to strike. That is why today, workers and Canadians are better off than they were a century or a century and a half ago.

The Conservative bill does not give the arbitrator the freedom and opportunity to decide on the best salary increase for Canada Post employees. This is unusual, new and very, very strange. We think that it adds insult to injury by setting salary increases that are lower than the employer's last offer. Should it not be the arbitrator, along with the two parties, deciding on the appropriate salary increases? How is it that the government is trying to save money by using special legislation that strips an arbitrator of the powers he usually has to settle this type of dispute?

If the employer felt it could offer these salary increases, then why is the Conservative government getting involved and imposing lower increases than the employer was offering? The employer itself acknowledged it could offer more and show more respect for the workers. Forcing the arbitrator to decide on lower salary increases is akin to stealing \$35 million out of the pockets of Canada Post employees over the next four years. Just imagine what future labour relations are going to be like in that sector. Imagine how motivated these men and women are going to be if a labour contract is shoved down their throats. Is that how the government shows respect for those who provide good service across the country?

I think the government should react and respect the Canada Post employees, forget this special legislation, lift the lockout, ask both parties to negotiate and allow Quebec MPs to celebrate their national holiday.

• (1540)

[English]

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has said much about the rights of workers today and I would like to raise a concern of a constituent in my riding who is also a worker who said:

I strongly encourage you to legislate an immediate end to the postal strike. I am the head of finance for a business which employs approximately 80 people across the country. The nature of our business is such that we supply our products to many smaller and owner operated businesses who pay us by cheque and utilize the mail. In the first three days of this strike/lockout we have delayed sufficient receivables that we have now maxed out our credit line...We are in serious risk of going under if this situation is not resolved immediately.

Why will the member opposite not acknowledge that this legislation is needed to protect the rights of all Canadian workers?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question. I appreciate the message she just read. I understand how difficult the situation is for that person's business. Indeed, it is not funny.

I just want to make a correction: I take issue with a word that was used in that constituent's message. It is not a strike; it is a lockout. The employer is responsible for this. The Conservative government is responsible for this. The government should do that constituent a favour and lift the lockout.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his presentation on Canada Post. The corporation posted a \$281 million profit last year. Its postal system is one of the best in the world. In his opinion, why did the Conservative government wish to create a crisis with Canada Post employees? Did it do so on purpose?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the excellent question.

This is a very troubling start for this new Conservative majority government, which seems to be very proud of the strong mandate it was given, as it likes to repeat when answering every other question. They are off to a bad start. Confrontation has been their first response to dealing with labour relations, unions and workers. They do not show any respect.

The Conservative government, which is a right-leaning government, is sending the following message to all workers, and to the country's union, association and rights movements: be careful over the next four years; we do not like you; we will be breathing down your necks and we will try to break you.

However, the NDP knows which side it is on. We support the workers, families and ordinary people. We will continue the fight to defend and ensure respect for their rights.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to New Democrats in the House wax poetic about what great champions of democracy they are, that they believe in the true democratic spirit, that everyone should have a right to vote and that everyone should have the right to self-determination. Yet I have not heard New Democrats stand in the House and suggest to the president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that his own members have the right to vote on any one of the three contract offers that Canada Post has made to the union.

The union bosses have refused to let their own members vote on any contract that is being offered. I happen to know that other members have indicated to me that they have had emails and phone calls from those workers who are very upset that their own union membership will not let them vote on the contract.

Would the member stand in his place and say that the union members deserve the right to vote on a contract?

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate this very pertinent question which allows me to set some things right. Perhaps my colleague is not very familiar with labour relations.

For the past nine years, I served as a union representative with the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I can assure him that unions, as democratic institutions, are still very vibrant and dynamic and they respect their members' freedom of expression.

In the normal bargaining process, members have had input into the list of demands, they have been part of the process, they have been consulted, they have voted on their executive, on the negotiating committee and on the strike mandate. Then, it is up to the negotiating committee to determine if it is in the interest of their members to present management's offer to a general assembly. It is their strategy, their decision, and it is respected. They have a legitimate democratic mandate.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to follow our member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie to speak today to this motion.

I want to say right at the outset that I feel shameful that we are here having to debate this motion regarding back to work legislation and that the first order of business that has come from the Conservative government is to force workers back to work and not give them a fair shot and a fair chance at collective bargaining.

Government Orders

I was first elected in 1997 and in December of that year we faced a similar situation of back-to-work legislation for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. What is ironic though is that at that time it was a Liberal government. The legislation that we are dealing with today is very similar to the legislation that we dealt with in 1997. The same incredible, outrageous fines, \$50,000 for union leaders and \$100,000 for the union as a whole, were in the Liberal legislation, and the same kind of restraints on the arbitrator that we see in the legislation today. Back then it was also a lower wage that was legislated, a wage restraint, than what had actually been at the bargaining table. It has been ironic to hear some of the Liberal members rise to say how they feel about this legislation when they forget their own history of what they did in 1997. I just wanted to remember that because I was a new member at that time and I remember that debate also went through the night.

I want to begin by thanking postal workers. I think they have had a really rough ride from the Conservative members in the House. They have been vilified, demonized and have been set up as the bad guys when, in reality, what the union and the members of the union want is a fair collective agreement. They do not want to see back to work legislation. They are willing to go back to the table.

Look at the circumstances that are now unfolding. We have a Conservative government that is using a sledgehammer and putting forward legislation, Motion No. 3, that we are now debating, that would actually put workers in such a constraint in terms of any collective bargaining that we might as well say goodbye to collective bargaining.

I want to reference that because some of the Conservative members have said that this is only about this situation, that it is only about the postal workers, that it does not affect anybody else other than, of course, the various people whose messages they are reading. But the fact is that the back to work legislation affects all workers in this country.

It may surprise members to know that even today Canada is not a signatory to one of the very important International Labour Organization conventions, ILO Convention No. 98, the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention and so, that right is not even enshrined in terms of Canadian practice. Is it any wonder that we see this assault on Canadians workers? What happens to these workers is a signal of what is yet to come. For that reason we should be deeply disturbed and concerned about the legislation and how it would affect other workers, whether they are under a collective agreement or not.

The other issue that we have to be very concerned about is the implication and impact on pensions. Every Canadian is concerned about what is going to happen to their pension system. One of the issues in this particular round of bargaining is the employer trying to change the pension system so that workers would no longer have an assurance of what it is they can expect from their pension when they retire.

This is a very basic value to all Canadian workers, again, whether they are unionized or not. For the employer, which happens to be a crown corporation controlled by the government, to run the gauntlet, lay this down and say it is going to change the pension system is really a warning sign of what is to come.

As New Democrats, we know that we have to fight this tooth and nail with the labour movement, with progressive people in this country, because we can see the signal and we see the direction that the government is taking.

In addition, one of the proposals that the union has had to deal with is facing a two-tiered wage system. Again, this is about an employer now supported by a government that is trying to put in a wage restraint through legislation.

● (1550)

It is pretty outrageous when the government itself tables a proposal in the legislation that would actually decrease the wages that were put on the table by the employer, which in itself would start workers 20% lower than existing postal workers. We can see where this is going.

I find it very ironic that the government says it is interested in economic recovery and stability on the one hand, but on the other hand everything it is doing is driving wages and working conditions down and making things less secure and more difficult for workers whether they are unionized or not.

These are all elements of this back to work legislation. The idea is that this is a one-off piece of legislation and we do not have to worry about it. In the debate unfolding today, which will go on for several days, it will become very clear that there are much broader implications for all workers in this country and it is something we should be concerned about.

Today in the House I tabled two private members' bills relating to what we call social condition, which is a recognition that people who are poor and have low incomes face discrimination based on their economic circumstances. I see a relationship between the tabling of those bills and what we are trying to do by removing discrimination from people who are economically disadvantaged or living below the poverty line and what the government is trying to do in this back to work legislation.

The fact is that when public policy goes in a direction that takes away people's rights, drives down wages and says collective bargaining will not be tolerated, that affects everybody. When unions do well and minimum wages go up, it benefits all workers in this country, including people who are living below the poverty line and struggling on minimum wages, whether it is \$8, \$9 or \$10 an hour depending on where they live.

These issues are related. We can see that the legislation that will be coming forward after we vote tonight, presuming this motion passes, will have a huge impact not only on CUPW members but on workers as a whole. Those in the labour movement are watching this with very keen interest. They are very concerned about what is taking place.

I noticed that one such union member, Fred Wilson who works at the CEP, noted in a blog on rabble.ca:

—the Conservatives have rigged this game completely. The outcome is now determined; there is nothing left for free collective bargaining to accomplish.

I would certainly echo those comments. I feel the sense of shame and distress about the road we are going down.

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The government did not have to intervene. We often hear that the Conservatives do not like to intervene in the marketplace. Why is it in this case they decided to intervene on the side of Canada Post? Why is it that they have not said anything about the lockout of the workers that is taking place?

We have heard Conservative member after Conservative member attack the union and those who are trying to get a fair deal with their employer, and yet I have not heard one word from any of those members about what the employer has done. The reality is the government is backing the employer. The government is saying it is onside with Canada Post 100%. Where is the balance? Where is the idea that fairness should exist?

We are very opposed to this motion. We are opposed to the process of bringing in closure on the bill that will be before us tonight.

We believe in collective bargaining. We stand for the rights of workers to get a fair deal as outlined by the International Labour Organization. We support convention 98 as all people in this country should do. We demand that the government respect those rights, that it think about the position it is taking and what it is imposing in such an unfair and discriminatory manner.

● (1555)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is a veteran of this House and I greatly respect her thoughts and comments on this piece of legislation.

I am quite concerned about the position of the New Democrats. They never talk about the viability of Canada Post as a company, as a service provider to Canadians.

A first class stamp costs 59¢ now. The cost seems to go up every year. I think the cost of stamps is likely hurting lower income people. I never hear a comment about that from the NDP.

I never hear the New Democrats say they are concerned that Canada Post can be viable for the long term. It is to some degree a monopoly. Many Canadians do not have an alternative service provider other than Canada Post for basic mail delivery.

We have heard about the impact on small business and on community groups specifically that rely on the mail for fundraising and much needed donations that come in the mail.

Why is it that we do not hear from members like the member for Vancouver East about their concerns regarding the long-term viability of Canada Post?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is possible that the member has not been in the House all day, but I have been because I have been on duty today. I have listened to the debate and I have heard NDP member after NDP member get up and actually talk about the viability of Canada Post and the fact that last year it made \$281 million in profits. This corporation has made profits year after year. That money has gone back into general revenue. Surely at least some of that money should be reinvested in the corporation to allow it to improve the working conditions and the environment for its workers.

We believe very much in the viability of Canada Post. In fact, we have been saying just the opposite of what the member is saying. It is a viable operation. Why is the government trying to knock it into the

ground? Why is it trying to knock into the ground the workers who go out day after day delivering our mail, sometimes in incredibly difficult environmental circumstances?

In terms of the rates, again NDP member after NDP member has pointed out today that our postal rates are among the most affordable in the world. There are many countries where the rates are much higher.

I do not think the member has his facts correct.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was a bit disappointed in terms of what the member for Vancouver East had to say.

We in the Liberal Party do not support the legislation that is being proposed by the government. I must say that she is not alone. The NDP attempts to say there is no difference between the 1997 legislation and the current legislation. Surely she can understand the difference between a lockout versus a strike. Today it is a lockout. Back then it was a strike.

Surely she can understand the difference in the legislation. All she has to do is read the legislation that was proposed back in 1997 compared to the legislation today.

I care about the workers. I care about the Canadians who are receiving the mail. I think it is important that we have some facts on the record.

Are there any circumstances whatsoever that the member could possibly imagine where the NDP would support back to work legislation?

● (1600)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I was only responding to what I heard from Liberal members both on Tuesday and today in debate. I heard the Liberal House leader say earlier today that he believes the bill makes a mockery of arbitration, and I would certainly agree.

I was just pointing out that in 1997 very similar legislation also restrained the arbitrator in terms of what he or she was able to do. I find it ironic and surprising that the Liberals thought it was okay then but they do not think it is okay now.

When we started debating this motion on Tuesday, I heard the interim leader of the Liberal Party express his concerns about the wages and the fact that the wages in the legislation are lower than what was on the table. I agree with that too. Again in 1997 the same situation existed and apparently the Liberals were not concerned about it.

I am only responding to what the Liberals said and pointing out their inconsistencies.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to speak to this issue. I wish that we were not here having to deal with this, but unfortunately we are.

I would like to thank the Minister of Labour for bringing forward the legislation on Monday evening. This measure is certainly necessary under the circumstances to restore an essential service to all Canadians.

Government Orders

I have a very rural riding. Since the start of the rotating strikes and then the lockout, I have been inundated with comments from rural constituents of mine, particularly those who run small- and medium-size businesses. That is the heart of Canada.

Before I carry on, I just want to read an example of the kind of comments I am getting. This comes from Rebecca, who said:

As a small business owner of a fledgling internet store, I can very honestly say that this stoppage of mail has almost killed my business.... I am receiving zero orders, and my customers are taking their business elsewhere. Using a courier for delivery is far too costly for me at this time. I hope that your majority government can bring this dispute to a timely completion.

That is a prime example of the kind of comments I am receiving.

After the minister tabled the legislation on Monday, that evening a poll done by an independent source found that 70% of Canadians are in support of this legislation. Many of the residents in my riding share the same sentiment.

I ask my hon. colleagues to think about the last time they experienced a power failure, a temporary loss of water, a shutdown of the elevators in their building, or a problem with their computer networks. We have all been through something like that. Even a very brief loss of a service or a system we depend on can cause a lot of stress. The longer that service is unavailable, the more it affects our quality of life.

When any crucial element in our infrastructure breaks down or is put out of commission, some people will suffer more than others. The poor, the elderly and people with disabilities are less able to adapt. They have fewer alternatives. There are even fewer alternatives for rural Canadians, like my constituents in my very rural riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

When a basic service or system breaks down or is withdrawn, everyone looks to the government to respond as quickly as possible to restore it, even if drastic action is necessary.

Our government believes that this work stoppage, if prolonged, has the potential to cause a lot of economic hardship. It will cause a lot of damage to our economy as many businesses in this country are just beginning to get back on their feet and the loss of postal services will just knock them down again. It will also cause grief to ordinary people who depend on the mail.

There are some who say that we can live without postal services for a while. This may be true, because there are always alternatives. Yes, there are some people and some businesses that will be able to weather this situation in relative comfort because they do have those alternatives. But those alternatives are not available or affordable for everyone, especially rural Canadians. There is no reason ordinary Canadians who are not involved in the dispute between Canada Post and CUPW should have to suffer.

Lightning or a surprise strike is unpredictable; nobody can really prepare for it. However, this work stoppage was not unforeseeable nor was it inevitable. Our government certainly did everything possible to prevent a strike or a lockout. We worked with Canada Post and CUPW for months to try to help them reach a settlement. Our efforts were unavailing.

Now Canadians want us to act, because the cost of this strike to our economy and to our society have become unbearable. The Government of Canada is not helpless. We have the means to solve this problem. I want to emphasize that we have legal means provided for in the Canada Labour Code. We have the right and the responsibility to use our powers to legislate an end to the work stoppage and to appoint an arbitrator. It is time to act.

That is why our government has introduced Bill C-6 and we are taking decisive action on behalf of all Canadians.

The bill imposes a four year contract and new pay rate increases; yes, increases. That will mean a 1.75% increase as of February 1, 2011; 1.5% as of February 2012; 2% as of February 2013; and 2% as of February 2014. It also provides for final offer selection, a binding mechanism on all outstanding matters.

● (1605)

In making the selection of a final offer, the arbitrator would be guided by the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries. The arbitrator would also strive to ensure the short and long term economic viability and competitiveness of the Canada Post Corporation, maintain the health and safety of its workers and maintain the sustainability of its pension plan.

The terms and conditions of employment must also take into account that the solvency ratio of the pension plan must not decline as a direct result of the new collective agreement and that the Canada Post Corporation must, without recourse, undo increases in postal rates, operate efficiently, improve productivity and meet acceptable standards of service.

Canadians have been patient but enough is enough. Canada is recovering slowly but steadily from the deep recession. That is why I am asking my hon. colleagues to join me in supporting Bill C-6. Let us help Canada Post refocus and build a postal service for the 21st century. Let us keep Canada working. Let us protect rural mail delivery.

I want to point out to my hon. colleagues that this has a far more adverse effect on rural mail delivery than any us may be realizing. I want hon. members to think long and hard about that. It is rural mail delivery that will suffer the hardest and the longest because of this. That is another reason that we need to pass this legislation.

I talked about many of the people I have heard from in my riding. The other people I have heard from are seniors on a very fixed pension. I will not get into the details of their pension, but Joel and Greta write:

For elderly people on a fixed income...it is hard to comprehend that people making in excess of \$50,000—are not happy. I have a grandson who was tickled pink to find a summer job, 3 days per week @ \$12.00 per hour.

They point out the hardships, but basically, if we read the underlying facts, it points out the fact that their grandson, who is just entering the workforce, realizes how lucky he is to have a job in these times.

I have another one from Kathie, who writes:

I am very much looking forward to the end of the postal problem. I have a very small business and I have \$2000 in invoices not received. If I am one sample of small business in Canada, we cannot afford to continue the labour problem.

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I do try to side with the working people.... But small business in Canada needs their service.

So I urge parliament to legislate the end of the lockout....

In another one I have, Lisa talks about urban versus rural, which I spoke about. She writes:

It's easy to get to an Urban group box they are on every corner it's not in Rural areas. People would have to drive miles to get their mail. This isn't fair. Thank you for your support.

The reason I read those is to point out, not only the problem with this work stoppage and the problem we are having overall, but to point out the difference between urban and rural. Many of my colleagues on both sides of the House come from very rural ridings just like I do, and their people will suffer long term.

• (1610)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering where this member is coming from. This is a lockout. It is not a strike. It is the company that put the workers on the street permanently and interrupted full mail service.

During the negotiations, the union did institute rotating strikes, which did not shut down the mail but drew attention to the issues. It even had an agreement to deliver pension cheques for seniors and other cheques. This is being characterized that somehow these union workers are doing this. It is not their fault. They were locked out by the company, backed by the government.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, my colleague speaks a little bit in half truths. The fact is that this started with rotating strikes. I heard, right from the very start of this, from my constituents about how it was affecting them. Sure, there was still some mail trickling through, but we should not think that it did not disrupt services in different parts of the country.

When I heard about the rotating strikes, I knew it would lead to a lockout, or I suspected it would.

I am not taking sides here. The bottom line is that they need to get back to work, sit down and talk about this and come up with a suitable resolution.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing a lot about the workers and, of course, the opposition seems to forget the 34 million Canadians who rely on the postal service. The opposition does not want to talk about that. In my hometown of Stouffville, the workers have a sign that says that all they want to do is get back to work. We know what the NDP is doing. It is supporting the union. It is not actually supporting the workers of Canada Post because it has never actually had the interest of the workers in mind. If the NDP did, it would be encouraging its union friends to allow the workers to vote on the contract that they wanted to accept so they could get back to work delivering the mail.

Could the hon. member comment on why he thinks the NDP is so focused on supporting the union bosses over the people who actually want to deliver the mail in this country?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, that is what I will call the eighth wonder of the world. Maybe none of the names of the union leaders were on the NDP ballots, at least not in print, but I think we know they were there.

The bottom line is that we are here to support people as a whole in this country. There is a dispute out there that is affecting everyday Canadians. The postal system is a public service and, with our economy in the still fragile state that it is right now, it cannot afford this work stoppage and strike. It is a combination. We can try to cut hairs on it but that is what it is.

We are to a point where we need to pass this legislation and get these people back to work so our small and medium-sized businesses and people in general can survive and get on with their life.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and the point trying to be made by the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, talking about the workers going back to work.

In fact, when the workers met with Mr. Chopra, they clearly indicated that they would go back to work, that they wanted to go back to work and that they would go back under the conditions of the past contract. They were very clear on that. They do not want to be off work. We have injured workers who do not have access to benefits packages. They have medication that has to be bought. They have children who have to be fended for. All these benefits are gone as long as they are locked out. They did offer to go back to work.

However, knowing that the government would bring forward this legislation, does my friend not see that they did not walk down the middle of this one, that it has put this squarely in favour of the corporation on this particular piece of legislation?

• (1615)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend and colleague from Cape Breton—Canso. I have been in his riding before. It is a very beautiful part of the world but it has a distinction very similar to mine, which is that it is very rural. Therefore, I am sure he understands how the people and constituents of his riding will suffer because of this stoppage.

With regard to the workers wanting to go back to work, I have had many Canada Post employees also tell me that they would like to go to work but it was after they realized that going on rotating strikes would force a lockout. I think a lot of them, in so many words, are regretting that.

The bottom line is that yes, we all want them back to work, but we do not want them to go back and start their rotating strikes, which is quite likely to happen.

We are here with Bill C-6 and I again urge my colleagues to support it today.

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[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member opposite if he could tell us more about the importance of division in the Conservatives' strategy: rural vs. urban, unionized vs. non-unionized workers, those with pensions and a decent salary vs. those who struggle to survive.

I would like him to explain to me just how important it is to divide people in a debate like this. Would it not be better to try to level the playing field rather than taking benefits away from those who have them? Can the government not try to establish some equality in society rather than seeking to divide?

[English]

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague to this great place, the House of Commons of Canada.

I will throw the member's question back at him. We have a democracy in Canada and right now 70% of Canadians have shown over and over that they support this legislation. I think what the member is telling all of us in a roundabout way is that 30% of the people should win in this and the other 70% should be overlooked, and that is not the way it is. In a democracy, the majority rules. Seventy per cent of Canadians want this work stoppage ended and that is exactly what we intend to do.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it had not been my intention to mention the ongoing bombing in Libya, but 70% of Canadians oppose that as well.

I agree that Canada Post is more essential to the lives of rural residents. I am from a rural community myself. A larger concern around Canada Post is whether the federal government is really committed to keeping a public service for all regions of the country.

Canada Post has lost some of its most profitable divisions to t companies like UPS and FedEx. I think this debate about the back to work legislation could rise to a level of analysis. How do we protect Canada Post? How do we keep it public? How do we ensure that we have rural services?

Can we not compromise in this place to have back to work legislation that does not undermine the workers in that great union?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I think the member and I, who has been to my riding a few times, may agree on one thing, which is that we do care about these workers. Today they are not getting a wage at all as they are locked out but they started with rotating strikes. Again I will not pick sides in that, but both are at fault here and it has led to a certain point. We are going to tell them to sit down at the table and resolve this.

The member talks about rural mail delivery and saving it. I have been fighting to save rural mail delivery for all of my seven years here in the House of Commons. Canada Post employees, management and non-management, should understand that the work stoppage and rotating strikes, the whole shooting match, is long term hurting the viability of rural mail delivery. The main reason that I support getting these people back to work is so that my businesses and constituents do not have to suffer through this any longer.

● (1620)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

[Translation]

This is my first speech in the House since the 2011 election. I am very proud to represent the great riding of Timmins—James Bay. I would like to wish the Franco-Ontarian community a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. I have a great deal of respect for the Franco-Ontarian community, for its identity and for its language.

[English]

I wish I were there with them but they know why we are here. We are here for a principle that was wonderfully articulated by the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound who, I think, finally told us the Conservative viewpoint.

He talked about the senior citizens in his riding who told him that they were tickled pink that their son got a job at \$12 an hour for three days a week and that he should be lucky he has a job. I have heard that language before from that kind of Republican Tea Party mentality, that one should just be lucky enough to get whatever they give you.

I have never had a senior citizen come up to me and say that they were tickled pink that their adult son could only find three days of work a week. The senior citizens in my riding are asking what has happened in our country that their 28-year-old son or daughter is still living at home because he or she is getting by on minimum wage. They tell me that when they were younger they built up a pension plan in Canada, but they know that their children will not have the kind of pension or the kind of life that they fought for. What has happened in our country?

One can hear it from the benches over there with the smug comments about the union bosses and that this is somehow rural people being picked on by urban people, the division and wedge issues.

I did hear my hon. colleagues from the Conservative Party on the bus talking about the SOB's, the workers. That was their attitude. They came in and they were all smug. They need someone to blame so they come in here and pretend that they are not picking sides. The message was clear: a crown corporation shut down service—

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You may want to check on this and rule on it, but I am not sure that "SOB" is appropriate parliamentary language, whether it is being said directly or being attributed indirectly.

Second, I hardly think it is fair to attribute something to people who may not be here to defend themselves. The member should observe some decorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I will note the concern raised by the member for Essex and would caution the member and all members to—

Government Orders

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have such great respect for the House that I would never call one of those members an SOB. Out of decency to them, I would never point out the members who would use such words. I take that under advisement and think it is really important.

However, it speaks to the underlying contempt that this is a manufactured crisis. I look across the way and I see the old Mike Harris wrecking crew. The members of that crew are all sitting there. I saw what they did in Ontario. The only one missing from the gang is the famous John Snobelen. John Snobelen was quite the character. He got a hold of the education system and, while not knowing he was being filmed, said that the government had to manufacture a crisis in order to act. That was the old Mike Harris wrecking crew gang.

What did we see? There was ongoing debate between the postal workers, in their right to collective bargaining with management, and those guys saw the opportunity to manufacture a crisis. What did they do? They locked out the workers. They shut down postal service.

Then Conservative backbenchers start saying, “Look what those bad posties and their union bosses are doing to senior citizens”, even though the postal workers were willing to deliver pensions, “Look how they are destroying business”. Conservatives shut down Canada Post and now they are intervening with legislation that is stripping rights that have been negotiated at the bargaining table.

They say that they are not picking sides. We know on what side those guys have been. They have always been on the side that will undermine the pension system in Canada. They have ridiculed defined pension benefits ever since they have been here.

They are against the right of workers to defend themselves. They tell us in the House that young workers today should be tickled pink that they work three days a week for \$12 an hour. My grandfather worked for three days a week at the collieries in the coal mines in Cape Breton. The workers were told that they were lucky they had jobs. Then they started to organize unions because men died so young. It was so bad in Cape Breton, they actually had to go to Timmins to work in the mines. The mines in Timmins were nicer than the mines in Cape Breton. That is how bad it was. The right to collective bargaining was won in Kirkland Lake in the 1941 strike.

The gang of people who have always been on the other side were calling the workers communists and telling them they were lucky to have jobs. They tried to intimidate the miners in Kirkland Lake. Another gang from Ontario sent up 500 police officers with machine guns and marched down the main street of Kirkland Lake in -40° weather. The next day 500 women and children marched back to show the cops that they would not be intimidated.

That is where the right of collective bargaining was won. It was won by people who were blacklisted later, who lost their jobs and homes in that strike. However, they won the principle that people should be able to negotiate legally.

This manufactured crisis by the government is the first step. This is the Wisconsin principle being brought into our country. When a government is allowed to lock out a service, blame the workers and then impose a wage agreement that is less than was negotiated at the

table, it has taken the fundamental principle that people in my community and others fought for and literally died for and thrown it out the window.

Do members know why the government thinks it is going to get away with it? Because it thinks the Canadian public is stupid and would love to rise up and kick the local postie. I do not think so. I come from a rural area and know the importance of rural mail. I will tell everyone what people back home have been saying. They have been waiting for these guys to take a run at Canada Post because they do not believe in public institutions.

The cost of a stamp in Kenabeek or Matachewan, Ontario is the same price as it is in downtown Montreal because it is a public system. However, it is not that profitable. It is not profitable to keep little rural post offices. The only reason those guys have not started to cut there is because they know there will be a backlash, so they manufacture a crisis and say that they will fix things. Then they will start hiving off where the easy money is and give it to their friends. That is the neo-con agenda.

Then the Conservatives will say Canada Post really is not all that viable and, of course, union bosses will get blamed again. By that time, what they will have done is sell off the money stream. They have not been able to get away with that because they know rural Canadians will fight for their post offices and would throw any Tory out who tries to mess with it. They needed a crisis and now they have one.

● (1625)

NDP members will debate this as long as it takes. We and our colleagues from Quebec, who are giving up their national holiday to be here, are doing this because we are sending that gang a message. If the Conservatives get away with this one, we will see them go after every collective agreement. Every time there is a strike, we will see them go after the fundamental rights of pensions and defined benefits plans, so we have to stop them.

I was kind of crying on my own shoulder, thinking I would be on the all night shift. I am getting kind of old and do not want to be here at 5:30 in the morning. I was thinking that I wished this would be all nice and we would settle. However, then I thought of the strike at Vale Inco, when those men and women were out for over a year because they were sold out by the government. The government allowed two of the greatest mining corporations in the world, Falconbridge and Inco, to be sold off to corporate raiders. I watched how those workers at Local 6500 stood up because it was the same plant that destroyed their defined benefits plan, that destroyed what they had done for 50, 60 years in the union. The workers at Local 6500 stayed out for over a year.

I remember being out there in January in the cold and their slogan was “One day longer, one day stronger”. They held the line and they pushed back one of the most brutal mining companies in the world. Vale got a black eye, but Vale was aided every step of the way by that gang and the then president of the Treasury Board, who was their friend.

Government Orders

There is a principle here. We are not kidding around. We will be here as long as it takes because we are drawing the line in the sand. The government's world is wrong and we will defend the rights of people to have pensions and decent wages in our country.

• (1630)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been quite funny listening to the debate today. We have the Liberals claiming one thing, but when they were in government they brought in similar legislation. Now it is all different.

Then we have the New Democrats who have the nerve to get up in the House and say that somehow they are the great defenders of the public service and of the union.

What about the workers in Ontario who had to suffer the Bob Rae years when he was the NDP premier of Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order please. The hon. member should recall that he may not use the name of a sitting member of Parliament while he is speaking in this place.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, you are right. I would rather refer to him as the NDP premier of the province of Ontario who imposed the social contract on the workers of Ontario.

What was the social contract? It was the NDP government of Ontario reopening the collective bargaining agreements that those workers had signed in good faith and deciding that they should take 12 days off a year and cutting their wages.

Who did that? That was the NDP. Some of the members of that unruly gang at that terrible ministry are in the NDP caucus today. Its members are so embarrassed by it that they shuffled that leader, who is now currently the Liberal leader, off to the Liberals.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, is that as good as it gets in the House?

I would answer that question. It is really so ridiculous and so beneath me to engage that guy in mudslinging that we have to get us back to where he was before when he was heckling about the union bosses.

That is the Mike Harris wrecking crew. We saw what its members did in Ontario. I will not defend or attack what was done by the Liberal leader when he was in Ontario. However, what was done by the Conservatives in Ontario people will never forget. Look what they did to the education system, to the health system and to natural resources and how they brought their gang of buddies in and sold things off. What is it always about? It is always about who will benefit and it is always their pals.

I would love to sit and debate Ontario history with my hon. colleague, but we have a bigger issue here, which is defending the pension benefits of Canadian working families.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question, which I have attempted to get answered from other members of the New Democratic caucus.

Does the member believe there are any circumstances whatsoever in which the NDP could envision themselves supporting back to work legislation?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I find that an odd question. Previous Liberal governments were always against the working rights. Now the Liberals are onside with us, but want to know if there could be a hypothetical situation down the road where they could jump ship. I am sure we will jump ship from them as soon as we can down the road from this legislation on many things. I will not get into whether there could be a hypothetical situation.

I am glad to hear my hon. colleagues in the Liberal Party speaking up for working rights. I am certainly glad to hear that they will be with us as we stay up night after night in the House. Maybe as we talk all night, we can find some hypothetical situations where he might find a reason not to support the legislation.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the union's rights and workers' rights, but one of the great principles of collective bargaining is the obligation on both sides to bargain in good faith.

I wonder if the legislation, the lockout, the order back to work and then the imposition of a wage less than what was on the bargaining table will have any impact on good faith bargaining.

• (1635)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the issue of bargaining in good faith is fundamental to union and management negotiations. When a government intervenes, locks out workers, forces a crisis and then imposes a new wage agreement that is lower than was negotiated, that sends the signal to management and all other sources of work.

The government has taken sides and intervened above and beyond its right. A very bad precedent is going to be set by the government.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for reminding this House and explaining to it some of the history and tradition involved in free collective bargaining and the struggle working people went through to enjoy what we now consider fundamental rights and freedoms, the right to free collective bargaining and, when that bargaining reaches an impasse, the right of working people to withhold their services as a legitimate economic lever to apply pressure to a bargaining relationship that is imbalanced at the outset from the obvious advantage that management has.

I want to begin, though, by clearing up some misinformation that the Minister of Labour has been sharing with this House. She keeps coming back to the point that she believes that what the government has imposed here by its legislation is somehow final offer selection, or FOS. I happen to know something about final offer selection, because it was in fact law in the Province of Manitoba for a period of time, and as a former trade union leader, I have negotiated dozens of collective agreements. In some of those collective agreements, the parties I was representing chose to settle their bargaining negotiations through final offer selection.

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This has nothing to do with FOS, which is only effective when both parties voluntarily submit themselves to it as a form of arbitration to settle their differences. The fact of the matter is that both parties present their last best offer and then an arbitrator chooses one or the other. This does not resemble FOS whatsoever, which had its origins in major league baseball to settle wage disputes between teams and players. Once the two parties have stripped away all the other language issues and are down to just money and cannot agree on the money, they put their best offer forward and an arbitrator chooses one or the other, but not a combination of the two.

Therefore, the minister is misleading the House if she is trying to sell this package as a form of final offer selection.

The second thing I would like to raise is that if we scratch the surface of this impasse, its root cause is Canada Post's saying that it is unwilling or unable to maintain fair wages or to meet the wage demands of its employees. However, in actual fact, for the last 10 years or more, Canada Post has been paying a dividend to the Government of Canada to the degree of \$200 million to \$300 million per year in profits.

If one reads the mandate of Canada Post, and I used to be the critic and know it quite well, nowhere in its mandate is Canada Post supposed to be a cash cow for the government of the day. Its mandate is to provide the best possible mail service to the most people at the lowest possible cost. If there ever is a surplus, it should perhaps go to expanding Canada Post's delivery service to Canadians, or lowering the cost of stamps or buying new vehicles or sorting stations, but not to putting \$200 million a year into the general revenues of the federal government.

If we add up the 10, 12 or 15 years that it has been putting \$200 million to \$280 million a year into general revenue, we would have \$2 billion, \$3 billion, \$4 billion a year worth of accumulated surplus. With that, Canada Post would have no problem meeting the reasonable wage demands of a reasonable settlement. I am not going to judge what is reasonable or what is not. However, it could not claim poverty or inability to pay, if it were actually following its mandate instead of handing over all this money.

We can scratch the surface of this assault on pensions and get back to its root cause. I think the root cause is the unofficial prime minister of Canada, Thomas d'Aquino, and I do not hesitate saying that, and his new incarnation, John Manley. I say this because 12 years ago, Thomas d'Aquino stood and listed 10 or 15 things that he thought Canada had to do to move forward. What he really meant was what we had to do to re-create our country in the image of the United States, but in his mind it was to move forward. One of those was legacy costs. He flagged those as an unsustainable expectation of Canadian workers for the pensions that had become the norm in the post-war years.

• (1640)

Then the modus operandi kicked in. First, a bunch of right-wing think tanks validated that notion. Then a bunch of lobbyists started chatting up this notion on talk shows and wrote articles in newspapers. Then those lobbyists were dispatched to Parliament Hill and a neo-conservative government dutifully fell into line and did exactly what it had been told to do a decade before by the Business Council on National Issues, or now the CEO of the

Canadian Council of Chief Executives, John Manley. That is where this comes from. They are hell-bent and determined to re-create Canada in the image of the United States.

Let me point out the folly of that in the context of union rights and fair wages. The greatest strength of the United States and what made it the economic powerhouse that it was until recently was its burgeoning middle class, a middle class that could consume. The United States got that because of free collective bargaining and the rise of the trade union movement from World War I through to the World War II and post-war eras, when unions negotiated fair wages. People want to dump on guys like Jimmy Hoffa, but the one thing that people should remember him for is that he took the lowest-paid occupation in the country and within a decade had turned it into one of the highest-paid blue collar jobs in the country.

Fair wages benefit the whole community. How can people not get that through their heads? When working people have a dollar in their pocket they spend it and they spend it again. In fact, a dollar is usually spent four times before it reaches its natural state of repose in some rich man's pocket. However, in the process on the way to the rich guy's pocket, it benefits a lot of people.

During the Reagan years, they set out to squash the unions in the United States and they succeeded. They went from 35% unionization to 20% to 15% to 12%. The Americans are now down to 9% unionization, and believe me, wages followed, because free collective bargaining had been the only way to elevate the standard of wages and working conditions of the people of the United States. Now they are wondering where all those good union jobs have gone that paid \$20 an hour and provided a pension, the jobs that people could raise a family on. Guess what, they do not exist any more. The Americans effectively stamped out the unions because their right wing think tanks told them that it was the way to prosperity.

Our right wing think tanks are telling the government that the road to prosperity means stamping out unions and pushing back and that the notion that people deserve a fair wage and a decent pension is a wild expectation that we can no longer afford. If we buy into that bill of goods, we will be following the Americans right down that same path, because it was middle class consumers who were the United States' greatest strength.

We have not followed the Americans there yet. We are still about 30% or 32% unionized. However, we can see it in the eyes of the guys across the floor that they hate unions. They would love to stamp out unions if they could get away with it. Also in their eyes is the notion of those fat pensions. What is fat about them?

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When Marcel Massé stole the \$30 billion surplus in the public service pension plan, which I do not hesitate to say he did, we did some research. The average public service pensioner is a woman, aged about 68 to 70, making \$9,000 a year from her pension. That \$30 billion the Liberal government stole from the public service pension plan and gave in the form of corporate tax cuts to its friends could have doubled the pension of every person collecting a public service pension benefit and we would still have change left over.

There has been a successive assault on fair wages and the notion of pensions, which can be traced right back to Thomas d'Aquino. The unofficial prime minister of Canada dictated that is what they needed to do and a bunch of toady governments, from the Liberal toady government to the Conservative toady government, fell successively into line and implemented and executed just about every single thing on his wish list. They ticked them off one by one, and if we keep following them they will want to re-create Canada in the image of the United States, and it is not a pretty sight south of the border, believe me.

• (1645)

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we want to make comparisons between countries and what they have tried, the roads to prosperity and bondage have both been proven through 5,000 or 6,000 years of human history. We may look to the south sometimes for examples of free markets, but we do not have to look south. We could look east and west for the examples of free markets versus socialism. I do not know what our handbook is but we know about some of the planks written by Mr. Marx on socialism and the redistribution of wealth. It is very clear that socialism has always led to poverty and despair.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, fair wages benefit the whole community. I do not know if anyone could argue with that.

There are low-wage, low-cost economies, like the United States and even like some provinces. They advertise themselves as this, thinking it will attract investment if they say they are a low-wage, low-cost economy. Frankly, the product of that leaves a lot of social consequences.

Then there are places like New Zealand and Australia where a coffee server in a coffee shop makes \$22 an hour. People working at London Drugs or whatever their equivalent is make \$25 an hour. I have been to Denmark, Sweden and Norway, where, again, a coffee shop worker makes \$20 to \$25 an hour.

Here, for some reason we have convinced ourselves that it is a good thing to have low wages. How can that possibly be a good thing? In the richest and most powerful civilization in the history of the world, how is it a good idea to pay people a wage they cannot live on?

The rate of child poverty in Norway, Denmark and Sweden is zero. There are no poor children there because they believe in fair wages for people.

What is wrong with this country?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member for Winnipeg Centre is quite aware of one of the saddest days I ever sat inside the Manitoba Legislature. It was in committee when I had retired teacher after retired teacher come to

the committee until past midnight, asking the NDP government why it was not giving them any form of COLA increase and to allow their pensions to go up.

The member for Winnipeg Centre loses his focus in trying to take shots at the Liberal Party on pensions. The Liberal Party has been a long-time advocate of decent pensions.

The issue here is Canada Post and why there is a lockout today, as opposed to the government trying to resolve this so that the postal workers can have that collective agreement.

Would the member for Winnipeg Centre not agree that the government was wrong in allowing Canada Post to enforce a lockout? Would it not have been better if there had not been a lockout and we had allowed the negotiations to take place in a much better way?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I was the labour critic during the 1997 Canada Post lockout.

The member for Cardigan was then the minister of labour. I believe it was a guy who became the ambassador to Denmark, or was it Hans Island that we sent him to, Minister Gagliano, who was the minister for Canada Post. That was when the Liberals imposed an almost equally draconian back-to-work legislation package on the workers of Canada Post.

The fact is, these impasses often come down to the ability to pay. In the private sector there is often a legitimate inability to pay the workers' demands. In this case, Canada Post has been showing a surplus of \$200 million to \$300 million a year for the last 10 to 15 years. There was no inability to pay. There was no reason it could not tolerate the rotating strikes, which in fact left the mail still being delivered. There was no reason to lock them out.

If we took the total accumulated surplus over the last 15 years, there would have been \$2 billion to \$3 billion, more than ample room to provide a fair cost of living increase while leaving their pensions alone. In other words, do not start an assault on pensions based on the inability to pay if the numbers do not bear it out.

* * *

• (1650)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I have the honour to inform the House that messages have been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bills:

Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (mega-trials); and

Bill C-3, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011.

I also have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following private bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired:

Bill S-1001, An Act respecting Queen's University at Kingston.

The bill is deemed to have been read the first time and ordered for second reading at the next sitting of the House.

* * *

RESUMPTION AND CONTINUATION OF POSTAL SERVICES LEGISLATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will not come as a surprise to anyone in the House or even in this country that our government has had to bring forward back-to-work legislation to end the work stoppage at Canada Post. We were fully prepared to use back-to-work legislation in the case of Air Canada and I must say I am particularly relieved that we did not have to take that step. I congratulate and thank both Air Canada and the Canada Auto Workers for finding a solution on their own. That is always the best way.

We would all be immensely relieved if the crisis at Canada Post could also be resolved as quickly and without the need for the government's intervention, but unfortunately it does not look like we will be that lucky. As I speak, the postal workers are still locked out, and there is no sign of a real and constructive move back to the bargaining table. Therefore, the government is obliged to invoke our powers that we have under the Canada Labour Code to end the work stoppage and appoint an arbitrator to impose a settlement.

The pros and cons of back-to-work legislation have already been thoroughly discussed in the media and of course, by the various stakeholders. The reactions have been entirely predictable.

If I may summarize all the objections I have heard, I would say that they seem to come down to three points: one, that the government is acting too forcefully; two, that the government has intervened too quickly; and three, that the government is exaggerating the effect on the national economy.

Let me take a few moments, if I may, to respond to each of these objections. A significant number of people believe that imposing arbitration in a labour dispute is inherently unjust and dictatorial, even if it is a perfectly legal option enshrined in the Canada Labour Code. These people believe that the right to strike or lock out is absolute and that it trumps all other rights.

In a democratic society, there can be no absolute rights because there are circumstances where the rights of one group will inevitably conflict with the rights of another group. Some degree of compromise is always necessary. When people will not co-operate with each other and their co-operation is vital to society, the state must step in and use the law. I will readily admit that the law can be a blunt instrument, but it is sometimes the only tool we have.

Let me address the second most common objection. Some people who accept the use of back-to-work legislation in principle are still convinced that in this particular case, the government is acting too hastily. In this country, the great majority of disputes between labour and management are resolved at the bargaining table, often with the help of mediators and conciliators from the labour program. These mediators and conciliators typically work behind the scenes and where their efforts are successful, they do not hold press conferences or media opportunities to boast about it, they get the job done.

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Because they keep such a low profile, the general public may not appreciate how hard these women and men work and how much they contribute to good labour management relations in this country.

When collective bargaining fails and a strike or a lockout occurs, the spotlight suddenly shines on the government, and it looks like we have somehow suddenly arrived on the scene, even though we have been there all along the way.

● (1655)

Many Canadians are simply unaware that the Canada Post negotiations have been going on for quite some time and that the Government of Canada has been involved almost from the beginning. The Minister of Labour has already described at length all the steps we took over a period of many months to avert this work stoppage.

In the Canada Post dispute the mediators and conciliators used all their skills and resources, but unfortunately, to no avail. Naturally, we prepared for the possibility of a strike or a lockout. We gave this situation a lot of thought.

The decision to table this back to work legislation was not made recklessly or impulsively. Some say we should sit and wait a little longer to see how events play out, but every day that this lockout continues is another day of losses to our economy, losses we can ill afford.

That brings me to the third most common objection to our back to work legislation and that is that this government is exaggerating the danger to our economy from a prolonged postal strike.

For several months now we have been telling the Canadian public that our economy is emerging from the global recession but that our recovery is still fragile. People who doubt the second part of this statement should read the financial section. Better still, they should talk to business owners who are just beginning to get back to profitability, or the many Canadians who have just recently started collecting a paycheque again. Ask them if they feel our economy is already so strong that it can afford to endure a major disruption in basic postal service.

In this situation our government is not being unduly alarmist. The threat to our recovery is real. The objections to back-to-work legislation, which might have some force under different circumstances, are not really valid right now. My hon. colleagues must recognize this reality. We need to get the mail moving again and the only way we can do that is by passing this bill.

I have been participating today and listening to many colleagues in the House express very eloquently and passionately their views on this. I really believe that there is a bigger and wider issue here, which is that we are a very large and vast country geographically and not so large in our population. We are very much spread out as a country. We have one mail service. I have heard members who represent rural ridings talk about the major impact even a day or two of mail not being delivered can mean to those communities.

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I represent a fairly urban municipality, certainly a suburban city from the City of Toronto. Residents have said to me that any disruption of mail delivery significantly impacts them, their families and particularly seniors and our most vulnerable citizens who rely not just on cheques and pension money and so on coming to them on a timely and regular basis, but correspondence from family members who may live far away from them. They rely on getting that letter. It is that important connection they have with their family and sending a letter is the best way for them to communicate. I am speaking of people who get well wishes cards, birthday cards and other things that mean so much in their life that they count on each and every year. I think of my daughters who are 11 and 7 and if they did not get a birthday card from grandma and grandpa who live in Peterborough and we live in Mississauga, they would be very disappointed. An email does not cut it for that kind of thing. People rely on our postal service to do that.

● (1700)

Governments have to make tough decisions and I think we were elected to make tough decisions.

Like all members of this House, I spent 36 days knocking on thousands of doors. I heard very clearly from my constituents what they wanted from their government. They wanted reliability and responsibility. They wanted a strong government that was going to look after the economy and continue to work to create jobs. They wanted a secure economic future for all kinds of Canadians, not just those Canadians who might have the benefit of working in a unionized environment. There are millions of Canadians who do not have a union. They still make a contribution to the country. They have well-paying jobs in many cases, certainly in my community, and they want to continue to do that. They want to continue to work for companies that will invest in our community.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to have the Canadian postal service working each and every day, contributing in a very significant way to the economy.

The last point I will raise is on the impact I believe a prolonged postal strike will have on charities. I was very proud that for close to 30 years I was a very strong volunteer in the city of Mississauga. In fact, the mayor and members of council recognized me with an award for 30 years of community service just last year. I have served on many boards that count on individual donations that come in through the mail to keep those organizations running. Food banks and other community service programs rely on individual donations.

Many of the people who donate to those organizations are not sophisticated online donors who use credit cards and Internet. They write a cheque out of the goodness of their heart and they put it in the mail. When that cheque is received at the food bank, it is deposited and it makes a huge difference in those people's lives who have to use organizations like the Mississauga Food Bank, whose board of directors I have served on for many years. We rely on that. Other charities rely on that. If we were to allow this labour dispute to continue through the summer, organizations that count on annual donations that normally come in May and June would be in deep trouble because those cheques would simply not be delivered to these agencies.

There are millions of Canadians, thousands of agencies, thousands of small, medium and large businesses that count on mail delivery. There are children and others like my kids who count on getting that birthday card or well wishes. They count on an efficient and effective postal service.

Our government has a responsibility. It is responsible to oversee the operation of Canada Post on behalf of Canadian taxpayers who ultimately own the crown corporation. In essence, the government has that fiduciary responsibility to step in only when necessary.

I certainly would not advocate this in every case and clearly we have not done this before; the last time it was done was in 1997. Obviously, most of the time the parties are able to come to an agreement, which is the preferred solution in all cases of collective bargaining, such as Air Canada has been able to do. The parties have been able to sit down and negotiate a tentative agreement which hopefully will be ratified and Air Canada will continue to serve the public.

Unfortunately, it looks like in this situation the parties simply cannot get together and read from the same songbook as to how they see Canada Post as a corporation moving forward. It is unfortunate, but I think we have a bigger responsibility to the citizens of this country to ensure the mail continues to flow.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak in the House today and I would be more than pleased to entertain any questions from hon. members.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member and I think he is missing the real issue.

The problem is not the services provided by Canada Post or Air Canada. It is not production at Nortel or AbitibiBowater. The problem is the workers' right to keep an effective pension plan, a defined benefit plan. That is the problem. We cannot expect people to agree to live in poverty in their senior years. That is what the government is asking.

That is what was happening with Air Canada. They came to an agreement because they decided not to include this issue. They decided not to talk about the pension plan and, in two days, the whole thing was settled. The issue of wages at Canada Post was settled. The issue of working conditions was settled. Everything was settled except the pension plan and the disability benefit plan. What this government is essentially asking is to recognize people's right to give up a viable pension without access to the food banks in which the hon. member told me he is actively involved.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I certainly did not expect to be involved in the collective bargaining process as a member of Parliament. However, I have been asked to comment on pensions. Obviously in the collective bargaining that has taken place, there are a number of issues that are on the table. I am certainly not in a position to determine what pension levels are appropriate or not in the case of a collective agreement between a union and management, whether it is a crown corporation or a private sector company.

However, the one thing we have to be realistic about is if we are going to have a pension system for people in the future who work for companies, whether they be in the public sector or private sector, those companies and crown corporations have to be economically viable in the longer term, not the immediate term but the longer term, because these agreements often stretch out for many years. If we do not have a situation where Canada Post, Air Canada, and any of those other organizations are economically viable, there will be no pensions for anybody because there will be fewer jobs and there will be less service. They will not be viable.

I am concerned about pensions, too, but I think it is a two-way street. The union has to be realistic with the company's ability to pay and management has to be realistic as to what is a fair pension for the employees.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for a very informative commentary on the subject at hand. He has tremendous experience in the charitable sector and the volunteer sector, for which he has been recognized by his community in Mississauga.

I would like him to talk about the impact of work stoppages at Canada Post on the charitable sector. I would also like him to comment on the fair and reasonable approach the government has put forward in the legislation that would align the wage increases that Canada Post personnel would receive if the bill passes with the increases that were negotiated with the broader public sector at the federal level.

Those are the two questions: one, the impact on the charitable and volunteer sectors; and two, the government's decision in the legislation to increase salaries and wages at the same rate as that in the federal public sector.

• (1710)

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary very much for the opportunity to comment on two areas. One area I am very passionate about is the charitable sector. Where would we be if there were no charitable and social service organizations doing great work on the ground in all of our communities and making a real impact on people's lives?

Quite frankly, I find the smaller and leaner the organization, the stronger it is in actually delivering much needed services in communities. The problem is that charities rely on cheques that are most often mailed. They are not big highfalutin volunteer organizations with fancy websites and online donations. They are small community agencies that make a big difference, and a \$10, \$25 or \$50 cheque in the mail to those agencies makes a big difference.

With respect to the wage increases that are being proposed in our bill, we have to be reasonable. I remind everyone that what is being proposed are wage increases, not wage rollbacks. We are not cutting people's wages. Wages would go up under the bill or if the union had settled with the last offer. The employer offered an increase in wages.

It is a balancing act, but the fact is we are increasing wages in the bill. We are asking the arbitrator to do some work. Arbitrators often

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side with union requests rather than management. That is a fair and appropriate process. Our government is acting very responsibly in these times.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Don Valley East. Today, we were supposed to return to Quebec. I must say that my heart is in my province more than it is here, but my mind remains here.

There is a lot of pathos surrounding what I have been hearing for the past few hours. I have been familiar with a number of community and charitable groups for a long time. They have been using the Internet to collect donations and grants for a long time.

My in-laws are 94 and 90 years old and they receive their pensions by direct deposit. Not every single Canadian from coast to coast is affected by this strike. We had rotating strikes that affected a small number of people, but the lockout is what made all the difference.

The government is complaining about the damage being done to small businesses, damage that it caused itself with the lockout. A lockout occurs when the employer shuts down a business in response to a strike or the threat of a strike. It just decides to shut down the business.

Who locked out the letter carriers? I will let my colleague answer that. Who is harming small-and medium-sized businesses? When the government talks about protecting the best interest, it is no doubt referring to the interests of major corporations, the banks and oil companies. When we talk about best interests, we are referring to those of the population, our constituents.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised the issue of rotating strikes. I was in the small business world before I came to this place. If half of my employees decided not to show up or picket outside my business and the other half came to work and at another branch location half of them showed up and the other half did not, I could not run my business like that.

How could Canada Post be expected to run its business when it never knew who was going to show up on which day? Of course it had no option other than to shut the system down and protect the health and safety of the workers who did show up, because God knows that they were going to be asked to do. Who knows what they would be asked to do when half the people are out or the Halifax branch is out but Montreal is working and Vancouver is out and there are rotating strikes.

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One cannot run a business that way. The union made it very clear, in my view. I really do not want to pick sides, but the union made it very clear the rotating strikes were going to continue ad nauseam. They were not going to stop. It was not just a protest for a couple of days; it was going to continue on and on, I assume until a collective agreement was reached. Nobody can run a business like that. It is impossible.

● (1715)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If you put it to the House, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: "That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-1001, An Act Respecting Queen's University at Kingston, be deemed to have been reported favourably by the examiner of petitions pursuant to Standing Order 133(3), and that the bill be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed considered in at report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 12 days of rotating strikes, Canada Post initiated a lockout. This work stoppage comes after many rounds of collective bargaining, during which Canada Post and the postal workers union failed to close a gap between the positions and reach a settlement.

For many months now, federal mediators have worked with the two sides to find a solution. Unfortunately, the employer and the union have been unable to finalize a new collective agreement. Accordingly the government has decided to take action and tabled legislation that would bring an end to the work stoppage. The motion before us will give the House a chance to consider the labour minister's bill in an expeditious fashion.

As all members know, the procedures before us are reserved for special urgent situations. This is the case with the current work stoppage at Canada Post. Just when our economy is in the early stages of recovery, and in view of the serious consequences of paralyzing the postal service, the country can ill-afford a work stoppage. This legislation, once enacted, will bring to an end to the lockout at Canada Post.

What is at stake is our economic recovery. Right now, our country has reason to be optimistic. Our country has experienced the strongest economic growth among the G7 countries since mid-2009. All the job losses incurred during the global economic recession have been recovered. Now is not the time to jeopardize our momentum.

Our government has a responsibility, nay a duty, to act on behalf of all Canadians.

It is always better when the two parties can reach a collective agreement at the bargaining table, without the need for parliamentary intervention. The best solution in any labour dispute is one where the parties resolve the differences themselves. In this case, unfortunately, the parties are too far apart.

We could let the situation deteriorate and see businesses fail, unemployment increase and our economy falter, or the government could take decisive action on behalf of all Canadians. That is what we have done. We have taken decisive action which is in the best interests of the country and the Canadian public.

The bill would impose a four year contract and new pay rate increases. That would mean a 1.75% increase as of February 1, 2011, 1.5% increase as of February 2012, another 2% as of February 2013 and as of February 2014, 2%. It also provides for final offer selection, a binding mechanism on all outstanding matters. Furthermore, in making the selection of a final offer the arbitrator is to be guided by the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries.

The arbitrator will also provide the necessary degree of flexibility to ensure the short-term and long-term economic viability and competitiveness of the Canada Post Corporation, maintain the health and safety of its workers and ensure the sustainability of its pension plan.

The terms and conditions of employment must also take into account: (a) that the solvency ratio of the pension plan must not decline as a result of the new collective agreement; and (b) that the Canada Post Corporation must, without recourse to undue increases in postal rates, operate efficiently, improve productivity and meet acceptable standards of service.

Let us remember that the last postal strike happened in 1997 and it lasted for 15 days. Since then, reliance on postal service has experienced a decline in personal mail due to the growth in the use of the Internet, email, electronic billing and electronic funds transfer.

● (1720)

However, small and mid-sized businesses still rely heavily on the postal service for direct marketing, billing and filling orders.

Business owners, seniors and other constituents of mine have contacted my office and have expressed their support for this motion and the need for the service to resume as soon as possible.

Small and medium-sized business owners are feeling the pinch. Their businesses are being affected. Business is slowing and the cost of shipping is starting to soar.

The people of Don Valley East elected me to be their voice in Parliament. Today, I am doing that by rising and speaking in favour of this motion.

Canada Post is a crown corporation. It is one of the largest employers in Canada. It employs more than 70,000 full-time and part-time employees. Every business day, Canada Post delivers about 40 million items and provides services to 14 million addresses. Canada Post, like any commercial enterprise, has to offer dependable service, generate revenue, control costs and maintain an efficient operation.

By the same token, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers is trying to gain the best salary and working conditions for its members.

Government Orders

The labour dispute between Canada Post and CUPW relates to the renewal of collective agreements covering some 50,000 workers, including plant and retail employees, letter carriers and mail service couriers.

We have a process in place to deal with these labour conflicts in the federal domain. It is called the Canada Labour Code. It has been followed each step of the way in this conflict.

Let me take a moment to outline the steps in this collective bargaining process, which has brought us to the situation we are faced with today.

Collective agreements covering CUPW and Canada Post expired in January 2011. Both parties had been bargaining since October 2010. When those talks reached an impasse, a conciliation officer was appointed and the conciliation period was extended until early May. During that time, the conciliation officer met with the parties. Throughout the month of May, a mediator from the labour program's Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service met frequently with the parties.

Despite all these efforts in mediation and conciliation and the Minister of Labour meeting with both party leaders, CUPW announced, on May 30, its intent to strike. On June 3 the Canadian Union of Postal Workers walked off the job. On June 15 the employer declared a lockout.

To recap, the postal workers have now been without a contract since January 2011, despite many rounds of bargaining. In fact, the parties have been bargaining for eight months.

Sometimes collective bargaining hits an impasse. It is unfortunate when the employer and the union cannot hammer out a mutually agreeable collective agreement. Unfortunately this is the situation facing the government today. When that happens, the parties can request the Minister of Labour to appoint an arbitrator.

Under normal circumstances, the Government of Canada does not intervene in labour disputes. Our government respects the right to free collective bargaining, which includes the right to strike and/or lockout. Parliament will not intervene if there is no serious harm to the national economy or public health and safety. However, when employers and unions choose a course of action that would have a negative effect on the economy and the country as a whole, then Parliament has the right to step in and protect the economic interests of the country and public interest as a whole.

What would be the effect of a prolonged postal disruption? Canada Post is a major employer across the country. It spends about \$3 billion in goods and services. It contributes \$6.6 billion to the country's GDP. Canada Post's direct marketing sector accounts for \$14 billion in its revenue. During the recent economic recession, this sector suffered financial losses.

• (1725)

Canadian retailers depend on Canada Post to reach their customers. The Canadian magazine industry relies on Canada Post for most of its distribution.

Charities depend on Canada Post to receive donations and the funding to assist them to work. In fact, the National Institute for the

Blind is now facing an estimated loss of \$250,000 in funding because more than half of its regular donations are received through the mail service.

Canada Post also offers an essential lifeline to Canadians in rural and remote areas. Often the Canada Post offices are the centre of a community's daily life. While rural letter carriers are not part of the current bargaining dispute, rural communities have been affected because sorting has ceased operations.

People with disabilities have transportation and accessibility barriers that may well effect their ability to receive goods and services.

Are we going to stand by and see some of these most vulnerable sectors of our economy affected by a prolonged work stoppage by Canada Post? What would be the effect on Canada Post as a viable business? As we recover from this economic downturn, it is more important than ever that we encourage co-operative and productive workplaces.

Let us support Canadians who have recently gone through a recession and are hoping to make some gains for their families. Let us support a back to work legislation. Let us keep our economy working. Let us look to the future.

I ask my honourable colleagues to join me in supporting this bill.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to this place.

I listened to his comments with great interest. He talked about vulnerable people. He may or may not know that I spent a lot of time in the last session dealing with pensions and trying to ensure that all Canadians received the pensions that were due. One of the big elements that has not been talked about very much in this dispute is pensions, just as it has been in the past couple of years with the recession.

We all know what happened to the Nortel workers. We all know what happened to Buchanan Forest Products workers in my riding. When it went bankrupt, the pension funds were underfunded and a lot of families suffered, and continue to suffer right now.

In large part, the Air Canada incident that has been solved, at least for now, revolved around pensions.

This too is about pensions, but there is a big difference. In this case, for the last dozen or so years, Canada Post Corporation has shown a profit, well over \$2 billion in the last 12 years, yet it has left its pension funds underfunded. It did not do it on its own. It is allowed to do that. That is one of the sticking points right now.

I have a very quick question for the member. Does he think it is fair that corporations that are making money, like Canada Post, should be trying to change a pension system that has been agreed to in collective bargaining? Does he think it is fair that it can leave it underfunded for years and years and then cry wolf and say that it does not have enough money for its pensions?

• (1730)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by my colleague.

Government Orders

Clearly, part of the agreement will take care of the pensions, but it also protects Canadian taxpayers from increased tax liabilities. The legislation also includes guiding principles on providing direction to the arbitrator such as the desire of the government to see no increase in the unfunded portion of the Canada Post pension plan.

Our government's desire is to ensure that Canadian taxpayers are not left with the bill for Canada Post's pension plan.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting the way the government characterizes the state of the economy. It goes from saying that the recovery is very fragile to saying that the economy is very strong, that we have recouped all the lost jobs since the recession and that we have had strong growth since 2009. It chooses one characterization over another, depending on its agenda and its strategic political objectives that particular day.

Since the hon. member views Canada Post as an essential service, even as its share of the market erodes over time because of new technologies, is there a kind of minimum threshold over which the government would allow Canada Post to go on strike? In other words, is there some kind of magic annual real GDP growth in the Canadian economy over a period of time at which point it would be acceptable to allow a strike at Canada Post?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any point where it is an acceptable position to go on strike. Clearly, the mandate is to negotiate a settlement between disputing parties. In this particular case, Canada Post actually has \$6.6 billion of business in this country and it affects our GDP directly. A situation affecting Canada Post will directly affect what we are doing.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the great speech and for outlining very well the concerns on this side of the House as they relate to the survival of thriving small businesses in our country.

I am sure that he, like many of us, has received numerous emails from constituents. Just this morning I received an email from a constituent who said:

I want to take this opportunity to express my complete displeasure and impatience with the length of and the handling of the Canada Post strike by the federal government.

I strongly believe that Canada Post should be deemed an essential service in this country.

I cannot believe that we can allow this corporation to hold hostage, and in some cases, destroy businesses within this country.

Our economy is still barely lifting its head out of the valleys of the most recent recession, and there are companies that were fighting to survive.

He went on at some length and I will not read the entire email.

Has my colleague also received communications from constituents who are very concerned about the survival of small businesses? Also, does it not seem ironic that the NDP, which seems to champion small business, in this situation seems to be ignoring the needs of small business and, in some cases, actually is causing their demise?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Speaker, certainly I have received numerous emails from people in my riding who support the action the government is taking to relieve the tension on not just small businesses but workers as well.

I have had a call from one company that has had to close its doors because it has not received the cheques to pay its workers. The effects have been much wider than just the things that are going on.

• (1735)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, since the members of the government have been quoting emails constantly today, I would like to quote from an email that I got just a few minutes ago.

The email is from George, who said, "Since Canada Post has locked out the workers and thus stopped the mail service in Canada, creating great hardships on businesses and families, does it seem just for the Government of Canada to punish its workers with Bill C-6? Indeed, since the full mail stoppage is caused by the management of Canada Post who directly answers to the Government of Canada, should the Government of Canada not be directing Canada Post to remove its lockout?"

Mr. Joe Daniel: Madam Speaker, clearly the whole business started with the strikes which started with the workers. Eventually, a business cannot be run when these sorts of strikes occur.

The lockout is also part of Canada Post's requirement to get things going. In a way, it pushes us to make some decisions and help businesses get going again.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, that was a very well-prepared speech the member for Don Valley East gave. I was struck by the fact that he was talking about how the government believes in free collective bargaining. The member also talked about a situation where the workers followed the rules, they got to the point where they started rotating strikes, but they offered to the company to return to work under the old contract rules. Then the company locked them out.

The government is legislating a settlement that is less than what the company was offering. Will the government remove that portion of the bill?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Madam Speaker, clearly the offer that is on the table is in line with the rest of the public sector that we are working with. There is absolutely no need to have it removed from the legislation.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, I received some emails, and I quoted one, but I also got a phone call from a small business owner in a small community in my riding. She obviously is a very well-informed small business owner, but she is suffering because of this strike. She asked me why the Government of Canada through Canada Post has locked out the workers.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Madam Speaker, the answer is relatively straightforward. As a result of the rotating strikes, a business cannot run successfully. As such, it might as well be closed down while it is negotiating.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is great to add some comments on this subject which is something I feel quite passionate about. I have always been very fond of Canada Post. I have used it personally in many different ways and I have an immense amount of respect for postal workers. I truly appreciate having the opportunity to add a few comments in this debate.

Having said that, I look at Canada Post from the perspective of putting people first. I have had the good fortune of being able to knock on thousands and thousands of doors, possibly a few more than others here because of the byelection that was held last November. We need to bring this matter down to what people in our communities have to say about Canada Post.

During the byelection, I was at a community function at the St. Josaphat Selo-Villa on McGregor just south of Selkirk Avenue. The first question asked was with regard to Canada Post. Residents were hoping to get a mailbox located at the base of the seniors complex. They felt this would be of great value because the mailbox was quite far away and they did not feel safe enough, especially at night, walking out to Selkirk Avenue to deposit their mail. It was a very important issue for them. Of all the issues that were being talked about, this was an issue that they wanted to talk to me about. I indicated that I appreciated that and that I would raise the issue when provided the opportunity to do so.

Fortunately, things went well for me in the byelection and, lo and behold, I believe it was in January, who comes calling at my office but a Canada Post representative. Canada Post wanted to meet with me and other members of Parliament. I believe representatives went to different caucuses.

I was quite pleased with the timing because I had mentioned that story to someone else. It was nice to be able to engage the crown corporation and share some of the other issues I had heard about from seniors, such as graffiti. Graffiti is a serious problem in certain areas of Canada. There are pockets in Winnipeg North where there is a great deal of graffiti. Mailboxes came up at that time also.

I was able to have discussions with people at Canada Post Corporation. I was really pleased with the responses they gave. They mentioned the new postal boxes. I have since seen them and can appreciate why there will not be as much graffiti on them.

I cannot recall the person's position in the corporation, maybe corporate secretary, but she appeared to take my concern quite seriously in terms of wanting to do some follow-up. She was going to look at where other mailboxes were located for that seniors complex. I was quite impressed with the overall presentation that Canada Post Corporation provided.

The Liberal Party does not have a problem with the idea of a corporation making a profit. There are things that could be done with that profit that would be better than putting it into general revenues. For example, it could be invested in unfunded pension liabilities, as has been pointed out. Innovative mailboxes could be designed, as was pointed out at that meeting. Maybe it could be used to provide better services. The member across the way talked about the importance of mail services in rural communities. These are all wonderful ideas.

• (1740)

I would like to think with the revenues and profits Canada Post is generating that it is not only there to provide money to the government, but also to provide a basic service to all Canadians.

There are things we could be doing within Canada Post that would see us reaching into our communities in a much more positive way. I am not overly concerned in terms of whether Canada Post makes a profit some years. It is more a concern in terms of what it is that it is actually doing with that money.

We often talk about the public. I have heard from New Democrats and Conservatives of the importance of having continuity in that service and that it be there for the public.

I too have had the opportunity to have some discussions. One lady met me at the local McDonald's restaurant. I try to get there every Saturday. She had a problem because she wanted to go back to the Philippines, but she was waiting for a document to arrive from Buffalo. I checked with Buffalo and was told that it was in the mail. In this particular case, I can appreciate why there would be anxiety.

We can talk about seniors pensions and other things that are of critical importance and in which Canada Post is heavily relied on to deliver. Many members talk about how small businesses need Canada Post in order to reach out to the communities and generate the necessary revenues for them to employ people. They depend on Canada Post in order to get their products out to the market. I am very sensitive to that.

I mentioned at the beginning that I am very dependent on the post office. There are petitions circulating in my community. Like all members, I send out mailers. Constituents communicate with me. I have used the post office for many years as an elected official. I have been through two elections. Trust me, I have used Canada Post a lot in the last eight months. I am very dependent on Canada Post and the wonderful work the letter carriers, sorters and others do in providing what I believe is the best quality service in the world.

In terms of what has taken place, we need to act on what is in the best public interest. We need to ensure as much as possible that the public interest is being served, but I also passionately believe in the rights of workers.

I did not get a phone call from the union, nor would I expect one, but I can say that after a spontaneous meeting with Canada Post Corporation I did take the time to talk to some letter carriers. I know my letter carrier, maybe not by name, but I have said hi to him on several occasions. I have had the opportunity to get to know a few letter carriers. I know the people at the local post office. I have had the opportunity to serve postal workers in different ways.

I have done what I can in terms of making sure that I am in touch with the important issues. Canada Post told me that it had a much better system and my constituents would benefit from it. Areas would be assigned certain delivery times. An area would be serviced by one postal worker who would have a vehicle and would be able to cater to that area. I took that to the letter carriers.

Government Orders

•(1745)

I talked to a few letter carriers and they were not necessarily happy with what Canada Post was saying. They talked about the problems of having double packages on their arm and the inconvenience of doing that. It was not as wonderful as Canada Post tried to portray when we had that discussion. I can honestly say that I valued the discussion I had with Canada Post. However, I also valued the talk I had with some of the postal workers because there are two sides and one needs to listen to both sides.

What put us in this position? I think we should all be concerned about what we are being asked to do today. This is not a victory. In my opinion, this legislation should not even be here. If the government really wanted to have more harmony within management and the employees of Canada Post, there was another way.

There is no way the government could ever convince me that it had no idea that Canada Post would lock out the workers. I do not believe that for a moment.

Sitting in this chamber, I have had the opportunity to talk to a number of members on that particular issue. I posed the question two, three or maybe even four times, I am not sure, but I asked government members if they had any sense that Canada Post would do the lockout. They kind of skated around it. I received no direct answer and I believe that was because the answer was yes, that they did know Canada Post would have a lockout. I do not believe for a moment that Canada Post did not inform the government that it would have a lockout.

In essence, I believe the government might have even suggested or, at the very least, was comfortable with what Canada Post Corporation was suggesting in terms of having a lockout. Yet, no one on the Conservative benches has come forward to say that is not the case.

I think it is a fair assessment that we should believe the government was aware of the fact that Canada Post would be locking out its employees. The government had the opportunity, and I must say, still has an opportunity, to ensure that there would be more harmony by sitting down with Canada Post and saying that it is not appropriate to locking out at this stage.

Yes, we know that rotating strikes were taking place. However, I believe that the workers of Canada Post would have taken responsible action to ensure that issues of urgency in getting mail made it into the homes where it was important. I am convinced that would have taken place.

•(1750)

I believe that when we talk about collective bargaining, we really did not provide the incentive for Canada Post and, to a lesser extent, the union to sit down and negotiate in good faith and come to an agreement.

Instead, what I believe happened is that the government knew what was taking place at Canada Post and preferred to take us down this particular track. It was not interested in harmony between management and the union. I find that to be most unfortunate.

It has been pointed out by the Leader of the Liberal Party and many others that we should look at what the wage is in the act. I have heard members talk about it, whether they are debating the bill or answering questions, where the government is saying that there is a wage increase. Technically there is a wage increase from what it was. However, what the government forgets to say is that there was already an offer for an increase that was higher than what is being suggested in the legislation. It was agreed to by the management earlier.

I have a sense of what the Minister of Finance said but I will not repeat it. He suggests from his seat that the employees should have taken it. That is a terrible way of looking at it, I would suggest. In the Minister of Finance's generosity from his seat, why does he not say that we will allow them to have that back?

We are very open-minded in the Liberal Party. We are an open-minded group of members of Parliament. We see this as an opportunity to take action on what the Minister of Finance has suggested. Let us give it back to them. Why not?

Instead, the government has legislated a decrease from something that was being proposed earlier. I do call that highly suspicious in terms of how that speaks for good, future labour negotiations. I think we should all be concerned about that sort of a mentality of negotiations. I have never seen that before.

That brings me to the next topic. I believe the New Democrats could learn a great deal if they listened to individuals like the Leader of the Liberal Party and many others.

An hon. member: We tried for four years.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Remember, no heckling. No heckling was your leader's rule, right?

An hon. member: It was.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: It is okay. I do not mind if the member heckles.

I believe I was told that there were 33 occasions when there was back to work legislation brought to this wonderful chamber. I am told that the New Democrats have never supported back to work legislation.

An. hon. member: That is because we support workers.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, it is not because of workers. It is because they have not been in government. The moment they are government, trust me, their opinion will change. All they need to do is look at NDP administrations at the provincial level. I have talked to union workers who have worked for MCI in Winnipeg. The point is that when I look for the NDP members to answer a question, they will not answer the question.

•(1755)

The question is very simple. Are there any circumstances members can foresee or imagine that is possible in which they believe that back to work legislation would work? Any imagination—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

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Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague and he seems really convinced. He used that term multiple times throughout his speech. The problem is that every time he uses that term, it is based on speculation as to what the government may or may not have done prior to tonight.

I am wondering if my colleague would confirm that he has also heard from multiple constituents in his riding who are concerned about the negative impact that this prolonged work stoppage is having on the economy, especially as it relates to small and medium businesses.

I want to just complete some of the email that I was starting to read earlier. This gentleman wrote an email to my office this morning stating:

Our economy is still barely lifting its head out of the valleys of the most recent recession, and there are companies that were fighting to survive. Our specific company happens to be in such a financial position that even though this strike is severely affecting our cash position, our survival is not at stake. I do know, however, of companies that I am dealing with on a daily basis, that could very well not make it. Because of the "strike situation", many companies are reluctant to put Payment cheques in the mail, and thus the money changing hands between corps has dried up to a trickle.

I would like my colleague to confirm that he has also heard from constituents in his riding who are very deeply concerned about the negative impact. Why would he not stand up for small businesses at a time when the economy is still on a very fragile recovery track?

● (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I have. Just last Saturday I had someone in McDonald's talking to me about a very serious situation.

The hon. member kind of twists things around. He says that it is a strike and he refers to it as a strike but it is not a strike. It is a lockout. The government had a choice. The government did not have to support Canada Post locking out its employees.

I appreciate why government members are so persistent on calling it a strike. It is because they believe they can win the public debate on it. Let us make it very clear. It is not a strike. It is a lockout. There is a huge difference.

In fairness to the people of Canada, we need to make that point. We should not try to demonize the Canada Post employees because they are wonderful, hard-working people who have committed many years of tremendous work and we should be appreciating that work.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Madam Speaker, when government members speak, they talk about the damage that this lockout is having on the economy. Would the hon. member not agree that if the government were so upset with the lockout and the damage it was doing to the economy, it would fire every one of the executives of Canada Post who were responsible for the lockout, for the intimidation of workers by denying health and disability benefits and get them back to the negotiating table. Would he care to pontificate on that one?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: In fairness, Madam Speaker, I must say that would include having to fire the minister responsible for Canada Post Corporation, because, after all, he played a very important role in the lockout itself.

I do want to put my NDP colleagues on notice that I am anxious to know if there are any circumstances in which the federal New Democratic Party would support bringing in back to work legislation. Are there any circumstances whatsoever? I would be genuinely interested in hearing that. It is a question that I will no doubt, if I get the opportunity, continue to ask.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like the member for Winnipeg North to elaborate a little bit more on the NDP's position on back to work legislation. In particular, he was just about to make a comment about some provincial NDP members who had supported back to work legislation. It appears that in this chamber the NDP would never support that, but the NDP has done it provincially.

I am wondering if the member could explain. He was just about to get to that point.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member asked an important question.

There seems to be a difference between the NDP in opposition and the NDP in government. When in government, NDP members tend to want to govern more like Liberals.

In fact, NDP administrations have brought in back-to-work legislation. I recall one incident that happened around 2002 at, I believe, MCI when the NDP premier became directly involved and upset a great number of union workers by recommending that they should vote again.

That was the NDP in power. I can appreciate the sensitivity and the differences.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member across the way.

It was about half an hour ago that members of the NDP were praising Copenhagen. I have to give the NDP credit for being consistent. Those members have consistently, over the year, tried to do things that would not be good for the economy and would increase taxes for Canadians.

I think of the Liberals. Back in 2007 they wanted to have a carbon tax. In 2008 they praised the carbon tax. In 2009 they wanted a carbon tax, and again in 2010. We have heard from the NDP today that it would like to have a carbon tax similar to what Copenhagen has.

Those members are not happy with the gas prices now. Do they want them higher? Does the Liberal Party still want to have higher taxes for Canadians?

● (1805)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that was an interesting question to say the least. Let me try to answer it in this fashion.

I am very dependent on Canada Post to be able to circulate petitions and to get feedback from constituents on important issues, such as the issues that the member has raised. I look forward to being able to share well into the future many of those issues through mail that those letter carriers will be delivering to homes and that they ultimately will make sure gets back here to the House of Commons.

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This chamber will always be somewhat aware, if not always aware, of those issues that are important, such as the retrofit program. It was a great Liberal idea, one that the government of today seems to take as an every-other-year type of thing. A good petition could potentially be out there trying to make sure that the program is on a five-year basis, which would generate more jobs and things of that nature.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, for my friend from Winnipeg North who asked what the NDP would do in such a situation, I have a simple answer. He should ask his leader, the member for Toronto Centre.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that is the nice thing. Our leader has an open mind. Our leader sees the benefits of a bargaining system. He recognizes the difference between a walkout and a strike. He is not as dogmatic as New Democrats in this chamber. He sees what is important to Canadians. I could go on, but I do not know how much time I would be allowed.

I could maybe better educate the New Democratic Party in terms of the merits of the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada and the ways in which we could make a better difference if only a few of them would consider joining us with good ideas and supporting us, as opposed to flipping on different ideas such as budgets and so forth.

At the end of the day I am confident in the abilities of our leader in making sure that the Liberal Party takes the right position on the issues that are important to all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

To know where we are going, we must know where we have come from. It takes two to tango. I was a worker in the Jonquière aluminum plant. I am a former union president and in 1976 I was locked out for six months. That experience leaves scars. After working for three years, we had a strike in 1979 and a labour dispute in 1995, trying to improve our pension fund, our living conditions and our wages. These are three important aspects for workers who fight to have something decent in their lives.

I believe that, in the union movement, both parties can find a solution if they want to, and if they must. They have to have the opportunity. The proof is that the union had started with rotating strikes. The legislation came down and there was a lockout even though the union was prepared to return to work and abide by the former collective agreement while waiting for the outcome of negotiations. It was a sign of good faith and they were locked out too quickly in that case.

Everyone is talking about the mail and email. I spoke with one woman, a letter carrier, who was on leave because of a work accident. All her documents were in limbo, her supervisor was in the dark, she was not being paid and no one was giving her any information. If that is how people are treated at Canada Post, I can understand that the employees are frustrated from time to time. This is not a normal situation.

A lockout is never a pleasant experience. The government, Canada Post and the workers have all lost money. For the head of a household, the impact is even greater. The rent is due at the end of the month and groceries are needed every Thursday, the same day the car's gas tank has to be filled. Thus, I am very cautious in this regard.

I spoke this morning with the union president. The member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and I, in my capacity as the member for Jonquière—Alma, sent a press release to our constituents informing them of the NDP's support and that we would be in the House, even if that meant that we would be here on the June 24 national holiday. It is our duty to stand by the people because it is a major problem. I would have liked the parties to sit down again to find a solution. When both parties want to, they can find solutions. It takes two to tango.

What also worries me is that everyone is talking about pension funds. The mayor of Montreal spoke about it in the newspaper. It is the same in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean for Rio Tinto Alcan. There is not enough money in the fund. What these companies are not saying is that they were given employment insurance premium holidays and now they are facing the consequences. That is where a nerve is struck and the hurt sets in. Workers and the company contribute to pension funds to ensure viable retirements. If these people start to see their pensions decrease, we will not need to pass legislation because they will be forced to work until they are 65. That is the difference. They should at least have a chance at a good retirement at 60 or 65. What is happening right now is terrible.

There is talk about Canada Post's profitability. It is the same for the forestry industry. Wood is not selling, neither is paper. We communicate electronically now, so it makes sense. There are no paper books anymore; they are all electronic. Of course that has an impact. But Canada Post made \$281 million in profits. That is a lot of money. A stamp in Canada costs 59¢, but stamps in Austria and the Netherlands are more expensive, they cost 64¢. There has to be profitability somewhere.

I am proud of these people, because they work hard to deliver the mail through snow and rain. Today there are equal numbers of men and women who do this job and it is not easy to carry parcels. I cannot help but think of the scars this lockout will leave when they go back to work, if they are forced to do so. Consider the poisonous work environment that will prevail. I am very disappointed that people are being treated like this in 2011, when they were trying to find peaceful solutions and communicate in order to improve the situation, rather than stretching the elastic until it snapped, leaving us to deal with lawsuits.

The right to bargain is a legitimate right and the right to strike is the only action that workers can use, just as the employer has the right to lock out its employees.

● (1810)

Let me just say again that the government moved a little too quickly on this.

Government Orders

In closing, I would like to read a press release that was sent this morning. I took a few notes. As I said, it is a strange coincidence. Is the government trying to undermine pension funds? Will the private sector do the same thing to its workers and reduce their pensions? In that case, we will not have to pass legislation to make them work until the age of 65 or 70, because they will have to work that long, because they need the money.

I will read the press release and then give the floor to my colleague.

For healthy negotiation

The members of Parliament [for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Jonquière—Alma] stand in solidarity with the postal workers and strongly oppose Bill C-6, which imposes an unfair ruling on thousands of postal workers.

Chicoutimi, June 23, 2011—As the House of Commons debates Bill C-6, introduced by the [Conservative] government to force the resumption of postal services in the country at the expense of working conditions for the postal workers, the hon. members for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Jonquière—Alma would like to announce their solidarity with the locked out postal workers; they are currently working on convincing the government to drop this bill and make room for bargaining in good faith.

“The Conservative government's current attitude is unacceptable. The fundamental right to bargain in good faith concerning working conditions at Canada Post is put in jeopardy by this special legislation. The Prime Minister is taking sides in this labour dispute and condemning Canada Post workers to double punishment: being thrown out in the street by a lockout and then being asked to return to work under less advantageous conditions than were being bargained for. I must say that my background as a union activist is motivating the position I am taking today as a member of Parliament: I support the postal workers and their right to negotiate”, said the hon. member for Jonquière—Alma...

“We are currently working in the House to make the government understand that this special legislation is unacceptable and that it must be withdrawn in order to allow both parties in the dispute to continue bargaining to end the lockout and resume postal services. The postal workers contribute fully to the success of this crown corporation, which offers an excellent service to the Canadian public that compares favourably with other postal services around the world and makes a profit. It is unacceptable that a frontal assault on our postal workers' pension fund or working conditions is being sanctioned by an exceptional provision. While the government is the guarantor of the country's postal service, it must also protect workers' rights. That is the principle we will be defending until the end in this debate, even if we have to spend our national holiday in the House to do it,” said ..., the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

As a negotiator, I have spent long nights and weekends negotiating. I would be proud to spend the national holiday here with my colleagues working to settle this dispute.

● (1815)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. He said that it takes two willing parties to negotiate such a deal. I believe he said, “We have to have a partner to dance”. I would agree.

Negotiations on this contract have been going on since October. One thing is clear. Whether through the rotating strikes that were occurring, which were having impacts on Canadians from coast to coast in this country, or the lockout that ensued, this is punitive on the Canadian public, punitive on the millions of Canadians who are not at the bargaining table.

I wonder if the member has considered those Canadians or if he has thought about them. The NDP had a motion on small business yesterday. Has he thought about the impact that this impasse is

having on small businesses, on seniors, on everyday Canadians? What about them?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Madam Speaker, I am very sensitive to that. I, too, think about the families that are deprived of their livelihood and about the fact that there will be no groceries on Thursday because there is no paycheque. I am sensitive to all of that.

I think we should have given people a chance to sit down or even asked other mediators to work on moving the issue forward. I still believe in that. It is too fast. It is disgraceful, although I hesitate to use that word in the House, since I am new here. I cannot use just any word, but I find this disgraceful.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, who gave a good summary of the current situation, with all the passion we expect from him.

I would like to know whether the steps undertaken in Bill C-6 create a dangerous precedent with respect to the erosion of public services and collective bargaining.

Mr. Claude Patry: Madam Speaker, I did not hear my colleague's entire question.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on the speech he made with all the passion we expect from him.

Could Bill C-6, which is before the House, not create a dangerous precedent with respect to the potential erosion of public services in the future?

Mr. Claude Patry: Madam Speaker, yes, the danger is that this could have an affect on other movements.

If things like this become commonplace, others will use such measures in the future. Not just Canada Post, but the private sector as well. That is what bargaining will turn into. When a government starts interfering with laws and the legitimate right to bargain, and to strike if the bargaining does not work, when a government imposes laws like that, it leaves scars and creates a bad work environment. Things are very difficult in a factory or workplace when conflicts are ended this way.

● (1820)

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened quite intently to the hon. member and his comments. He makes it sound as if nobody else in the House cares about the workers or the impact that all of this has on all sides and on the citizens of our great country.

His party often exposes what its members would do if they were to form the government. If they were in this position, what would they do?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Madam Speaker, I would force the two parties to sit down, to work and to find a solution.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today because I consider this motion to be one of the most important this legislature has had to consider to date.

Government Orders

It is important because we are being asked to rush through the consideration of a bill that is every bit as important to the future of all Canadian workers as it is to that of the employees of Canada Post.

This bill, if adopted by the House, will be a major step backwards following decades of work by our Canadian unions. It will fly in the face of the legitimate right of workers to negotiate their working conditions, a hard-won fight waged by our ancestors who helped shape Canada's labour history.

Here is what has occurred: Canada Post employees went on a rotating strike at 11.59 p.m. on June 2, 2011, giving the assurance that it would have no impact on the delivery of government cheques, thereby minimizing any potential adverse impact on the public, even though there was no legal obligation to do so.

Moreover, the Minister of Labour stated on the morning of June 14 that back to work legislation was not necessary since it was a rotating strike and mail delivery was continuing. On the morning of June 15, 2011, the minister announced that she had, in fact, received very few complaints regarding the rotating strikes at Canada Post.

On the evening of June 14, 2011, claiming it had suffered losses of \$100 million, the employer, one of this government's crown corporations, decided to impose a lockout, completely paralyzing the postal service, despite the fact that the rotating strikes continued to ensure the delivery of mail.

The government then decided that the disruption to postal services had gone on too long, and chose to introduce legislation to force Canada Post employees back to work only one day after the imposition of a lockout that it had itself created, on the pretext that it was in the best interests of the Canadian economy.

Worse still, the government has included working conditions in the bill that are worse than those proposed to workers under the employer's most recent offer, as if they had not already been sufficiently insulted. The arbitrator will have to choose one of these proposals. There are no shades of grey; it is all black or white.

This bill may end up setting an incredible precedent in the history of Canadian workers. The implication is that the government could henceforth take it upon itself to intervene in a situation of its own making by forcing workers to return to work under worse conditions than those initially proposed.

This bill is clearly important, as it will draw a line in the sand in terms of workers' rights in our country.

We have a motion before us today to limit debate on this bill, with no acknowledgement of its importance. This bill will violate the rights of workers, and yet the government has the gall to ask us to approve it as quickly as possible.

Given the importance of this bill, I feel it is crucial that we take the time to think things over and ask the questions that need to be asked. But it will be impossible to do that with a clear head if there is no adjournment until the end of debate on this bill.

Giving orders about working conditions can have disastrous consequences. In 2005, I had working conditions forced on me when I worked in the health sector in Quebec, and I suffered the consequences.

First, I felt as though it were an attack. People with no real concept of our day-to-day reality had decided for us, even though it is the workers who live that reality. My trust in the government that made the decision was shattered. And that feeling lasts and lasts.

Being left out of the talks that will govern your reality is the worst affront for a worker who is dedicated to the job. It is as though the worker has become nothing but a number to a machine that is too big to realize that people are affected by these decisions—mothers, fathers, young, motivated workers and others with more experience—all proud of the professions they have chosen.

Then there was the return to work. The workers were bitter and unmotivated after the ruling, their hope lost in light of a true evaluation of their worth. They lost their sense of belonging. When you are treated like a pawn, you are prone to act like one.

Many nurses deserted the public health system because they felt ignored after the ruling. The vast majority of them chose to go to private nursing placement agencies where they have the right to do what was refused them—negotiate their working conditions.

● (1825)

Private nursing agencies have had disastrous consequences for our health care system in Quebec. They have quite simply caused costs to skyrocket, when it comes to the salaries paid, to pay for these agency nurses. The agencies have been a contributing factor in major conflicts between employees in the public system, who then often have to work overtime, and private agency employees, who go home without suffering those consequences.

Other conflicts have erupted when hospitals had no choice but to assign additional day shifts to private agencies, since they refused to work the evening and night shifts. The hospitals then turned to their own employees and demanded that they work the night and evening shifts.

What point is there in staying in the public system if it means being saddled with lower wages and less favourable working conditions compared to private agency employees?

When the 2011 collective agreement was negotiated, the Quebec government did not make the mistake of legislating working conditions. There was real bargaining, which brought the two parties to a satisfactory agreement. Bit by bit, the feeling of sharing in the pride of a profession has returned, but the wounds take a long time to heal.

The damage done to our health care system by the intrusion of private agencies will take much longer than five years to heal. Those wounds would probably not have been so deep if the government had not legislated working conditions in 2006.

The reason I have brought all this up is that I am concerned about the potential privatization of Canada Post. What seems to be hidden in this bill is a desire to privatize Canada Post.

This motion wants to make me give the bill hastier consideration, even though it may bring about profound changes in the future of a corporation as important as Canada Post, a corporation, a system, that has left its mark on Canadian history.

Government Orders

Considering the hidden agenda to privatize postal services, it is crucial to point out that Canada Post is a very profitable concern at present: it had revenue totalling \$281 million last year. The cost of sending a standard letter is currently \$0.59 in Canada, while in all countries that have privatized their postal services it is always higher. In Germany, it is \$0.77, and it is \$0.88 in Austria and \$0.64 in the Netherlands. Obviously our public system is benefiting. And the other thing is that if we move toward a private system, the competition will push a lot of businesses toward the major centres and there will be no one left to serve small, remote communities.

Who will come to serve the country roads and isolated communities in my riding? No one. What business would agree to come and serve the towns of St-Lambert-de-Desmeloizes, Belletre, Saint-Nazaire-de-Berry and Bellecombe? None. Why? Because it would not be lucrative.

There are seniors in my riding who live out in the country and no longer have a driver's licence. They have made the decision to remain in their homes, many of which they built themselves. I wonder how they will get their mail.

Therefore, if I am asked to hurry up and pass this bill as soon as possible, despite all the consequences it could have, I will stand up and firmly oppose it. I would also like to point out the disrespect this government is showing for our Quebec nation. It is telling us that if we want to celebrate our national holiday, we must do so at the expense of the Canada Post workers.

I have missed Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations in the past, when I worked as a nurse in the hospital. It did not really bother me that much, because I told myself that my patients needed me. Today I know that the Canada Post workers need members who will stand up for them, as the NDP members will. I will miss my national holiday for them. It does not bother me, because I know they need me.

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I said earlier for one of the other members, bargaining on this current contract began last October. Clearly, the parties had a significant number of issues to discuss, and not the least among them is the fact that the Canada Post business model is changing dramatically. In fact, many Canadians, if they live in an urban setting and if they have access to broadband and Internet, have found ways to significantly replace a lot of their mail. In fact, Canada Post's own numbers indicate that postal flow is dropping fairly dramatically.

One of the things that really concerns me, and I wonder if it concerns the member, is this. From the moment in time that the rotating strikes began and then throughout the lockout period, it was clear that Canadians, financial institutions, utility companies and others had been encouraging people to move away from using the mail and to move toward use of electronic statements. This is damaging the post office's long-term business structure.

I am concerned that rural Canadians in my riding are going to have to pay inflated prices for mail because the Canada Post business model is being permanently damaged by these actions.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, I would like to tell my hon. colleague that, although the use of Internet services has increased, for paying bills, for instance, there is nevertheless a limit to everything. There are things that cannot be done online. Furthermore, in my riding, many people in the country do not even have high-speed Internet service. How can those people use that method to pay their bills?

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, sometimes in these discussions we forget the realities of people's lives. I have an email from a worker in my riding. I will not read the whole email, but this is the reality for some of these letter carriers.

The email says that letter carriers start out as temporary workers and are told they are likely to be temporary for three to five years. In Nanaimo they are temporary for much longer. Mike in this case has worked for Canada Post as a temporary letter carrier since 2004. He receives no paid vacation, no paid sick time and no pension. Mostly he works full-time hours, but sometimes he finishes a work week and is told that there may not be work for him in the following week. In 2009, he spent five months in this situation, and out of that five months he only worked three weeks.

I wonder if the member could comment on the fact these letter carriers are often in precarious employment situations and that we need to do everything that we can to support workers in their right to bargain for fair and reasonable employment.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her comment. The working conditions for postal workers are often not every secure at first. One of my roommates started working at Canada Post and at first his job varied quite a bit. He had to work as both a security guard and a letter carrier. He tried to juggle both positions, never knowing when he was going to be called by either employer. I think negotiating this collective agreement could have helped these workers avoid such situations.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I just heard one of the member's colleagues talk about reality. Well, I would like to talk to her about the reality in my riding and some of the calls I am getting at my office.

I am getting calls from seniors who are worried about strike's effects on the cheques they need, if the strike is prolonged. I am getting calls from people with disabilities who are worried about having their cheques delivered. I am getting calls from small businesses that are relying on cheques coming into their offices so they can pay their employees.

We are just exiting one of the worst recessions in history. I would like the member to tell my constituents, the people who are real to me, what she is going to say to them when they are depending on that postal service to provide jobs in my community. What is she going to say to them?

Government Orders

•(1835)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, during the rotating strike, there were very few consequences for the general public. The government could have acted to prevent the lockout and to ensure that people in every constituency in Canada did not have to deal with lengthy delays.

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Madam Speaker, this is my first opportunity to present a speech to the House since the last election. I would like to take a moment to thank the people of Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia for re-electing me, the people of Winnipeg for electing several more Conservative colleagues, and the people of Canada for electing a strong, stable majority government.

I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve as Minister of State for Transport.

In this role as minister of state, I am responsible for a number of crown corporations. Canada Post is one of them. Therefore, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the importance of the legislation to resolve the labour dispute that we now see occurring between Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Canada Post and the urban component of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, otherwise known as CUPW, have been negotiating since October 2010. I am sorry to note that despite some eight months of discussions, the parties have made little progress in their negotiations.

Today, I will be focusing my remarks on the impact of the work stoppage on Canadian postal consumers and businesses and on Canada Post, both today and in the future.

The current labour action is damaging to the Canadian economy and to many small businesses and individuals who rely on the postal service. Canada's economy is still in a fragile recovery. In fact, if we look around the world, including at the situation in some European countries and the geopolitical instability in the world, we realize there are many forces that create uncertainty. This is not a pleasant reality but it is reality, and a reality in which Canadians must live.

The work stoppage will only slow our economic recovery if it is allowed to continue. Therefore, the government needs to take action. To mitigate the damage, our government is enacting back to work legislation. The economic downturn of 2008 has had a severe effect on the Canadian economy and on many businesses, including Canada Post.

As a result of the recession and the increasing competition from other channels of communication, such as email and the Internet, Canada Post has experienced declines in its domestic letter volume, as well as in its domestic parcel and ad mail volumes. The decline in letter mail to postal addresses amounts to some 17% over the last five years. That is a significant number.

Also, as the Canadian population grows, the number of addresses and delivery points increases, and so does the cost per piece of delivered mail. In other words, it costs more to send mail due to the increase in the number of addresses.

There are many pension plans in Canada. Canada Post has a pension plan, but it has lost substantial value following the economic downturn. I understand that the loss in value of the plan was more than 19% between 2007 and the end of 2008.

Since 2008, Canada Post has reacted strongly to the threats posed by the economic downturn and the increased competition. Canada Post has been seeking ways to position itself for the future. It is hoping to improve its business sustainability by working with its employees to bring about greater efficiencies and more flexibility in the way work is carried out. It has cut its management ranks by 15% and has reduced other costs in a bid to become more efficient.

•(1840)

Like other competitive postal service providers around the world, Canada Post is trying to become even more efficient and competitive. It has started a major infrastructure renewal project across the country called postal transformation.

In fact, on the boundary of my riding in my home city of Winnipeg, I was fortunate to have the opportunity, with my colleague, the member for Yellowhead and former minister of state, to see the opening of a fantastic facility with state-of-the-art infrastructure. The efficiencies were evident. Canada Post is obviously planning for the future.

It is through this project that Canada Post will replace obsolete and outdated plants, equipment and processes. It will implement technology that other postal administrations around the world are using successfully. It will renovate its plants to ensure safer working conditions for its employees. Canada Post has stated that without subsidies from taxpayers, these measures will not be enough for it to continue to deliver affordable mail to Canadians.

Since the postal business is labour intensive, most of Canada Post's costs are labour related. For example, Canada Post's pension plan has liabilities that are more than twice the company's annual revenue. At the end of 2010, the company had an estimated pension solvency shortfall of more than \$3.2 billion. Canada Post is committed to meeting its pension obligations. The money it spends ensuring that its pension plan will remain solvent is money not available to be spent on operations or modernization.

Our government's position on these negotiations is clear. We would prefer a negotiated settlement. We have been encouraging Canada Post and CUPW to come to a negotiated agreement. However, there is a third party in these negotiations that our government cannot ignore. That is why we are here today. Canadians are that third party. They are the shareholders and customers of the important postal services that Canada Post and its employees provide. As a crown corporation, if Canada Post's profitability drops and it cannot fund its pension plans, taxpayers will be left with the bill.

The union's demands during this labour dispute do not reflect many of the economic realities that Canada Post is facing. A drastic increase in costs at Canada Post will only end in taxpayers footing the bill.

Government Orders

There are those who believe that back to work legislation is not needed. They claim that the postal service is no longer an essential one, as it once was. While it is true that Canadians are increasingly using a growing number of other channels of communication, it is not simply a question of replacing one mode of communication with another. Many modes co-exist and the postal service will continue to remain important for the foreseeable future. For example, parcel and small packet delivery by Canada Post is critical to Canadian businesses and consumers and to the economy in general.

Canada Post is working toward building a sustainable future. In developing other services that will complement traditional mail, Canada Post is adapting. An example of this is Canada Post's retail network, one of the largest in the country. It is leveraging its retail network to provide services to Canadians. Canada Post has recently set up a new secure online service for comparison shopping and online advertising to allow consumers to quickly find the best deal on the right product and, of course, to ensure it is delivered at a reasonable price.

Nonetheless, traditional mail remains an important channel of communication for businesses and consumers alike. Many small businesses are dependent on mail for advertising and the delivery of parcels. While it is true that couriers also deliver parcels, at least in urban areas, none can fully compete with Canada Post.

● (1845)

Many businesses are turning to other modes of communication due to this work stoppage, so the longer this work stoppage goes on, the greater the damage is to Canada Post's prospects for the future.

For some firms there are no alternatives to Canada Post. These are small businesses without the ability or technology to conduct their business online. Some small businesses are using other courier companies to deliver their packages but are finding they have to pay more than they had to with Canada Post. This is affecting those small businesses' profitability and competitiveness.

Also, small businesses and charities still rely on Canada Post for billing purposes and fundraising. This work stoppage is drying up their cash flow. The cash flow of charities, small businesses and individuals is what we are really talking about, grassroots Canadians.

In short, mail is an important enabler of Canadian commerce which is now being threatened by this work stoppage. I would like to share a comment from a small business owner in my riding, who said:

The bill must pass immediately. This must end. Our customers are used to receiving hard copy invoices by mail and customers return payment by Canada Post. That is not happening. Couriers are much more expensive. We cannot pass on the cost in today's competitive environment.

We have cheques that were caught by the stoppage. It has cost us \$12 to stop payment on those cheques to our suppliers and more to resend them by courier.

This situation must end. It is damaging small business. Canada Post must go back to work as soon as possible.

In referring to Canada Post, I believe the small business owner is talking about the corporate entity and its entire workforce.

I give that as one example from Winnipeg which highlights the impact the stoppage is having not only on Canada Post and its future, but also on the ability of Canadians to do their business.

One of the more remarkable things about the postal system is how firmly entrenched it is in all facets of Canadian society, so much so that we take it for granted or even ignore it, but we notice when for some reason the mail is not delivered.

While it is true the occasional letter or parcel may go astray over the years, Canada Post has consistently averaged on-time delivery 96% of the time, as verified by third parties. That is quite impressive considering that Canada Post processes some 40 million pieces of mail for 50 million residential and business addresses every business day. The stoppage is obviously preventing that from happening.

Let us look at the international picture for a moment. Among other major postal service providers, only the United States Postal Service is marginally cheaper than Canada Post. The United States Postal Service does this with a multi-billion dollar deficit in a country with more than 10 times the population of Canada.

As I stated, our reliance on the mail only becomes fully apparent when it does not get delivered. Although the dispute is between Canada Post and the urban component of CUPW, rural Canadians and businesses across the country are also being hurt. As a result of the work stoppage, rural mail is not being delivered. The vast majority of rural newspapers and magazines rely on Canada Post for delivery. Rural residents rely primarily on Canada Post to deliver items that would otherwise not be available through other distribution channels.

● (1850)

Even competing couriers have arrangements to have their packages delivered by Canada Post in rural and remote areas. As a result of the vastness and impressive network of delivery that Canada Post has across our country, couriers use Canada Post for what is described as the last mile of delivery outside of urban areas. Naturally, that last mile is not being completed at present because Canada Post is not functioning, which leads to the obvious conclusion that back to work legislation is needed.

Certain segments of the population, including seniors and shut-ins, also tend to rely heavily on Canada Post and have limited alternatives during a mail stoppage.

The labour dispute is impacting Canada Post's profitability and its continued ability to modernize without cost to taxpayers in the short and long term. I will give the House some numbers. During the rotating strikes, Canada Post estimated that mail volume had declined by 50% and that it had cost over \$100 million by the time the lockout occurred.

Government Orders

I suspect the work stoppage will have permanent effects. Companies and consumers have found alternative options to postal service for bill payments and communication. The fact that this work stoppage has occurred leads people to accelerate their switch from traditional mail to e-billing or e-banking, for example. This loss of volume of work due to the stoppage may never return, as businesses and consumers move permanently to electronic alternatives.

At stake is the future of Canada Post and affordable and efficient mail service for all Canadians. Canada Post must modernize if it is to remain profitable. The impact of the work stoppage on Canada Post's bottom line has impacted all of us. The longer this situation continues, the worse the long-term effects will be.

CUPW and Canada Post have had many months to resolve their differences and negotiate a new collective agreement. They have not succeeded and there is no sign that they will succeed any time soon.

We expect Canada Post to provide quality postal service to Canadians on which Canadians can count. The government has introduced the Canadian postal service charter, and I thank the member for Yellowhead for his leadership in that. Through the service charter, the government has clearly expressed its expectations that Canada Post provide postal service to all Canadians, especially those in rural areas and those who are vulnerable.

This work stoppage could have a permanent impact on the quality of postal service across Canada for a long time. After eight months of failed negotiations, it is time to consider the needs of Canadians and consumers, businesses and taxpayers. It is time for back to work legislation. The time is now.

Canada Post is a critical part of not only the Canadian economy, but the Canadian way of life. By introducing back to work legislation, we are ensuring that the Canadian economy has the ability to recover from an economic downturn. We are ensuring that Canada Post has a future. We are ensuring that Canadians have the best possible postal service today and in the future. Let us get it done so Canadians can get their mail.

● (1855)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member opposite on his re-election.

Surely, the hon. member would know that under the rotating strikes, birthday cards, well wishes cards and small business packages had the capability of passing through the system and getting to the person.

Would the hon. member highlight for members in the chamber and Canadians the difference between a lockout and a rotating strike and how during a lockout there is no possibility for people to get their mail whereas during a rotating strike there is? Would the hon. member also highlight why the government chose to lock out the workers and thus end the possibility of anyone in Canada getting their mail?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his re-election.

The member will agree that despite differences, we live in the greatest country in the world and it is very good that we have the opportunity to debate these types of issues in this forum.

To answer the member's question, the challenge with the rotating strikes has been that they are very disruptive to Canada Post's ability to deliver mail. The rotating strikes went from smaller centres and rotated to very large centres. This caused uncertainty to the business community. Mail volumes decreased by 50% and the work stoppages were essentially almost as effective as a national strike. It is my understanding that this is why we are where we are. It is because of the impact the rotating strikes had, which was as effective as a national strike.

What we need to do now is to get things rolling, get CUPW workers and Canada Post delivering the mail to Canadians so we can all move on, and this is what the proposed legislation does.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is this misperception that the NDP really wants to project to Canadians. In fact, it is not truthful to say that the government locked out Canada Post workers.

In fact, did the minister, who is responsible for Canada Post, lock out Canada Post workers or was the decision taken by the executives, who have been appointed to run Canada Post on behalf of Canadians?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Peterborough on his re-election and for the community museum in Peterborough.

The very important point is that Canada Post, like all crown corporations, is arm's-length from government. We do not make the operational decisions. The lockout was a decision of Canada Post. The only stake the government has here is representing the people of Canada. The government has brought forward the legislation because the people of Canada want their mail. The people in Canada want Canada Post to sustain itself in the future and they are asking their MPs to please pass this legislation so they can get their mail.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the minister that in this matter, the government is playing firefighter but lit the fire itself.

We will not bother bickering over whether it was Canada Post or the government that really triggered the lockout, but one thing is certain: Canada Post triggered a lockout simply because the government threatened to pass special legislation. The employer thought it was free to impose whatever it wanted on the workers who, we admit, had decided to go on a rotating strike. This affected the public on a small scale. It was a pressure tactic. In a democracy, people have to be able to negotiate until the end.

Does the minister think that the government truly gave both parties a chance to really negotiate? I think with the special legislation, the employer got the upper hand.

Government Orders

●(1900)

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the premise of the preamble of the question is completely false. I remind the member that the parties had eight months of negotiations. In fact, there was even a federal election in that period of time. There was plenty of opportunity.

It is clear now that parties are not going to come to a negotiated settlement. A negotiated settlement is the strong preference of the government and if they were able to come to an agreement, we would not be here. However, they are unable to do that. This is why we are bringing forward the proposed legislation so we can get the mail to Canadians.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, a fellow Winnipegger, for his address. I wonder if he is aware, though, that the \$3.2 billion shortfall in the pension can be traced back to its origins in the fact that it was an underfunded pension plan, and that for the last decade or more Canada Post has been generating a profit and submitting that profit to general revenue.

Does my colleague know that the mandate of Canada Post is simply to deliver mail to the greatest number of Canadians at the lowest possible cost? Nowhere does the mandate of Canada Post include giving hundreds of millions of dollars a year in dividends to the federal government.

Had Canada Post been funding its pension adequately with that money, instead of putting it into general revenue, we would not have an underfunded pension.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping my colleague from Winnipeg Centre would have an opportunity to ask a question, because the brand new mail facility is right on the edge of our shared riding boundary. This is a great improvement not only for the delivery of mail but also for the people who work for Canada Post and provide the mail for our shared constituents and throughout the region.

In answer to the question, I wonder if the member is aware that Canada Post, partly for that facility, is investing \$1.5 billion in infrastructure. The return on investment is very marginal, which implies that Canada Post is working for Canadians right at the margin.

We do not want taxpayers subsidizing the operations, but we also want to ensure that people in Canada get the mail when they ask for it. There are a lot of factors here.

The bottom line is that at the end of the day we can go into all of this, but we need Canadians to get their mail. Right now they do not. This legislation will ensure that Canadians will get their mail, our economy will move along and everyone will be able to enjoy the great institution of mail delivery.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Minister's comments today.

One thing we have overlooked for a lot of small businesses and larger businesses within Canada is that at the end of this month, everyone must remit the HST or GST. A lot of the small business

owners still receive it by paper form. We cannot remit without that paper form.

How much of a problem will it be for the government when we small business owners will not be able to remit our taxes to it?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on his election.

The member has pointed out one of probably millions of examples of the vital role Canada Post plays in the lives of Canadians.

Right now Canadians are not receiving the mail. There are a lot of reasons. The two parties, Canada Post and CUPW, have not been able to come up with a negotiated settlement. We want to get the mail flowing, and the only way to do this is for the government to bring forward back-to-work legislation so that the stakeholders, the people of Canada, will get their mail.

●(1905)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Burnaby—New Westminster in this debate. Since this is also my first speech in the House since we returned, although I did participate in question period and a few questions and comments, I will take the opportunity to thank the voters of St. John's East who returned me to this House to represent them. I am very proud to be their representative.

This is a very crucial debate. It is a crucial debate because it is really about the values Canadians have and the values this government is trying to impose on them against their will through this legislation.

Let us look at what happened here. The previous speaker, the Minister of State for Transport, said it very well. We have an excellent postal service. We deliver 55 million pieces of mail per day. We have rural and urban delivery. We have a service that is in fact profitable. As stated by my colleague, the member for Winnipeg North, Canada Post has made from \$100 million to \$300 million per year for the last 10 years. It is a profitable public corporation that is providing a service to Canadians and is able to negotiate fair wage and pension benefits for its workers. It is in a position to do so because it is a profitable service.

What do we have happening here? We have a combination of three things.

First, this crown corporation, essentially run on behalf of the government, has locked out its workers, effectively shutting down the postal service, which it is complaining about. Why does it not tell them to unlock the locks, open the postal service and deliver the mail? Instead of talking about pensioners not getting their cheques, it should open the doors. The employees said they were quite happy to deliver the pension cheques even if they were on strike. They were not trying to disrupt pensioners or people who were dependent on receiving cheques in the mail.

Government Orders

Second, after the workers were locked out and the post office was shut down, there is now legislation ordering the workers back to work, including workers who are not even on strike. At the same time, their wages are being reduced with a wage offer below what was on the table. A profitable corporation made a wage offer in the middle of negotiations, and the government came in and ordered the workers back to work, telling them they will get less than the profitable corporation was prepared to offer through collective bargaining.

What are we doing here? What are we telling the people of Canada?

Part of the problem going on here is the attempt by this profitable corporation to drive down the pension benefits of workers. The government is facilitating, aiding and abetting that attempt. What message are they trying to send to the people of Canada? I do not mean necessarily all the people of Canada, but a certain group of the people of Canada to whom this message is going. I am talking about the next generation of workers.

When I think about this legislation, I think about my children. I think about the young people in this country, the next generation. I am of a generation that is getting close to retirement, but there are young people, and we have them in our caucus, who are being told by the government not to expect for themselves, their friends and their children the same benefits, the same retirement possibilities and the same opportunity to live in dignity in their senior years as exist today.

We are becoming more prosperous as a country, yet we are telling people that if they work for the post office, they should not expect the same kind of retirement security as the people who came before them.

The same thing was happening at Air Canada. The government was aiding and abetting the employer, a profitable company, to drive down the expectations of young people. They are your children and your grandchildren. Members over there are telling them they are not entitled to share in the prosperity of this country.

That is wrong. Members opposite are aiding and abetting it, and that message has to be stopped, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation is going to be opposed as long as it does those things to these workers.

● (1910)

I heard the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound speak earlier, and I like the hon. member. I do not like what he said, though.

The hon. member offered a letter from a constituent who wrote about a grandchild who felt lucky to have a job receiving the minimum wage for a couple of days a week. There may be some people with that sentiment, but the member used that letter to suggest that is a reason to resent someone who has a job with decent pay.

If the argument made by the hon. member is that this is the principle on which we should be talking about these issues, what the hon. member is saying is that everybody should be grateful to have a job, any job at any wage, with any offer from anybody, and should

be thankful. That is a recipe for poverty, for disaster, for people working for slave wages without any bargaining rights.

We have heard many moving speeches on this side of the House today concerning collective bargaining. The member for Timmins—James Bay talked about miners being challenged by police officers with machine guns for going on strike in Kirkland Lake to win the right to bargain collectively. It was not that long ago, just some 50, 60 or 70 years ago.

Now members opposite are seeking to destroy that right to bargain collectively with a profitable corporation in the 21st century, in one of the most prosperous countries in the world, with a postal service that is quite capable of paying decent wages and bargaining collectively in good faith. The strike and lockout mechanisms that exist are part of that good-faith bargaining, and the parties could reach a bargain.

What does one do with that? What did the government do? The union and its members offered to end the rotating strikes and to return to work under their existing contract and to continue negotiations. There would be no worries about the postal service working, no worries about rotating strikes, no worries about anything. The union offered to continue to negotiate in good faith.

Sometimes negotiations go on for a couple of years. They do not always take two or three months. Sometimes they take two or three months, but sometimes when there are tough negotiations and people want an opportunity to figure things out, they do that.

However, Canada Post said no and locked the doors.

The Conservative government supported the company by stepping up virtually immediately to say it would bring in back-to-work legislation. In fact, notice was given on June 15. This is what is going on.

It is happening in lockstep. Who locked the doors? Canada Post locked the doors, but the government was there a minute later to say it would order the workers back to work because the postal service could not be shut down.

That is wrong. The challenge the Conservative government is putting to workers and to ordinary people has to be challenged back, and that is what we are here to do.

To actually interfere with collective bargaining and impose a wage rate below what fair collective bargaining in good faith was producing is outrageous.

I see that my time is coming to a close. I have a minute left, but as someone who has practised law for 30 years, a good portion of it labour law, I am very familiar with the kind of situation that we are facing here today with back-to-work legislation.

To put people back to work, to reduce their wages from an offer that was on the table, to impose with this legislation a final offer on parties that have not agreed to it is one of the most draconian pieces of legislation that I have seen in the 30 years I have been practising labour law. That is something the parties agree to sometimes as a way out of a situation, and these parties may at some point have agreed to such a thing on certain aspects of their contract, but it should not be imposed by a third party.

Government Orders

It is utterly wrong on all counts, and we are opposed to it.

● (1915)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have had an opportunity to stand up in the House since being re-elected on May 2. I want to thank the voters of Burlington for sending me back to this fine institution. I hope to be able to support the needs and causes that are important to Burlington over the next four and a half years.

My question is simple. I stand to be corrected if I am wrong, but it is my understanding that the postal workers have never had an opportunity to vote of any offers that Canada Post has made to them. I have had calls from CUPW workers asking me to support back-to-work legislation because their union would not let them vote on the offers that had been made by Canada Post.

Can the hon. member explain to me what the responsibility of union leadership is in allowing its workers an opportunity to vote on offers that have been made to them?

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member on getting re-elected and serving here in the House. I thank him for his question. It is one that is often misunderstood.

An individual union member may not agree. If there is a strike vote the member may vote against going on strike. That same person may think he or she should vote on every piece of paper, every comment, every single offer that is made, that negotiations will be taking place pretty shortly so we will have a vote on this and another vote on this.

These cost thousands of dollars. There are 48,000 workers and that member feels the workers and their families should vote on every offer.

The democratic union elects the bargaining committee. It elects the process. It is a democratic organization. That is the way this works and that is the way it happens. Some people may disagree, but it is a democratic organization that has its own democratically chosen procedure as to how to deal with this.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate my colleague from Newfoundland for his re-election in St. John's East. I remember a time when he was the provincial leader of the NDP in Newfoundland and Labrador. I do not recall him supporting any back to work legislation ever. I remember the nurse's strike of 1996. He did not support back to work legislation for that essential service in Newfoundland.

Would the member ever see himself supporting any type of back to work legislation that is good for the public?

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Avalon on his re-election against the senator. I know it was a hard fought election. It is good to see him back here.

What I am hearing is a bit of an echo of a Liberal mantra today. The Liberal mantra is not about will we support this legislation, do we support postal workers, do we believe that governments should order people back to work, impose contracts, lower people's wages.

All they want to know is some theoretical, philosophical issue to do with something that may or may not happen in the future.

I do not speculate on the future. What I will say is that this legislation is as bad, probably worse, than the legislation that he is talking about that was brought in by his provincial counterparts against the nurses. It is probably just as bad, if not worse. I said in my speech they had the worst legislation. So if someone brings in legislation like this, we will vote against it, as we did in Newfoundland, as we will here today.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, while we are dealing with a very specific labour dispute between Canada Post, the workers and the management, and this government's intervention, are we not also dealing with the more fundamental principle of how the government treats the legislative process that exists in law in Canada that has been supported by constitutional experts and in fact the Supreme Court that says that when workers have a dispute with management if they are in a union they can go and freely and fairly bargain with those that employ them?

For a government to intervene and impose a wage settlement, as it has done here, I am trying to find a precedent for a government having done that with an arm's-length institution like Canada Post before, intervening on the actual settlement, not even allowing an arbitrator or mediator to work out the details. Is there not a fundamental principle for which the NDP members are standing in our places for time and time again today and potentially tonight and tomorrow?

● (1920)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that the fundamental right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the right to organize and to bargain collectively is part of the freedom of association. There is a case in B.C. where legislation that imposed restrictions on collective bargaining was struck down.

It is a very high level of right protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The government is attacking those rights in this legislation and that is one of the many reasons why we are opposing it.

The Deputy Speaker: The member hon. member for Leeds—Grenville has a point of order.

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AN ACT RESPECTING QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY AT KINGSTON

(Bill S-1001. On the Order: Government Orders:)

June 23, 2011—Second reading, An Act Respecting Queen's University at Kingston

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC) moved:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-1001, An Act Respecting Queen's University at Kingston, be deemed to have been reported favourably by the Examiner of Petitions pursuant to Standing Order 133(3); and that the bill be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

RESUMPTION AND CONTINUATION OF POSTAL SERVICES LEGISLATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, given that display of unanimity one would hope that we would be able to get actual bills through the House that would deal with credit card gouging, gas price gouging and all the things the government has not been willing to take action on. We are always willing to work with the government when it actually works in the interests of ordinary people.

I would like to start by saying a few words to our Quebec colleagues, Canadians who live in the province of Quebec.

[*Translation*]

I would like to wish a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to all Quebecers. As hon. members know, this day will be celebrated tomorrow all across Quebec.

[*English*]

I was a manual labourer in a previous life. I worked in a number of factories and went back to school eventually. I have never been a member of a labour union. Following my university education I went on to work as a negotiator from the management side on a number of collective agreements. I have been a long-time member of the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce and a proud member of the Burnaby Board of Trade. I have won a number of business excellence awards.

I am going to take a slightly different tack from a number of my colleagues in this wonderfully diverse caucus, which is the new official opposition, the NDP caucus of 103 members of Parliament, people who come from a variety of backgrounds. Some have been involved in the labour movement. Some have been involved in the business community. Some have been involved as professionals. Some have been involved in the trades. All of them have the interests of Canada at heart, and we are excited to take on our new role as official opposition and to bring a lot to Parliament because of our diversity.

In the case of every single member of Parliament in the NDP caucus, our focus is on the community. That is why we are very concerned about what the government has done in this particular case.

We saw this first with Air Canada and even more of increasing concern around the Canada Post negotiations. I would like to briefly go back a few steps to talk about the process because this is what is so profoundly worrying about how the government has reacted in this case.

There have been broad concerns about how the management of Canada Post has managed the negotiations in the collective agreement. What we have had is a very broad base of support from postal workers, 50,000 strong across the country who contribute enormously to our communities and to the strength of Canada. What we have found is, because of certain intransigence from Canada Post management, there was a series of very limited, rotating work stoppages in various parts of the country. There was some mild impact on mail generally.

We had postal workers playing the role that they do, going through rain, sleet and snow, making sure that the mail gets delivered, ensuring that cheques are delivered for seniors, ensuring that those most vulnerable in our society are taken care of. The workers took a very responsible and principled approach to what was clear intransigence from Canada Post management.

When we talk about Canada Post management, in the case of the CEO we are talking about an individual who receives \$650,000 a year and has seen the salary for his position double over the last few years. There has been a massive increase in management salaries. It is a profitable corporation because of the hard work of the employees who, as usual, never receive the credit for the work they do for Canada. It is a very profitable corporation with extremely high executive salaries and intransigence from the management side.

In the midst of this, instead of reacting in a moderate way, which is what the government could have chosen to do, it reacted in a very immoderate way. We all know that as we came through the end of the month of April and to the May 2 election what we heard from the Prime Minister was repeated assurances that he would be moderate in government.

We have not seen many examples of that since May 2. Certainly we could talk about the appointments of failed Conservative candidates to the Senate. We could talk about this bill. We could talk about a number of other measures that have shown those commitments that were made to Canadians to have a moderate government, a government that would be balanced in its approach, have proven to be vain promises. In my riding I have met a number of people who voted for the Conservative Party who feel that they have been betrayed by the immoderate actions of the government.

What did the government do in this case? Management reacted by locking out the workers. The letter carriers across the country, in a very moderate, reserved way had limited, rotating work stoppages in various parts of the country that slowed down only slightly the overall delivery of mail.

Government Orders

●(1925)

Management reacted by shutting down the entire system. Far from reacting in a moderate way, what the government has done is twofold. It has taken the side of management. It has decided that it will aid management in its intransigence in negotiating what should be a collective agreement that would be relatively easy to negotiate given how moderate the requests have been from the workers working for the company.

It did much more. The government imposed what would be a collective agreement. I cannot call it a collective agreement when it is imposed by the government. In a free and democratic society, collective bargaining is one way where more of the resources and more of the profits that a company has actually remain in the community. It allows for a much more balanced approach in family income. It means that, in a very clear way, more of the profits that a company may have may actually remain in the community in which those profits are earned and benefit other businesses as well.

When I talk about my community, I know how hard hit the small businesses have been by many of the policies of the government. I just have to name the HST as one example. The idea of collective bargaining is to ensure there is moderation and balance. When there is a \$200 million profitable corporation, the workers should receive money that at least meets the inflation rate. That is something that is a reasonable request.

The government imposed a wage settlement and, more important, it imposed what is very clearly a pension structure and framework that will be of enormous disadvantage to anyone else who works for Canada Post in the future. It means that younger workers will be treated as second class within the Canada Post system.

This is an important issue. When we look at the middle class and what has happened over the last five years under the present government and what happened under the previous government in the previous five years, we have seen a dramatic erosion in middle class earning power. For most families, their real income has declined somewhat dramatically, particularly among the poorest of Canadians. We have seen problems with pensions and seniors living under the poverty line. We have seen the debt load of the average family in Canada double over this period as well.

We have seen a dramatic restructuring of how families in Canada cope economically. Far from us being economically prosperous, as the government likes to pretend, the middle class is struggling. One of the ways that struggle can be addressed is through free, collective bargaining, which is the hallmark of any democratic system.

What the government has done by imposing this legislation is ensuring that bad management is helped, management that is stubborn and unwilling to sit down and negotiate an effective agreement. Having been on the management side in collective agreement negotiations, I can say that it is not rocket science.

In negotiating a collective agreement, parties need to be transparent, honest, sincere and willing to work for a solution. When parties do that, they get a collective agreement renewed. There are collective agreement negotiations. When collective agreement negotiations are approached in a meanspirited way, in a non-transparent way, in a way where the people who are working to

actually build that firm or build that organization are being pushed back, then the parties will not get the same results.

What has happened here is that the government has helped bad management try to impose a bad agreement that is bad for Canadian communities.

●(1930)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was listening to the member opposite talk about this lockout. It is passing strange that there was no mention of what is happening to everyday Canadians who rely on their mail. There are cheques in the mail that have not arrived.

For instance, a young family in my riding was given \$15,000 from the parents to put a down payment on a cottage. The family has never been able to afford anything but the parents helped them out a little and together with their siblings they are buying a cottage. However, the money has not arrived and the deadline to purchase the cottage has passed. There is an 81-year-old senior who has been waiting for a cheque and it has not arrived.

I am asking the member about everyday Canadians who are waiting for the mail and hoping it will come very soon so they will not lose their chance to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: It is inconceivable, Mr. Speaker. The member admits that there was a lockout and that Canada Post management is to blame and then tries to justify legislation that punishes the workers who approached this whole conflict in a very moderate, reasonable way.

The management shut down the system and yet not one Conservative member of Parliament has said that the government understands what a lockout is, that management acted inappropriately and that it will ensure that management is compelled to negotiate a collective agreement. The Conservatives have not done that. They have done exactly the opposite. They are punishing the workers who have been delivering the cheques to seniors, who had a very moderate and reasonable series of rotating work stoppages that slowed the system only slightly. Management came in with a sledgehammer to bust the system apart and Conservative MPs are saying that it is the workers' fault that management shut down the entire system.

I think any reasonable, fair-minded Canadian can see how immoderate the government is becoming. It blames ordinary middle class families for something that is management's fault. Management shut—

●(1935)

The Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for laying out so clearly what some of the issues are.

Government Orders

Numerous times in the House today we have heard, particularly Conservative members, talk about the economics of this and declining revenues from the post office. I want to put on the record that the Canadian Union of Postal Workers has actually had some proposals around increasing the business line. The article states:

Canada Post is at a crossroads. On the one hand, it faces significant challenges due to economic recession, electronic diversion and years of underinvestment in facilities and equipment. On the other hand, it is well placed to meet these challenges with its enormous, nation-wide infrastructure and trained workforce.

I would argue that part of this process really is about respecting the trained workforce and respecting the ideas it has put forward. I wonder if the member could comment on how important it is to have stability in that workforce so employees can continue to contribute to the bottom line for the business.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, every member of the opposition has approached this issue with respect for the ordinary workers who carry our mail every day. We are talking about people who work hard in the community. My letter carrier climbs 40 steps up the hill to deliver every day. Letter carriers work very hard, I know the kinds of hours they put in, and they are very thoughtful. Yet the government is attacking what has been bad management practices. There is no other way of putting it.

A business plan needs to be put into place to ensure the workers who understand the system best are keenly involved in bringing Canada Post to the next stage. These workers are the backbone of the system. Instead, management has been very stubborn and obstinate. What happens? The Conservative government rewards bad behaviour. We have seen that, whether we are talking about the banking industry or anywhere else, the Conservatives reward bad behaviour, and that is really too bad.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the legislation introduced by the Minister of Labour to bring an end to the work stoppage at Canada Post and to send the outstanding issues between the parties to binding arbitration.

A work stoppage is underway and a vital service is gone and Canadians have some urgent questions. How did this happen? How did things ever get this far? Do we not have mechanisms to resolve labour-management conflicts? We certainly do and, over 90% of the time, they work exceptionally well.

In this country, employers and the unions that represent their employees are able to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment through a process of collective bargaining. This usually involves some compromises on both sides. These negotiations almost always result in a settlement that is acceptable to both sides. We do not hear much about the proceedings because usually there is nothing very dramatic about the signing of a collective agreement.

What if the talks fail? This occasionally happens but all is not lost because the Canada Labour Code provides for a series of measures the government can take to help the parties in a dispute get past their differences and avoid a strike or a lockout.

What happened in the case of Canada Post? It is not my place to comment on the issues between the parties. I can speak only for the government. I can assure Canadians that we did everything within our power to help Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal

Workers, Urban Operations Unit to come to an agreement. We used every tool at our disposal.

I will go back to the fall of last year. Negotiations between Canada Post and CUPW began in October 2010 with the goal of reaching a settlement before the existing collective agreement expired on January 31, 2011. Despite some concessions on both sides, the two parties could not agree on some crucial points. On January 21, 10 days before the contract expiry date, the parties to the dispute informed the Minister of Labour that they were deadlocked. As I said, in a case like this, there are steps the government can take and the government has taken them.

Step one is to send in a conciliator. If conciliation fails, step two is to appoint a mediator. In the case of Canada Post and CUPW, the government followed the usual process as set out in the Canada Labour Code, and we spent a lot of time meeting with both sides. I want to stress, in case there is any doubt on this point, that the Minister of Labour does not play favourites and that the experts she appoints have to be impartial. Their job is not to impose the kind of agreement that would be most agreeable to the government. Their role is to help the parties find their own solutions.

I will now go to the chronology of events.

After 60 days of conciliation, there was still no agreement between Canada Post and the union. Considering the stakes involved, both parties agreed to extend the conciliation period for another 32 days. Even after 92 days of effort by the conciliator, an agreement in this case was not forthcoming.

On May 5, the Minister of Labour appointed a mediator. The parties entered into a 21-day cooling off period as prescribed by the Canada Labour Code but there was still no progress. Instead, on May 30 the union filed a 72-hour strike notice and, on June 3, the postal workers walked out. Finally, on June 15 the employer declared a lockout.

I said before that Canadians have questions and the next question they have is what will happen now. If the last postal disruption, which occurred in 1997, is anything to go on, the damage to the economy could be significant. Businesses that rely on the mail will be severely affected if the strike is prolonged. Some of these businesses could go under, jobs could be lost, and some of those losses could be permanent.

The question before us is whether we can afford this disruption at a time when our economy is still fragile and still in recovery.

● (1940)

It is important to remember that not everyone uses computers exclusively. Many Canadians still communicate by conventional mail as an essential part of their business operations.

Government Orders

Many of our citizens depend on the services of Canada Post to receive essential government information and benefits. People who are waiting for an important cheque or a package and cannot easily get to an alternative delivery site are suffering. Everyone will be affected by this work stoppage, but people with disabilities, the elderly and people who live in remote communities will hurt the most.

I will highlight some of the many organizations in my riding of Calgary Northeast that is adversely affected by this strike. Recently I was contacted by Fred Weiss, executive director of Samaritan's Purse Canada, as well as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association of Canada, both of which are headquartered in my riding. Between 65% to 75% of the donations to these organizations arrive through the mail. The recent postal strike has reduced those donations substantially. The very missions of these charity relief organizations is in jeopardy as a direct result of this strike.

I will share with members some of the work that people like my EDA member, Marg Pollon, are doing at Samaritan's Purse. They provided relief to citizens of Slave Lake Alberta as they returned to their fire-ravaged town. They assisted in the relief efforts during the floods in Quebec. They are assisting in post-earthquake rebuilding in Japan. They worked to treat victims in Haiti. This is only a small fraction of the work that the Samaritan's Purse does in Canada and around the world, but it needs donations to do it and it needs the postal service. It is not only the economy, it is also the victims of disasters at home and abroad. The strike will cause real hardship to many Canadians.

People have asked what the government is going to do about it?

In answer is we have made the difficult decision to end the strike with back to work legislation and binding arbitration. That means that we are imposing a solution. This is a drastic measure and we know that we may be criticized for seemingly violating the rights of free collective bargaining.

When collective bargaining fails, the worker's union has the legal right to pressure the employer by withdrawing their labour. Employers also have the legal right to lock out workers and try to continue business without them.

Our government respects the rights of both the workers and the employers. That is why back to work legislation is the exception to the rule in Canada. In the case of Canada Post versus CUPW, the rights of the corporation and the 50,000 postal workers have to be weighed against the rights of 33 million Canadians.

We know we are also being criticized for acting too quickly and forcefully, but this is not an over reaction to an unforeseeable event. It is a culmination of a long process. As I said, we have been working with Canada Post and the union for several months.

The best solution in any dispute is always the one that the parties reach themselves. As parliamentarians, we would rather not intervene, but in this case we must because there is a threat of serious harm to the national economy, small businesses and vulnerable Canadians.

Our country's economy is only now beginning to emerge from the downturn caused by the global recession. If the postal strike continues, we could lose much of the ground we have gained so far.

We just cannot afford to go without our postal services. Our government has no alternative but to introduce back to work legislation to bring resolution to this dispute.

Canadians want to know when Parliament is going to act. The answer is very simple: right now.

● (1945)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I could relate with and agree to much of what my colleague had to say. The hon. member said things that I believe we know to be true. It is a fundamental tenet of a western democracy that working people have the right to organize in trade unions, they have the right to bargain collectively and they have the right to withhold their service if those negotiations and collective bargaining should reach an impasse.

We enshrined those rights in our Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a way to ameliorate and mitigate the imbalance that exists in the power dynamic between an employer and its employees. Obviously the power is resident with the employer and it has the ultimate economic hammer. Some countervailing rights are allocated to the employees so as to be able to move forward in the bargaining process.

Has the member ever seen the movie *Wag The Dog*, when one creates a manufactured crisis by underfunding the pension plan and then going balls to the walls in the negotiations trying to convince the world that the pension plan is so underfunded that it is an expectation that is unreasonable? Is he aware that he is willing dupe perhaps in this ridiculous charade?

● (1950)

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend from the opposite side asks his question by laying out all the ground work and at the end asks a typically NDP-socialist question.

I absolutely agree with the member that the unions and workers have rights, but he forgets to mention that the employers of the businesses and charitable organizations also have rights to run smoothly. The government has the obligation to ensure that everyone runs his or her business smoothly, while at the same time protecting the rights of workers.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the comments of my colleague, but I have to ask him quite sincerely if he has actually looked at the clauses in Bill C-6? Has the hon. member looked at it from the objective of having to be fair to all sides of this issue? How can the hon. member stand there and defend legislation that clearly has only one objective, which is to break the back of the union?

Has he actually read the clauses and is he comfortable with them? On this side of the House we are looking for compromises on various sides of the issue. Compromise means both sides. It does not mean just one side.

Government Orders

Has the hon. member looked at the clauses in Bill C-6 and can he tell me that he is able to live with himself when he votes for this legislation?

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I do not believe in something, I will never stand and defend it. Therefore, the answer to her question is, yes, I am familiar with the clauses.

She talks about breaking the back of the unions. However, I mentioned in my speech there are charities in my own riding that depend on donations. They do great work, not only in Calgary Northeast, Alberta and across Canada but around the world. They depend on those donations. That is why it is our government's obligation to ensure all those good organizations are able to run smoothly.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank my hon. colleague from Calgary for what I thought was an outstanding intervention. He talked about the process the federal government has gone through in following all of the legislation and trying to assist in bringing the two sides together to get a deal. We have always indicated that we wanted to see a deal worked out between the two sides. However, it is clear that is just not going to happen, and the government must act.

We have certainly heard the NDP members say that they think the government is not being fair. Does the member think that it is fair that CUPW has not allowed any of its membership to vote on the three Canada Post contract offers? The union members have not had the opportunity to vote on any of that, including the most recent contract offer that Canada Post made to its members. Is he aware of that? Does he think CUPW should have allowed the individual members the right to vote? It seems democratic to me.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asks an excellent question. I have received some messages from some posties. One postie raised the issue that for some reason, the union had not allowed them to vote on any agreement.

The NDP talks all the time about transparency and openness. However, at the same time, these unions do not allow their own members to vote until they finalize the deal according to their wishes.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the many speeches made by government members and they seem to want to lead us to believe that there is a sense of urgency and that we must act quickly. They are trying to get their point across by taking every opportunity to remind us that negotiations have been underway for eight months. It seems to me that one does not have to have participated in very many negotiation processes to know that things move slowly for the first few months. The parties talk about the colour of the paper, the expiry date of the collective agreement, the number of years.

The collective agreement expired at the end of January 2011. The parties have therefore really only been negotiating for a few months. If the parties are negotiating without any strike action, what difference does it make if it takes 8, 12 or 24 months, as long as

services are still being provided and the public is not negatively affected. In my opinion, the sense of urgency seems to have been created entirely by the lockout declared by Canada Post and likely telegraphed by our government friends.

[*English*]

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member acknowledging that the negotiations have been going on for almost eight months.

The key point here is that the negotiations between the parties were going for three months or so and then after that the conciliator was there. The conciliator got some dates extended for another 32 days, so all together it was 92 days. After that, mediators were present.

It was the union that, on May 30, filed a 72-hour strike notice. It was not the management, it was not the government and it was not a third party; it was the union that threatened a strike.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in my place and ask the hon. member a couple of questions.

I agree with the fact that the member has recognized this as a problem situation, but I disagree with his characterization of the problem. The member suggested that this is a strike. It is absolutely not a strike. It is a lockout. He has suggested that eight months' worth of negotiations is too long.

When is the government going to then make amendments to the Canada Labour Code and suggest amendments to all the trade union acts that "thou shalt only negotiate for eight months?" It is absolutely absurd.

The member opposite should pay a little more attention to what really happens in negotiations and not interfere with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Northeast.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, it is amazing how the member opposite can distort the facts in the House of Commons.

He talks about a lockout, but he is not ready to say that the lockout was the last stage of the strike. The strike was started by the union. The employer had to impose a lockout because the strike began.

At the same time, the member should understand one thing. As a government, it is our obligation to ensure that the workers' rights are protected and at the same time ensure that our economy is not be hurt.

As everyone knows, Canada has one of the best records on its economy and on the recovery of its economy. We are not in a position to take a chance on it.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first opportunity to rise in the House in the 41st Parliament, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the electors of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for returning me to the House. They have done me the favour of allowing me to be part of a strong majority Conservative government. That warms my heart very much.

Government Orders

I receive a lot of calls in my office, and especially in the last two weeks. Close to 70% of the callers say they want us to get the posties back to work. That is what the polls across the nation are saying.

In the member's riding, what is the rate of people who want us to get the posties back to work?

• (2000)

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Speaker, it is not only me who gets hundreds of emails and phone calls that the posties must get back to work, but I am sure that the offices of the members opposite also get hundreds of emails saying that the workers should go back to work.

The Speaker: It being 8 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 23)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill

Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Gosal
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer — 153	

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brison
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Foote
Freeman

Government Orders

Fry
Genest
Giguère
Goodale
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
Mai
Martin
Mathyssen
McCallum
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Péclet
Pilon
Quach
Ravignat
Regan
Saganash
Savoie
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Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
Layton
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Marston
Masse
May
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Perreault
Plamondon
Rafferty
Raynault
Rousseau
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Sitsabaiesan
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoeppner
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Opitz
Payne
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Rickford
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 153

Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Baird
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastroy
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Gosal
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Leaf
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Raiitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

PAIRED

Nil

• (2025)

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (2035)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 24*)

YEAS

Members

Adams

Adler

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)

Andrews

Angus
 Atamanenko
 Ayala
 Bellavance
 Benskin
 Blanchette
 Boivin
 Boulerice
 Brahmi
 Brosseau
 Caron
 Cash
 Chicoine
 Choquette
 Christopherson
 Coderre
 Côté
 Cullen
 Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
 Day
 Dion
 Donnelly
 Dubé
 Dusseault
 Eyking
 Fortin
 Fry
 Genest
 Giguère
 Goodale
 Groguhé
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hsu
 Hyer
 Julian
 Lamoureux
 Larose

Ashton
 Aubin
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Bevington
 Blanchette-Lamothe
 Borg
 Boutin-Sweet
 Brison
 Byrne
 Casey
 Chariton
 Chisholm
 Chow
 Cleary
 Comartin
 Crowder
 Cuzner
 Davies (Vancouver East)
 Dewar
 Dionne Labelle
 Doré Lefebvre
 Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
 Easter
 Foote
 Freeman
 Garrison
 Genest-Jourdain
 Godin
 Gravelle
 Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
 Hassainia
 Hughes
 Jacob
 Kellway
 Lapointe
 Latendresse

Government Orders

Laverdière
 LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
 Leslie
 Mai
 Martin
 Mathysen
 McCallum
 Michaud
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
 Mulcair
 Nash
 Nunez-Melo
 Papillon
 Péclet
 Pilon
 Quach
 Ravignat
 Regan
 Saganash
 Savoie
 Sellah
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 Stewart
 Sullivan
 Toone
 Trudeau
 Valériote— 131

Layton
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 Liu
 Marston
 Masse
 May
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 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
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 Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
 Nantel
 Nicholls
 Pacetti
 Patry
 Perreault
 Plamondon
 Rafferty
 Raynault
 Rousseau
 Sandhu
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Sitsabaiesan
 Stoffer
 Thibeault
 Tremblay
 Turmel

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[For continuation of proceedings see Part B]

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, June 23, 2011
(Part B)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 23, 2011

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (2035)

[English]

RESTORING MAIL DELIVERY FOR CANADIANS ACT

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC) moved that Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services, be read the second time and referred to a committee of the whole.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to introduce the second reading of the bill entitled, “An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services”.

A work stoppage is under way, a vital service is gone and Canadians have some urgent questions: How did this happen? How did things get this far? Do we not have mechanisms to resolve labour management conflicts?

We certainly do and they actually work quite well, and over 90% of the time.

In this country, employers and unions that represent employers are able to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment through the process of collective bargaining. This usually involves compromise on both sides and these negotiations almost always result in a settlement that is acceptable to both sides. We do not hear much about these proceedings because there is usually nothing very dramatic about the signing of a collective agreement.

However, what if the talks fail? This occasionally does happen. However, all should not be lost because the Canada Labour Code does provide for a series of measures the government can take in order to help the parties in a dispute get past their differences and avoid a strike or a lockout.

So what happened in the case of Canada Post?

I can assure Canadians that we did everything within our power to help Canada Post and the union to come to an agreement. We used every tool at our disposal.

I will take members back to the fall of last year. Negotiations between the parties began in October 2010 and the goal was to get a settlement before the existing collective agreement expired at the end of January. Despite some concessions made on both sides, the two parties could not agree on some crucial points. Therefore, on January

21, 10 days before the contract expired, the parties informed me that they were deadlocked.

As I said, in a case like this, there are steps the government can take. The first step is to send in a conciliator and, if conciliation fails, to appoint a mediator.

In the case of Canada Post and CUPW, the government followed the usual process as set out in the Canada Labour Code and we spent a lot of time with both sides. I want to stress, in case there is any doubt on this point, that this government does not play favourites and we appoint experts who are impartial. The job of conciliators and mediators is not to impose the kind of agreement that would be most agreeable to the government. Their role is to help the parties find their own solution.

I will go back to the chronology. After 60 days of conciliation, there was still no agreement between Canada Post and the union. Considering the stakes involved, both parties agreed to extend the conciliation by a further 32 days. Even after 92 days of effort by a conciliator, an agreement in this case was not forthcoming so, on May 5, I appointed a mediator. The parties entered a 21-day cooling off period, as prescribed in the Canada Labour Code, and still there was no progress. Instead, on May 30, the union filed a 72-hour strike notice and, on June 3, the postal workers walked out. Finally, on June 15, the employer declared a lockout.

I said at the beginning that Canadians have questions. The next question they have is: What will happen now?

If the last postal disruption, which occurred in 1997, is anything to go on, the damage to the economy could be significant. Businesses that rely on the mail will be severely affected. If the strike is prolonged, some of those businesses could go under, jobs could be lost and some of the job losses could be permanent.

Can we afford this disruption at a time when our economy is still recovering?

Many of our citizens depend on the services of Canada Post to receive essential government information and benefits. In fact, everyone will be affected by the work stoppage but people with disabilities, elderly people and people who live in remote communities will be hurt the most. This strike will cause undue real hardship to many Canadians.

The next question in their minds is: What is the government going to do about it? The answer is that we have made the difficult decision to end the strike with back to work legislation and binding arbitration.

Government Orders

• (2040)

When collective bargaining actually fails, employers have the ability and the legal right to bring pressure on the unions in order to settle the matter. The unions also have the right to withdraw their labour in order to make sure that there is a settlement at the end of the day.

In this case, we are unable to see a resolution. That is why we introduced this resolution in order to give the parties a way forward so that they conclude their collective agreement at the table.

It is the culmination of a long process. I have worked with the union and I have worked with management for a long period of time. The reality of the situation is Canadians cannot go on without postal services for much longer. The government has no alternative but to introduce back to work legislation and that is what we have done today.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible that the Conservative Minister of Labour three times in her speech called it a strike. I remind the Minister of Labour and the Prime Minister that this is a lockout. The workers did not go on strike.

The Minister of Labour, who I have great respect for, should understand the difference between a lockout and a strike. The mail was being delivered. The company told the workers that they were no longer required.

How can the Minister of Labour stand in this House and on three separate occasions call this a strike when she knows that it was Canada Post that locked out the employees?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that he is correct. It is a lockout which was precipitated by a series of rolling strikes.

I might offer this piece of advice to the opposition. In the case of the government, it does not matter how the work stoppage happens. What matters is we act for all Canadians and we make—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Bourassa.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have really reached a low point if the Minister of Labour said today that it does not really matter how things will turn out. Our government is siding with the employers.

I have been on the government side in the past, and when there was a two-week general strike, we differentiated between a lockout and a general strike. We certainly had a bill to ensure that the arbitrator could be respectful to both parties in arriving at a negotiated solution.

We have a minister who has just completely denied collective rights and workers' rights.

Is the minister prepared to make amendments to ensure that we do not begin a marathon session? There is a lack of respect for two groups today. There is a lack of respect for workers, and for Quebecers and French Canadians, because the NDP wants to start a

marathon session when we should rather be celebrating, since we have agreed in this House that Quebec is a nation.

What does she have to say about that?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, it is important to remind the hon. member that there are in fact 45,000 members of the union and in reality there are 33 million Canadians.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I was making my speech before the vote, I had a message from one of my constituents which I would like to read.

It says: "Great job on your speech...We were watching it live. My business is affected by this. I hope the situation is resolved soon!"

What message should I give to those constituents?

• (2045)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, the message to give to Canadians in general in businesses and charities is that we are here to ensure the return of postal services and we are here to ensure the continuation of postal services.

Indeed, we will sit here as long as we need to sit here to ensure that postal services continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the minister was speaking, I received a message from one of my constituents, who said that his pension fund was in jeopardy. He was asking the Minister of Labour to protect workers.

He also asked why the Conservative government and the Prime Minister hate the working men and women so much. Why does the bill hurt only the workers and not Canada Post?

That is what Canadian workers are saying.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I guess none of us should be surprised that unions have a hotline to the NDP.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the comments made by the minister in her speech, prior to the heavy-handed lockout that Canada Post came forward with, she said it was prompted by the rotating strikes as if they were an illegal tactic. They are absolutely legitimate. Does the minister disagree that they are a legitimate tactic?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated clearly, we do not blame one party or the other. The blame is that the two parties at the table were unable to reach a deal after being in the collective bargaining process for eight months.

Quite simply, Canadians want to know what the government is going to do. The government is going to make sure that the service starts again, that they are back to work, and people can resume their lives.

Government Orders

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the legislation calls for wage increases of 1.75% this year, 1.5% next year and 2% in each of the subsequent two years. I wonder if the Minister of Labour could tell the House why these particular numbers were chosen and whether or not they are based on what the government has negotiated with the federal public service.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member, colleague and neighbour for the question. Indeed, the increases in wages for postal workers are wages that have been negotiated in another free collective bargaining process with PSAC, the largest public sector union in the federal government, and they are fair.

As I have said many times, these are amounts that every Canadian would love to have as a guaranteed wage increase for the next few years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also received today an email from one of my constituents who is a letter carrier.

Here is what he said:

Mr. [MP's name], thank you for defending postal workers. Many people do not know what we are fighting for. We are not for fighting for wages, but for safe working conditions. Please ask the Conservatives what they intend to do about all the workplace accidents that will occur once we go back to work and our working conditions have still not been addressed.

I would like to know what the Minister of Labour intends to do about worker safety.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, the top priority of this government is the health and safety of all Canadians. We take that very seriously. That is why in the legislation we have included this in the guiding principles for the arbitrator to ensure that the principles of the health and safety of the workers on the job are looked at.

• (2050)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in light of the polarized ideological barbs that have gone back and forth between the government and the official opposition in the last few minutes, I wonder if the minister could tell us what in fact has been accomplished by that type of exchange. The postal system is still dysfunctional, the workers are still out of work, the small businesses across this country that depend on Canada Post are still without service. Why can the minister not adopt a more constructive approach?

Will the minister entertain specific constructive amendments to her legislation to try to improve that legislation and actually get this problem solved rather than have ideological polarization on the floor of the House of Commons? What good does that do?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member because obviously what he is indicating is that the Liberal Party will gladly support the bill and we can count on its full support for quick passage of the bill.

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that we start this debate on a bit of a sad note. We have just heard the Minister of Labour say, in thinking about the situation before us, that there are 45,000 postal workers, though I

believe there are more than that but I will use the number she used, and there are 33 million Canadians. In other words, she is dividing the people who provide the mail to us from the rest of Canadians.

First, I find it sad that the Minister of Labour would see the world that way and, second, that we would be approaching this issue on such a divisive basis. I have said in the past, and I was hoping things might have been different, that it is a government that preys on the concept of dividing Canadians, one from the other. Unfortunately, we are starting off in that frame of mind.

I do not intend to use that approach. In fact, when I think about postal workers, the first image that comes to my mind is the postal delivery fellow who comes to my home. His name is Gary and he provides mail service to my house. At my house people are normally home during the day, so it is my 85-year-old stepmother who receives the mail. Like a lot of senior citizens and Canadians, a relationship develops between the person who delivers the mail and families. It becomes quite a personal thing.

When families celebrate the important seasons and everyone wishes each other well, it is one of those cases where the services that government provides comes right up against the public in a particularly intimate and important way. I think we all want to start this debate by realizing that we need to appreciate the work of those who work in the public service.

[*Translation*]

Second of all, I want to say that we are here to achieve a positive outcome. We are going to propose amendments to this legislation. I want to tell the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour that my team and I will be available, no matter what time it is, to discuss the possibility of finding a solution to this situation.

[*English*]

We in the NDP do not support the legislation that has been presented and we will explain why. We are here to propose changes, amendments and propositions that could improve the legislation. We are prepared to work with the government to find language that might actually get us out of the predicament that we find ourselves in today.

I simply want to say that we are available, it does not matter what time of day or night, to work with representatives of the government to try to accomplish that goal in the interests not only of 33 million Canadians, but also the people who work so hard to make sure we get mail service in this country.

Government Orders

• (2055)

[*Translation*]

Ensuring good labour relations in this country depends on the good faith of everyone, and unfortunately, the Conservative government has decided to act in bad faith. Postal workers in Canada's urban centres have been in talks with Canada Post since last October. Their contract expired just five months ago, on January 31. Now, this government, as the owner of this crown corporation that took in revenues of \$281 million last year, is imposing wage reductions, especially on all new employees. The government is ordering an 18% reduction in the basic wage rate, as well as a reduction in vacation time, in addition to forcing new employees to work an additional five years before they are eligible to receive full pension benefits.

[*English*]

Even so, these workers have bargained in good faith. Throughout all of the bargaining, they made sure that Canadians got their mail and that all social services cheques were delivered on time. That is very important for Canadians to understand.

I think about these folks who work so hard for us. The image I have in my mind right now is visiting the large postal sorting stations. These postal sorting stations are huge operations. I visit them at least once every year to touch base, because it is a huge employer right on the border of my riding. Thousands of people are working there to sort the mail, and it is actually a surprisingly intimate process, despite all the machines.

I am thinking of some of the people who sit in their chairs and have all of these sorting boxes into which to put the mail that we write. Some of it cannot be sorted by a machine and has to be looked at by an individual.

There they are, and looking over their shoulders and talking to them, I have seen mail from all over the world. There are personal stories and messages from one Canadian to another, or from someone beyond our borders who is not a Canadian but is communicating with a Canadian. Chances are it is family related, or maybe it is business related, but there is an intimacy there. The respect with which those workers ply their trade is quite remarkable.

A lot of them, I noticed, wear various forms of braces on their hands and their arms because of the repetitive motions that they do. These motions produce a strain on their bodies to the point moving is painful and difficult. However, there they are, working nonetheless to try to provide a service and also because they have to provide for their families.

Another thing I noticed about that group of workers, at least in the plant near my riding, is the diversity. I do not think a more diverse group of Canadians could be found anywhere. They come from absolutely every background. Maybe that is why there is a certain appreciation of the importance of the mail. In a way it is a part of the democratic communication process that brought them to Canada in the first place, the notion that people can communicate freely, that they can speak their mind and that there is a public postal service to make sure people can communicate with each other.

Many of them will mention the charter of rights and so on that we have here in Canada, and how proud they are to be Canadians and to be working on behalf of Canadians. That is why I found it very distressing to see them being partitioned off as though they were somehow not part of the 33 million Canadians. They are as much a part of the 33 million Canadians as anybody else.

I am very proud of Canada Post and its management and the decisions that have been made there over the years. I have had my opposition, as many of us have had, to some of their decisions. I will speak about that later.

One decision was to turn over of many of the postal operations in the small businesses in my community to Shoppers Drug Mart. I have nothing against Shoppers Drug Mart, but it does not need to be delivering the post. Lots of small mom-and-pop variety stores have had to close because of a decision by Canada Post to give the contracts to the highest bidder. That has been very hurtful.

Nonetheless, I have been very proud of Canada Post as an institution in this country. I think of Purolator, for example. Most Canadians do not even know that it is owned by Canada Post and by the Canadian people. It does a fine job of delivering on our behalf in a very competitive environment and has taken leadership in environmental areas. Purolator has a hydrogen-powered van that operates out of a garage in my riding, and that hydrogen is created by the wind turbine that you see when you come into Toronto along the waterfront at the CNE. That is where the hydrogen comes from. That is a publicly owned postal delivery vehicle that is powered by the wind. I think that is fabulous.

Another reason I am personally fond of Canada Post is that it took a decision—and I appreciate the Prime Minister's support for it along the way—to issue a stamp in honour of the 100th anniversary of services to the blind in this country by the CNIB and by the Montreal Association for the Blind, which was founded by my blind great-grandfather, Philip E. Layton.

• (2100)

As it happens, Canada Post took the decision to put his image on the envelope. When we buy a group of those stamps, his image is there, and I take a lot of pride in that. All of those who have been working with and involved with the blind over the years appreciate that gesture. We could cite many stamps that have been issued and many gestures that Canada Post has made because it is part of the community. It is part of who we are, as Canadians, in many different ways.

I do not want what I have to say today about the legislation to take away from all of those positive things that we have to say, nor from the public services that we rely on, because we do rely on these public services, each and every one of us.

However, I have to speak against the bill. I must briefly explain why, or maybe not so briefly, as a matter of fact, if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker.

Effective labour relations in this country rely on good faith. We have not seen that in the actions of the government here. I too, like the member for Acadie—Bathurst, was quite shocked to hear the labour minister describe the situation facing us as a strike. That simply is not true. It was the most brazen example of propaganda designed to try to turn people against these workers that I have seen, and to see it right here in the House of Commons is shocking.

What we are facing right now is a lockout. If we did not have the lockout, we would not have this debate, we would not have this legislation and people would be receiving their mail.

The workers who provide that service are ready to go to work now, but they are faced with a problem. When they show up for work, there is a lock on the door. They cannot work. They cannot go into that sorting plant. They cannot go into the Post Office. They cannot collect the bag of mail and deliver it to people like my mother-in-law and lots of other people who are waiting for their mail.

There is a simple solution. I have asked the Prime Minister repeatedly over recent days to simply adopt this solution, which I will say again: Prime Minister, take the locks off the door and let us have our postal service back.

It is not a strike. It is a lockout initiated by the management, clearly supported by the government. We say that it is supported by the government because if the government were sincere in suggesting that the strike is causing a problem for the Canadian economy, it would be taking action to ensure that the mail was delivered as quickly as possible. The simplest way to do that is to take the locks off the doors, but that is not the objective, unfortunately, despite what is being said; the objective is to interfere with the process between workers and management in coming to a fair collective agreement. That, unfortunately, I must conclude, is the objective.

The government says it has to legislate the workers back for economic reasons, but if that is the case, why did it shut down the post office in the first place?

I would again ask the government to order Canada Post to take the locks off the doors. It is an agency of the government. Let us remember that. The actions it has taken have compromised the Canadian economy; let us remember that too.

It could be done now. A simple phone call would get that process sorted out within hours. I have no doubt that would happen if the Prime Minister were to call the CEO.

However, by siding with the employer and by pitting the workers against the Canadian people in a blatant attempt to try to divide and conquer, as we have seen the government do before, the government has essentially killed the incentive to bargain.

Let us put ourselves in the position of the CEO of the company. He would have a big grin on his face after seeing this legislation, which essentially tells him he does not have to do anything anymore. He does not have to compromise and he does not even have to talk to his workers, because the government is simply going to ram legislation through.

Government Orders

Can we guess what the icing on the cake will be? The government is going to give the workers less in wages than he, as CEO, was prepared to give them.

• (2105)

Mr. Speaker, do we know why else he would be smiling? It is because the CEO, who I am told is the best paid of the CEOs of the organizations we have in the Canadian government system, is allowed a 33% bonus on top of his salary. If a CEO's bonus is based on the profitability of the enterprise and he has just been told that a reduction of the wages of the workers has been legislated through the Parliament of Canada, can we guess what happens? It is higher profits and a bigger bonus. We know who is smiling now.

This is what leaves us with the sense that the government has essentially taken sides here, and we think in a most inappropriate way.

Let us look at the impact on the average full-time postal worker's family during the four years of the agreement.

It turns out that \$857.50 would be taken out of the pockets of the postal worker's family. We can understand why people would be upset about this, particularly when the CEO is going to get a bigger bonus by virtue of that very reduction.

If a government is prepared to do that to the postal workers, we have to ask ourselves who it is prepared to do that to next. Who is next?

This is why 33 million Canadians ought to be taking a very close look at this legislation and asking themselves if they are next. Will they be hit next? Will there be user charges to deal with the huge record deficit the government built up?

Mr. Speaker, we are getting commentary from the commentariat over here on the other side. One is tempted to respond by suggesting that the massive corporate tax cuts the Conservatives implemented left them with this deficit. If the government had followed our advice, it would not have this deficit.

A lot of Canadians are going to be wondering what will happen if their employer offers them a certain wage and there is a discussion and negotiation about wages. If the Prime Minister is willing to say to postal workers that the offer they were being given by their management was too high, so he brought in a law to reduce their wages, would that happen to them also?

I do not think there would be any reason to think it would not happen. In fact, I think there is every reason to be fearful that the government might well do it, and that anyone could be next. Who would that be?

The government will protest and say that it would never do that to anybody else, but there is a question of trust here that is going to be challenged by the legislation we see in front of us. The government is willing to do that to 55,000 Canadians, the very people who deliver the mail, usually with smiles on their faces no matter what the weather, and people will ask themselves if they could be next.

There is also the question of pensions.

Government Orders

Yes, many do not have a pension plan, so we need to strengthen the Canada pension plan to help all these people.

However, anyone who does have a pension plan for when they retire is looking at a government that is willing to impose restrictions on them. It is telling them they can't retire with the full pension they thought they had, the pension they told their families would be available for retirement and on which all family plans were dependent, the plan that kept workers going on some of the worst-weather days when their job involved going door to door or when their arms hurt as they were sorting the mail.

• (2110)

At the end of the day, that worker was probably thinking that he or she could retire with a certain pension and would not live in poverty, that the work would be worth it and would allow them to spend more time with their family, because a lot of this is shift work and workers do not have much time to spend with their families. So workers make promises to their spouses and kids that they will eventually spend more time with them based on their having a pension.

However, this legislation tells those workers they will have to work five years longer than they planned. That is not right. It creates further problems, which I will speak about in just a second. Sure, it would be a big saving for Canada Post, yet we could do all kinds of things if all that we wanted to do was to save money. Let us just cut everyone's salaries down to size, let us not have pensions, let us forget about health care. We could save money in all kinds of ways. Saving money is not, by definition, the best thing to do in all circumstances. It is a question of balancing things, and that has not been done in this legislation.

Canadians should therefore be forgiven for doubting Canada Post's claim that it is going to be in financial trouble if it does not squeeze the workers, the same workers who helped Canada Post make \$1.7 billion in profits over the last 15 years. That was done by hard work, because the postal system did not make money years ago, as that was not how it was set up, but it has been structured that way for a number of years. Those workers have helped to create that profit, but now they are being punished for having done it. How do people get motivated when they are faced with that situation?

Canada Post made \$281 million in net profits in 2009 alone, the last year for which we have the full numbers. Let us remember that the government gets a chunk of that money, so I suppose this is one of the ways that it is going to reduce the debt. To reduce its debt, the government is going to extract \$857.50 from the average full-time postal worker's family. It will take that money and put it against the national debt. That is not right and it is not fair. The national debt is something that we all have to shoulder together, all 33 million of us, not just the 55,000 workers in the postal system.

The company does not need a bullying big brother to support its demands against workers who just want to support their families. This is really reprehensible legislation because of the way it tries to push people around, and it is not done in good faith.

[*Translation*]

Let us talk about the contract the government wants to impose. The contract divides workers into two categories: new versus old, young workers versus more senior workers. By asking new workers

to accept lower wages, less secure retirement benefits and less vacation time, the government is turning them into second-class workers. I admire the workers for rising up against this injustice, even though it is not necessarily their rights and benefits that are in jeopardy, but those of future employees. The workers have stood up to protect the next generation, upholding the tradition of the labour movement. That is also a tradition of the NDP, one we are proud of.

• (2115)

[*English*]

It is linked to a broader value that we hold, a fundamental Canadian value, that no one should be left behind. That means that we do not create two classes of workers in a place like Canada Post.

The government actually wants to impose a contract that takes that very value and turns it on its head. It says that some should be left behind and says who they are going to be, essentially structuring it to give one generation of workers an inferior arrangement. This invites resentment in the workplace, which is only human. Over time the younger workers are going to resent the older workers and the better deal they have. How can that be positive for the morale of a workplace or the efficiency or quality of life of the workers?

It is really quite a negative a thing. It is dividing people once again. It weakens the bonds that can exist in a workplace between people working together. It pits worker against worker, and worse, in this context, a generation against another generation. I think that is a very dangerous situation.

It weakens their collective voice because to the extent they are not working and feeling like they are part of the same team but are feeling that there is a conflict within, their collective voice is not going to be as strong or as effective as it could be. Maybe that is what the government wants. Maybe that is what is really going on here, amongst other things, to try to weaken the voice of working people at their workplace. Certainly, if we look at this legislation in its many dimensions or the actions of the government in recent days on both of the strikes we have been dealing with here, people would have to come to the conclusion that this could be part of the strategy

From the perspective of some employers and governments, maybe this is somehow seen to be a good thing, to divide and conquer in a race to the bottom, except for those at the top who do better and better. In fact, the statistics in our country should be alarming for all members of Parliament, because the inequalities that are growing in our society are the kinds of inequalities that ultimately lead to a reduction in quality of life, a reduction in the sense of well-being. There are lots of measures of this.

The societies that have a greater level of equality, where the distance between the top and the bottom is not as great as other societies, have all kinds of advantages when it comes to the well-being of their citizens, everything from lifespan to measurements of disease and happiness, and the list goes on and on.

Government Orders

There has been a lot of work done on this. In fact, I know that a lot of parliamentarians of all political stripes are starting to pay attention to the work that is being done on the growing inequality and how that needs to be challenged.

Unfortunately, the policies of the government, piece by piece, have actually helped the inequality to grow. So there are cases where, for example, if someone is not a taxpayer with a decent income, some of the tax credit approaches offered by the government are not available to them.

Many of the tax reduction strategies have ended up benefiting those at the top, to a greater extent. Or, some of the measures that have been offered up are really only workable for people who have extra money at the end of the month or end of the year, when there are a lot of folks who do not have that.

The result is that we are going to see a step-by-step growth of the distance between those at the top and those at the bottom. What are we looking at here but a piece of legislation that actually makes that the case within this group of 55,000 employees, creating a distance within the workforce and, of course, the distance I spoke about earlier between the CEO with that whole bonus system and the workers. There are probably other upper echelon managers who get some kind of a bonus as well.

So the inequalities within that workplace are going to increase. That is a reflection of a pathology that is afoot in our society right now. This legislation runs counter to the sorts of initiatives we should be following to deal with that pathology.

It also undermines the workers' voice. Now some people perhaps think that is a good idea. I was doing an interview earlier today with Mr. O'Leary of *The Lang and O'Leary Exchange*. I had challenged him in an earlier interview, taking issue with that quote of his that "greed is good". I took him on and said that I did not think that greed should be considered a good thing. I just needed to go on the record saying that on the public broadcaster.

• (2120)

I had the opportunity to be interviewed by him on this very topic this afternoon. He asked me, "Wouldn't we be better off if we just simply didn't have unions at all, Jack?" He used my first name. I hope I can use it in that context. In responding to him, I pointed out that he had just saluted the very successful economy of Australia, which has a labour government and a strong union movement.

The fact is that the union movement in our country has given us and working people wherever unions are allowed to form a dramatically improved standard of living. We could go through the list of the things that have been accomplished by trade unionists over the years. Most of them were negotiated, perhaps in labour contracts to begin with, but became sufficiently popular with all Canadians that they became the law of the land.

One could start with child labour. Had we not had the union movement, we would have child labour. If we have any doubts about that, we should go to the places where there is child labour and find out how easy it is to organize a union there.

We could also take a look at things such as weekends off. We would not have weekends off if it were not for trade unionists

organizing for the right of working families to have a little time together once every seven days.

We would not have health and safety committees in our workplaces, which sit down and talk about how to make working conditions safer and better for workers, without unions. However, we still have three workers a day dying on the job in Canada. We have an awful lot more work to do in these areas. We passed the Westray bill. That never would have happened, had it not been for the union movement. Here I refer to the steelworkers and all of those who supported that strong legislation we now have, which is being brought to bear in appropriate circumstances. I know there are corporations, large and small, that have changed their practices as a result of that bill.

I had the privilege of sitting on the board of directors of the fourth largest energy utility in the country, Toronto Hydro, and we did not. When I joined that organization, we did not have anywhere near adequate workers' health and safety. We had the worst record of any public utility in North America. This bill came in. We were all briefed on it as board members. I do not mind saying I had been pushing for change there, but it was that bill that ultimately said to the managers and directors of the board that they could be criminally liable if they knew that a situation was dangerous and did not do something about it. That snapped everyone to attention darn quickly.

I want to salute Toronto Hydro, because within six quarters it went from having the worst quarterly record of injuries and those sorts of situations on the job to having zero injuries a quarter, and it was because of that legislation.

• (2125)

I am really trying to make the point that the unions we are talking about here perform an extremely important service in our society. People are frustrated when something they were counting on is not available. When people's mail is not delivered, it is tough and it is very tough for small businesses.

I had a small business once and I would pay my contractors, but if the cheque had not arrived from the person I had the contract with, it was tough. Some small businesses right now are struggling because of that situation. Other business owners rely on the mail as fundamental to their business.

We all know about those kinds of businesses. That is why, if we were serious about these businesses, we would take the locks off the operation and let the workers get back to work.

[*Translation*]

I would like the government to understand how important it is to build bridges between generations and between different groups of workers. I would like the government to agree to work with us to defend the rights of workers and to secure a better agreement for their families. That is why we are proposing to work with the Prime Minister and his team to come up with acceptable amendments to this bill in order to improve the situation.

Government Orders

Let us be clear: this bill violates the rights of workers to negotiate a collective agreement in good faith. It also weakens the collective bargaining rights of all 33 million Canadians; their right to work together with their co-workers to secure better conditions, a right entrenched in section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are the facts. This legislation sends a message to employers across the country that the government is prepared to side with employers against employees every time it has an opportunity to do so.

[*English*]

Why should employers bargain in good faith if they can count on the government to step in and impose what they cannot get at the bargaining table? Where is this going to end? Once we allow this sort of thing to get started, who knows where it could go?

That is why we propose that the laws be changed and why we cannot support the legislation. It encourages employers everywhere to go out and test the waters. Look what they got at Canada Post. Maybe we can manoeuvre into a similar position. Who do we have to call in the government to get it on side? Who do we check in with? I guess we will start with some of those consulting companies that seem to be populated by former members of the party. Maybe we will get some advice there, but that is a topic for another day.

By sending a message that back to work legislation could be the new norm for labour negotiations in our country, the whole notion of good-faith negotiations really goes out the window, and it is a slippery slope that the government wants to force Canadians to go down. I simply ask the government if this is really where it wants to go because it will be very dangerous.

● (2130)

[*Translation*]

It is important for us to understand that the benefits provided by collective agreements go beyond a mere contract. The added benefits negotiated by workers over the years have helped to raise the standards for all Canadians. Unionized workers fought for rights that we now take for granted: a decent wage to raise a family—the salaries of unionized workers have a positive upward effect on the salaries of non-unionized workers—plus occupational safety and health standards, the 40-hour work week, weekends, protection against harassment, vacations, workplace pension plans, and the list goes on.

[*English*]

Hand in hand with progressive parties like the New Democratic Party, collective bargaining has been one of those engines for progress for working people. I see this as a legacy to build upon, not something to be torn down.

We are celebrating our 50th anniversary as a political movement. At our convention, we reflected on our achievements over those years. It was always with one goal in mind, which was to make life better for working families. That was and is what we are.

At our convention, we reflected on our achievements over those years and we paid a special tribute to our founding national leader, Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare. Public health care was his signature achievement for all Canadians. Public pensions were

another achievement, working with Lester Pearson. However, Tommy Douglas accomplished so much more, including rural electrification, universal access to education and income stabilization for farmers.

Tommy also knew that securing workers' basic rights was a key to a just and prosperous Saskatchewan and Canada. Therefore, as premier of Saskatchewan, he passed legislation, and we are going back many years, guaranteeing a minimum wage for working people. He passed legislation establishing a 40-hour work week, paid vacations and full collective bargaining rights for all workers.

Tommy gave credit to where credit was due, which was to the ideas that had come from working people. They were bargained into existence by working people. Tommy's job, as he saw it, was to extend those most basic protections to all working people through legislation in his province and in his country.

When we see legislation in this Parliament, we hope for the kind of legislation that would accomplish those kinds of goals. Instead, we are seeing legislation today that goes precisely in the opposite direction, for several reasons that I have touched on already. Other members of our party in our caucus will speak about other dimensions of this in the debate.

Tommy's legacy was extraordinary.

● (2135)

[*Translation*]

Sixty years ago, Tommy Douglas was instrumental in bringing in Canada's first real labour code.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jack Layton: Are we allowed to sing? I imagine that at times, it might improve the tone of the debate.

The labour code represented a major step forward for workers of the day. We will not sit idly by and watch the Conservatives turn back the clock and strip workers of vested rights they fought so hard to achieve.

[*English*]

I am simply not going to sit and watch the Conservative government follow in the footsteps of the U.S. Republicans and their Tea Party friends.

We have all been watching occurrences in Wisconsin, where the governor yanked collective bargaining rights from 175,000 public employees and nullified their rights to decent conditions, gender equality and fair pensions. The governor is not even hiding that this is an attempt to cut down the number of workers. It is not just in Wisconsin, but Ohio, Indiana and Idaho are all attacking workers, using the excuse of austerity.

[*Translation*]

Their real goal is to maximize profits by mistreating workers. The Canada Post Corporation Act does exactly the same thing: a profitable company is saying that it cannot afford to pay new hires. This Conservative government is complicit with the employer by proposing this legislation. Simply put, its inspiration is coming from the wrong place.

Government Orders

[English]

I will summarize our essential position.

First, we must not be dividing Canadians in this place by talking about 55,000 postal workers and 33 million other Canadians. It is time we started to see each other as all part of the same people who are trying to accomplish the same goals for our families. That is what this is about. Therefore, I am asking that we see less of this divisive politics, particularly in this debate because many Canadians will be following it.

I do not want those who deliver the mail or who sort it on our behalf, each and every day, to feel that they are somehow less than anyone else.

[Translation]

Second, this bill attacks the workers' basic right to negotiate their working conditions. That cannot happen.

Third, this bill will increase disparities in our society. If we begin to see numerous bills such as these in different areas of our economy and society, disparities will increase. This approach is completely unacceptable, not only to the New Democratic Party, but also to the great majority of Canadians.

People must be wondering if they and their families will be the next ones to suffer from the Conservative government's tactics. If the government can do this to Canada Post workers, will it do the same to other workers? Is there a list? Are there several other companies with the same type of contract? Will CEOs be celebrating tonight, tomorrow or this weekend because they can use the same tactic that Canada Post used? That is unacceptable.

To conclude, I want to reiterate once again that we can put an end to this dispute right now. The Prime Minister can ask Canada Post to take the locks off so that these people can return to work. My team and I are once again offering to work and create amendments to the bill so that we can end this debate and so that proper bargaining can take place.

That is all I can say at the moment.

● (2140)

[English]

I therefore move:

That Bill C-6 be not now read a second time but be read a second time six months hence.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened quite intently to the Leader of the Opposition give his speech. There were a number of things, frankly, on which we agree but there were a number of things on which we disagree.

I do have concerns when I hear conversations about different levels of Canadians. Well there are, sadly, Canadians who have not been at the table in these negotiations but, believe me, they are being deeply impacted.

His motion, which would suggest a hoist motion, to move this in six months, unlock the doors of Canada Post, for what? Is it so we

can have more rotating strikes? Maybe tomorrow it would be Toronto that shut down. Maybe next week it would be Peterborough or somewhere in Ottawa or elsewhere. This is not a solution.

I have received notes from postal workers asking why they have not had an opportunity to vote. Their union would not let them vote on this contract. There is intimidation within the ranks of CUPW and workers are afraid. Does the member know that?

Would he call on CUPW and ask it to allow a vote on the last offer by Canada Post, or is he simply going to allow this kind of tyranny from the top union leaders?

● (2145)

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, if that offer was so terrific one would think it would have at least been replicated in the legislation.

I appreciate the comments and observations from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister but he suggests that if we unlock the doors that this would take us back to the rotating strikes. We need to be crystal clear here. The representatives of the workers involved have said that if those locks are taken off they will go back to work and deliver the mail.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was back in 1988 when I last heard of a six-month hoist motion. In fact, that was also on a labour bill. At the time, inside the Manitoba legislature, it was the New Democrats in opposition. When I get the opportunity to speak to this particular motion, I hope to fill in what actually transpired. There were some highlights and some lowlights.

I am very sympathetic to many of the arguments. The Liberal Party believes in the efforts and work that the Canada Post workers have put in and the services they provide for Canadians. We do not question that. The issue is the lockout.

Does the Leader of the Opposition believe that, if the lockout were never put in place, we would have had an agreement or the mail would have continued to be delivered to address the concerns in terms of the public interest?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, yes I do.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can say that in my 14 years here, the hon. member's speech has been one of the finest speeches ever in the House of Commons.

My father was a letter carrier in south Marpole for many years in Vancouver, British Columbia. The proudest moment as an immigrant to this country was when he got a job with Canada Post, which meant that he had medical benefits, dental benefits, and not just for him and his wife, but for the nine children that he had. It was the proudest moment of his day when he was on SW Marine Drive and put that postal cap on.

Does the hon. Leader of the Opposition believe that the government's real agenda is the privatization of Canada Post?

Government Orders

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for his comments just now and the story about his father. It is a touching story and underlines so many points. He summarized in 30 seconds what it took me half an hour to try to explain, and I appreciate it.

The question really addresses a fear that many have, which is that the government would degrade public services to the point where people's complaints about them begin to increase and, therefore, there are calls for privatization. We have seen this occur before and that, naturally, is a concern. I did not elaborate on it here but it naturally is a concern for a great many of us.

• (2150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the official opposition leader's speech, and I am wondering if he did not overlook a certain aspect of the situation. I was here in 1997 when back-to-work legislation was passed. In that bill, the legislator included provisions that required the mediator or arbitrator to take the importance of good labour-management relations into account.

However, the bill that we are debating today does not include any such provisions. There is therefore a danger that, once the regulations are imposed, the work atmosphere will not be conducive to good working relations and this will have a negative impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall postal system. The arbitrator responsible for the final offer is not the person who has to live with the consequences of his decision. Can the leader of the opposition tell us whether he also hopes that such provisions are included in the bill?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's comments clearly reflect his experience. He is right and we share the same concerns about this bill. That is why we proposed discussing amendments to try to address the shortfalls of the current bill.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition said in his speech that he is opposed to this bill, but he also said that he wants to propose amendments to improve it.

[*English*]

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned several times in his speech that he is willing to improve the legislation. What exactly are the amendments that he proposes to bring forward?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of amendments touching on a number of areas that we are preparing to submit. However, it would be particularly valuable if the government would indicate a willingness to talk about amendments, because it might be possible to agree on a package of proposals that could meet our various objectives, which is why I am reluctant to run through a long list.

Ms. Eve Adams: Don't be shy.

Hon. Jack Layton: I am being called upon to be less shy, Mr. Speaker. That is the first time that has ever happened.

In my remarks, I touched on quite a number of the areas that concern us, such as impacts on pensions, the way in which a two-tier structure is set up, lower salaries and the tone and structure that is

being established for any arbitration. In fact, I would have to say that the structure that has been recommended, where there would be a process of mediation to be then followed by final offer selection, is completely and utterly unworkable.

No mediator or arbitrator would be able to work in that sort of situation. It would be like, as one member said, playing poker, spending time showing our cards to the very person who we will ultimately have play against and then moving to the actual game of poker later. That is not how negotiations work.

Those are some of the areas where we would have concerns.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to the bill. Fully recognizing and appreciating the greater sense of decorum here in the 41st Parliament and the greater degree of collegiality, I would ask the House if I might split my time with the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, there are a great number of aspects of the bill that cause concern, and some have been raised by the previous speaker. I would like to put a bit more meat on the bones and be somewhat more specific. There are two things about the approach that the government has taken on this legislation.

First, the government would like to paint the picture that the Canada Post workers are on strike. We know, and we know through the comments of the previous speaker, that that in fact is not the case. These workers have been locked out by Canada Post. We need to understand that is the situation. These workers have offered to go back to meetings with senior officials with Canada Post and have offered to go back to work. They said that they would go back under the past agreement. Any time people are off the job because of a labour dispute, it is not fun. There is absolutely no joy in this for the workers.

I know the government has—

• (2155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. There is an awful lot of noise in the House. I would invite members to find their way to their respective lobbies and we will let the member for Cape Breton—Canso continue.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, the government read a number of emails and letters that it would have received over the last couple of days and we fully appreciate the impact that some Canadians have experienced because of the lockout. We know there has been an impact on some businesses. We know there has been an impact on some charities. We know that some individuals have been inconvenienced.

Government Orders

It has not been rosy for the workers. I shared earlier an instance where a Canada Post worker who had been delivering mail and had been going about his route. He was up on a porch and a dog ran around the corner. The postman was loaded down with mail. The dog came at him and he fell back off the step. He cracked his arm in five places. He has undergone significant surgery. He is having a heck of a time, but we know that his benefits are cut off. Anybody who is suffering any kind of hardship has his or her benefits cut off.

I have two friends who work with Canada Post, Cliff and Lorraine Murphy. If we want to put a face on postal workers, Cliff has been there for over 25 years. Lorraine has been a long-time employee. They are great members of the community. Cliff, year after year, is a committed volunteer in the community coaching young ball players, having an impact on young people's lives. For Lorraine it is the same thing. She sorts the mail. She is an incredible person. She takes in members of the major junior hockey team, the Cape Breton Screaming Eagles, and she is a billet for the hockey team. She gets up at four o'clock and does her work. She comes home and provides a home atmosphere for young major junior hockey players. Trying to keep them fed is no easy chore, but she is the mother for those players as well. Cliff and Lorraine Murphy make that commitment to the community.

The postal workers are people we live beside, that we live with, who provide a tremendous service for us. They are hurting too and they would like to have this resolved, but they certainly do not want to have it resolved in the manner that the government has undertaken to resolve it, which is to come in with the sledgehammer, with this piece of legislation. That is not the way to find agreement on this.

There are a number of aspects of the proposed legislation that cause us great concern. We would hope, ideally, that the sides would come together and find their way through this so that the service is provided, people get back to work and that way everyone wins. However, we believe that the way the legislation is written and with the provisions in the legislation it greatly handcuffs the ability to find a way through.

I wish to consider specifically clause 11(2), guiding principle:

(2) In making the selection of a final offer, the arbitrator is to be guided by the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries—

On comparable postal industries, there is only one Canada Post. There are private companies that provide similar services, but for the cost of a postage stamp they are not delivering to Nunavut. They are not bringing mail to rural communities and remote communities in this country. There is nothing comparable to Canada Post.

Under “guiding principle” it is also important that they:

provide the necessary degree of flexibility to ensure the short- and long-term economic viability and competitiveness of the Canada Post Corporation, maintain the health and safety of its workers and ensure the sustainability of its pension plan—

So we further handcuff the arbitrator by putting in these provisions.

They also identify in paragraph 11(2)(a):

that the solvency ratio of the pension plan must not decline as a direct result of the new collective agreement—

We know that points to the end of the defined benefit pension plan. We know that is what is being identified in that paragraph.

● (2200)

When we move amendments these are clauses in the legislation that we would like to see taken out. The minister said earlier that she would be amenable to these types of amendments and I really hope she is.

Clause 13(3) talks about salaries. It says that the salaries should be no greater than those offered in section 15, and we see what is offered in section 15. The government has put rates forward that are lower than those offered by Canada Post prior to the tabling of this legislation. That makes no sense at all.

We hope that these clauses within the legislation will be taken out. That would give far greater latitude to an arbitrator to put a deal together, a deal that would assure a safe, healthy and productive work environment. Any interruption would be a thing of the past. We think this would be productive.

We want to work toward a positive conclusion to this lockout. We in the Liberal Party would like to do what we can to make sure that we can find some kind of pragmatic approach to this so that we get mail delivered, we get the people back to work and get this thing over with.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue of the wage percentages in the legislation simply reflects what the public service has received. I hope that answers the member's question.

The parties have been negotiating since October and the labour minister has already outlined all the steps, the timelines and the considerable amount of effort that has gone into bringing the two parties together and yet they have not been able to come together. Would the member not agree that it was time for legislation to be brought forward to bring Canada Post and its workers back to serving the people of Canada to ensure that the Canadian economy continues to recover instead of having this very unfortunate situation? Would the member not agree that it is time for the government to act?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, these things have due process. They have a path that they follow on their own. IWK Health Centre nurses signed a contract today in Nova Scotia. Their contract lapsed in October 2009 and they have been negotiating since then. They resolved the issues. There were no last hours worked. There were no interruptions in the work service. These things can be done.

If the government had made it imperative that both sides sit down and get this deal done rather than coming in with the heavyhanded, tilted approach that really handcuffed any hope that the workers would get a fair deal out of this then we would be further ahead and we would not be here tonight and over this weekend.

Government Orders

• (2205)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my friend from Cape Breton and I have also been listening to the comments coming from the Conservative benches, in particular the Minister of Labour, who somehow managed on three occasions in her speech to misconstrue the entire situation by calling it a strike rather than what it is, which is a lockout. I do not know if that was wilful ignorance or a lack of experience in dealing with these kinds of things. We here on the New Democratic benches have a lot of experience in this.

Is the very reason that we have these labour laws in place not because some time ago when there were many strikes and many disruptions employers asked for some sort of fair negotiating practice alongside working people? To undermine this process takes us back to a time when we had more strikes, more disruption of services and they destabilized the very economy that Conservatives seem to care so much about but do so little about.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, when I posed the question to the minister, she referenced the fact that the lockout was triggered by rotating strikes.

There were 25 different places where these strikes took place. It tied up a minimal amount of mail over that period of time. It had limited, if any, impact. It allowed the workers to get their message out.

It was looked upon as if rotating strikes were illegal in this country. We know they are not. They are long accepted. They are a legitimate process. They have been used on a great number of occasions in various labour disputes. It was not a fair assessment to put them in the light that this was a radical tactic that was assumed by the union and that this would throw everything into peril. It was not a fair rendition of exactly what was taking place. It was heavyhanded on the part of Canada Post to come in with a lockout.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso and the House for allowing me to share his time.

First of all, I acknowledge that, from time to time, there may be circumstances when the government and Parliament must intervene to put an end to a strike and force a return to work.

In my time as an MP, I have participated in such debates on a few occasions and have had to vote on the issues. There was mention of 1997, the last time there was a postal strike. That is one case. There was also the strike affecting grain producers in western Canada who were unable to deliver their products.

However, this is not the only means the government can use to help. I will give another example of parliamentary intervention. After the 2008 election, the government was faced with a situation that I will talk about later. The Prime Minister prorogued Parliament. A few days later, OC Transpo, Ottawa's public transit company, went on strike. The strike lasted 53 days during the winter. It was very difficult for the people of our city. When Parliament resumed in January 2009, I asked for an emergency debate at the earliest opportunity. The Speaker at the time scheduled a debate for the next

day because Parliamentary staff had to be able to make arrangements to return home in the evening.

In the meantime, knowing that there would be a debate in the House the next day, the two parties, which were at serious odds and very far apart in their respective positions, agreed to go to arbitration. The strike was settled.

The government can also intervene by using its moral authority, by debating, as we are doing at present, but not by making threats.

Let me set up the backdrop to this situation. I want to go back to the 2008 election. Those who were here and everyone in Canada will remember that, following the election, the government was supposed to provide a fiscal update. When the government provided the House with the update, it added certain elements that had never been discussed during the election. One of those elements was to suspend the right of public servants to strike. Parliament had recognized that right to strike in the 1960s under the leadership of Lester Pearson. The right to strike has never really been misused in Canada, but it did strike a balance between management and the union's need to assert its rights. Without notice, the government was proposing to suspend public servants' right to strike.

The three opposition parties at the time agreed to say no, and that led to the prorogation I talked about earlier. The government did not change its mind, at least not at the time.

Here is another factor: a few days ago, an Air Canada union went on strike after an agreement could not be reached. Everyone agreed that Canadians who use Air Canada had not suffered very much because of that strike—as there are other ways to fly other than Air Canada. In less than 24 hours, less than a day after the strike began, the government still tabled back-to-work legislation. The legislation did not have to be considered because an agreement was concluded. That being said, like anyone with a background in labour, I am sure that negotiations are attempted once it becomes known that back-to-work legislation is planned.

The third factor in this backdrop is the current Canada Post situation. Following unsuccessful negotiations and its members' overwhelming vote, the Canada Post union decided to launch a rotating strike that affected local mail delivery. However, the union members and representatives agreed to deliver cheques to those who needed them at all times. They still showed some flexibility.

• (2210)

On June 9, they proposed going back to work if Canada Post agreed to restore the clauses that were in the old collective agreement. But Canada Post did much more than just refuse; it put the locks on the doors and imposed a lockout, while negotiations were still under way. That is unheard of. While the negotiations were still under way, the government showed up with a bill to force workers back to work after a lockout. That makes no sense.

Government Orders

This backdrop is very worrisome for anyone who believes in the legitimacy and legality of the right to strike. We are in a situation where a right has been recognized in this country for decades, a right that has its place, a right that creates problems for the employer whose workers are on strike or for the people who use and need the services in question. There are other considerations, however. There is the essential nature of the service affected, but that is not what we are talking about. I think it is understood that this situation is disruptive to business owners and perhaps charitable organizations. But by its very nature, a strike must cause disruption in order to bring pressure to bear at the bargaining table. That is what the union was trying to do and what Canada Post never wanted. We are all aware that Canada Post has just one shareholder and that is the Crown, in this instance, the majority Conservative government, which acts for the Crown.

This backdrop is very worrisome for anyone who believes in upholding rights that have existed in a nation decade after decade, Parliament after Parliament. That is why—as the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso mentioned—we are going to propose certain amendments; this is a draconian piece of legislation and needs to be less rigid.

As I said, we accept that there may be times when the government can and must take action, but this is not one of them. As the leader of my party noted, the government is wielding a club or a hammer, and is coming at every problem as if it were a nail. This is not the way to resolve problems, this is not how society evolves, and this is not how one shows respect.

I hope that in its desire to take action, the government will take people's rights into consideration. Our record on that score is an honourable one. There have been significant advances in the field of labour rights in this country. The circumstances here are unique, as is the backdrop against which these events are unfolding. We have a government that, when it was in a minority position, talked about suspending the right to strike. We have a union that decided to strike and that was ordered back to work by the government less than 24 hours after walking out. Now, we have a government that tabled back-to-work legislation even while the parties were still at the bargaining table, because the employer locked out all of its employees. I hope that everyone who is listening to these proceedings recognizes that this situation is extremely disturbing.

And, here, I think the government needs to show some flexibility and make some concessions to find a solution, preferably a negotiated settlement. Let us get back to the bargaining table—the union has said it is ready—and ensure that mail gets delivered in the meantime.

To conclude, only once all of the truly genuine, frank and honest attempts have been made and failed, only at that time can we fathom the government returning to Parliament. Nothing is keeping the government from bringing Parliament back this summer. Right now we are being called on to sit for 48 or 72 hours. Instead of doing that, they could ask the union and Canada Post managers to reach a settlement through negotiations and, when that happens, everyone could work with the best deal and in a better environment. But if that is not the case, things could be quite challenging at Canada Post for some time to come.

● (2215)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member and for all members of the opposition about how they are characterizing the debate.

This came to me shortly after I delivered a speech this afternoon. It says:

“I am a letter carrier and so is my spouse. We have four children. Please pass this legislation as soon as possible. This is not what we wanted, not what we expected. We never wanted a strike. We feel that we were deceived and misled by our union about the power given to them with a strike mandate. There have been four more offers from the company since the original offer that we have not been given the opportunity to vote on. A lot of us feel this way, not just my spouse and I”.

How would the member respond to letter carriers who feel they should get back to the job? That is what we are about to do from our government side.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I will respond simply by repeating what I have said before: a strike causes disruption. That is what a strike is meant to do—disrupt things and put pressure on the employer to bargain at the bargaining table. That is why they are used. Not everyone who was asked their opinion was in favour of striking. Only about 90% were. So I imagine that the person who sent the message to the hon. member was part of the group that did not want to strike. I have no problem believing that. It could also be said that a large number of Canadians did not choose this government.

● (2220)

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier for his comments. I just read his parliamentary file, and I see that he has been in Parliament for over 16 years, since 1995. As I am a new member, I would like to benefit from his parliamentary experience. I am certain that he was politically astute before he came here, and I would like to know if he knows of any government that ever acted with so much contempt for workers?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, Mr. Speaker, I have not. I began my speech by saying that I recognize there can be circumstances in which the government must in fact take action. As a member of Parliament, I have been called upon on several occasions to vote on this type of bill. I mentioned the situation that occurred in 1997. However, the current situation and that of 1997 are not really comparable. So, to answer the hon. member's question, I would say that I do not believe that other governments have behaved in this manner. I am not talking about the 1800s, but in modern times I do not believe that there has been a government that created or tried to create a situation so worrisome to Canada's workers.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's comments and I remind the member that there were eight months of negotiations. The Minister of Labour made every effort to bring the two parties together.

Government Orders

The member referred to the rotating strikes, which effectively had a devastating impact on Canada Post and the company responded with a lockout. The two parties are clearly not coming together and they are not going to come to an agreement.

The major stakeholder is not the union, it is not management; it is the people of Canada, it is the economy of Canada and it is the families of Canada. This situation has to come to an end.

Why will this member not support the government's back to work legislation?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, the minister can repeat the same gibberish as much as he likes but it does not change the way things really are. I said what I said and I believe it to be true. Just because the government is telling people stories and saying it has done everything it can to resolve the situation does not mean that people are going to believe it. This is what the government is doing, through its bill: it is supporting a lockout. That has never been done and we should not support such a measure.

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Leader of the Opposition provide his remarks on this legislation. I have a lot of respect for him. I actually agree with many of the sentiments he expressed, although I disagree with some of the specifics about which he also talked.

Notwithstanding some of the perhaps intellectually disingenuous conclusions and analogies made in parts of his speech, his speech underscored that as Canadians, regardless if we are members of the NDP, the Conservatives, Liberals or whichever party, there is much more that brings us together and unites us than divides us.

Today we are discussing Bill C-6. The bill is intended to bring together Canadians in the united cause of getting their mail service back. I am pleased to speak to Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services in Canada.

Our government believes that parties of all labour disputes should be allowed to find their own solutions. Most of the time this happens. Our government does not take back to work legislation lightly. Back to work legislation is a last resort when all other avenues have been exhausted. Unfortunately, the two parties have not been able to reach an agreement, despite being at the negotiating table since last October.

This is not the first time Canadian citizens and businesses have had to suffer the effects of a work stoppage involving postal services. In fact, I remind my colleagues that in 1997, back to work legislation was used to resolve a dispute at Canada Post. This legislation also included guiding principles and wage rates.

Our government does everything possible to help the parties in a labour dispute resolve their differences without a work stoppage. However, I will spend a few minutes reviewing the impact of Canada's postal system on our country's business sector.

When people consider the importance of Canada Post, they often think in terms of individual Canadians, as they should. Canada Post is an iconic Canadian corporation. It unites Canadians from coast to coast to coast, whether urban or rural, in houses, condos or

apartments. Be it families, seniors, students, kids or their grandparents, Canada Post is a uniting force in our country.

Canada Post also has a significant number of businesses that it affects in various industries across the country that rely on traditional mail services to fulfill their commercial undertakings and achieve profitable results.

Although Canadian businesses are recovering from the setbacks faced in the 2008 recession, we are still in a fragile state. We only need to look around the world to see how fragile the situation is. Though Canada has exited the economic downturn stronger and faster than most of our companions in our—

• (2225)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if you could confirm for me whether quorum is present in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I see quorum. We will let the Minister of State for Transport continue.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I do not fault the NDP member for having a problem with the numbers. That is not uncommon with the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The Minister of State is in the middle of his speech and I would ask that the chamber at least stop the additional noise and we will allow the Minister of State to continue.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I think there are more interruptions than there are members in the House, perhaps. However—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If the government stayed in the House, there would be enough people and we would not have to call for a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I do not know that this is a point of order, but we will take that in stride.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member across the way indicated there were no Liberals in the House. I can assure the member that there were at least two Liberals, which is just as many as there were New Democrats. It is not that difficult to count.

To have a quorum, is it just a quick count, or is there a need to identify the members who are present when a quorum is called?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is really not a point of order, but to answer the member's question for the benefit of other members, there needs to be 20 members present in the chamber to maintain quorum.

• (2230)

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, one Liberal member is half as many as there were in Manitoba before the last federal election. I think the hon. member will appreciate the significance of the number one.

It is a very serious issue when Canada Post has a work stoppage. There are, as I was saying, many iconic images about Canada Post and how it affects individuals. I want to take a moment, though, to reflect on the effect that Canada Post has on businesses.

Government Orders

Many industries still rely on traditional mail service to fulfill their commercial undertakings and to achieve profitable results. Although Canadian businesses are recovering from setbacks in the last recession, we only need to look around the world at the various challenges other countries are having such as sovereign debt crises, be it geopolitical. Many things could cause Canada a lot of grief.

Let us not create challenges within our own country. This is what we are trying to avoid when we bring forward back to work legislation. Our goal is to help Canadians achieve their full potential monetarily, individually and personally. As a result of the demands of the new world economy and efficiencies, Canada Post Corporation is implementing a major infrastructure renewal program.

The member for Winnipeg North, who intervened earlier, will know that one of these great new facilities is in Winnipeg, on the boundary of our ridings. These infrastructure renewal programs help Canada Post achieve efficiencies and become more competitive.

Infrastructure renewal projects are expected to bring around changes that will improve the corporation's efficiencies and its flexibility. The government expects that these changes will also result in benefits for Canadian businesses through more expedient mail delivery, as well as new types of services.

Businesses, especially small business, will continue to rely on traditional mail as an important channel of communication, marketing and delivery of parcels. In fact, Canadian mailers can depend on Canada Post to account for more than 500,000 jobs and Canada Post is the largest enabler of remote trade and commerce in the Canadian economy. Although parcels can be delivered by private courier companies, Canada Post is often engaged to provide the last-mile delivery outside the Montreal-Windsor corridor and other major urban centres.

The number of Canadian businesses that customers of Canada Post rely on is impressive. The corporation has reported that it has about 100,000 commercial customers, over 5,000 of which do more than \$50,000 worth of business over a 12-month period, a statistic that clearly demonstrates the importance of Canada Post to small business and the corporate situation in Canada.

Canada Post has 60% of the market share of the business-to-customer market among businesses of less than 10 employees. This work stoppage is hurting these small businesses. In fact, a local small businessman in my riding contacted me today, requesting that this legislation be passed immediately because it is damaging his business.

As much as the postal service is important to businesses, it is equally, if not more, important to Canada's charitable sector. National charities like the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Alzheimer Society, just to name a few, rely on mail to receive more than \$1 billion in donations each year.

The current work stoppage is having a material effect on this important segment of Canada's society because 25% of all fundraising is received in late spring or early summer.

● (2235)

We cannot let this interruption of businesses and charities continue.

Many businesses are turning to alternative modes of communication as a result of the present work stoppage. However, there are some for which there is no alternative. There are small businesses without the ability or technology to conduct their business online. Some small businesses are using other courier companies to deliver their packages but are finding that they have to pay more than when they used Canada Post. This is also affecting the corporation's own profitability and competitiveness.

Most small businesses and charities still rely on Canada Post for billing purposes and fundraising. This work stoppage is drying up their cashflow. These additional costs are hurting our own small businesses which, in turn, hurts the Canadian economy.

In short, mail is an important enabler of Canadian commerce and it is now being threatened by this work stoppage.

At this point, there is no one in this chamber who would not have preferred that Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers had negotiated a collective agreement that each was comfortable with. But we must face facts: They are not able to resolve their differences. The impact on our country is mounting. Now the government must act. It must legislate the parties back to work. They cannot reach a negotiated agreement, so an arbitrator will be chosen for them.

As I said, there is a mounting impact on Canadian businesses, individuals and governments due to this mail stoppage. I am also concerned about the impact this will have on Canadian taxpayers.

First, the threat of strike action and the reality of rotating strikes raised significant uncertainty about the mail delivery in Canada, and now the situation is affecting individuals and every Canadian family. Couples wonder when their wedding invitations will make it to their loved ones. Grandmothers cannot send birthday greetings to their grandchildren. Students are waiting for course material and university acceptances. Canadians and their families want to share in the Canada Post experience. We all remember getting that handwritten letter from a loved one or that first letter from an employer or that first paycheque after a long couple of weeks of work.

The advancement of telecommunications has caused Canada Post to lose letter volume. This is true for postal services throughout the world. The combined loss of mail volume and growth of Canadian communities causes a great burden for Canada Post. There have been 200,000 new addresses added each year. Direct mail delivery has become more costly as a result. Add to that the mail customers that will never return to Canada Post as a result of this mail stoppage. I worry about Canada Post's ability to remain in the black.

Government Orders

Parliament established expectations for Canada Post through the Canada Post Corporation Act and the Financial Administration Act. Canada Post is to provide universal service at affordable rates while remaining financially self-sustaining. It is expected to earn a return on equity, to pay a dividend and to operate without reliance on government appropriations.

We are in a situation that is very serious. Canada Post is unable to deliver the mail. We can look at the months of negotiations and the tireless efforts of the labour minister to bring the two parties together. We can also look at individual families from coast to coast to coast, urban and rural, apartment dwellers, condo dwellers and homeowners. We can look at every corner of Canadian society. When we do, we see that Canada Post plays a role.

• (2240)

Our economy is in a fragile state of recovery. Canada Post's involvement in the Canadian economy involves hundreds of thousands of individuals and companies, and billions of dollars in transactions. The situation at Canada Post is unsustainable. The government must act in a timely and thorough manner. It is not the preferred course. Back to work legislation is the last resort but at this point it is the only resort.

I call on all members to stand up, not for Canada Post or the Canadian Union of Public Workers, but to stand up for Canadians so that Canadians can get their mail. The back to work legislation would allow that to happen and it would allow Canada to fight a good fight in the world economy and allow for economic recovery.

Together we can make this happen and we need to do it in a timely manner.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister talked about the serious situation. He talked Canada Post being profitable. We know it is profitable and it will be even more profitable. Given the technological changes that are going through, it will have a profit of an additional \$250 million.

How serious is it that we are dealing with this issue today? It is very serious. I have a colleague from Newton—North Delta who will actually forego her 40th wedding anniversary and her husband's 60th birthday. I have another colleague who will be thanking all of her volunteers on this issue. I can say that this is very serious.

The minister talked about the economy. I have an email from a constituent of mine. Basically she talked about the economy, because she has not been able to get her vulnerable persons cheque from the RCMP, and she applied in March 2011. She is about to lose everything she owns. Why is the economy not important on this issue but only on the issues that the government wants it to be, like taking the rights away from workers?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, on the preamble to the member's question, I point out that Canada Post has assets of \$7 billion or \$8 billion, in that range. It is in the black, and the range, I think the member suggested a higher number than it actually is, but even if we used the member's numbers, the return on investment is not a very high number by any stretch of the imagination, and anything that is in the black at present is being reinvested in appropriations in the infrastructure that I have talked about.

That is now all in jeopardy because of this work stoppage. Canada Post has lost over \$100 million since these rotating strikes began. Canada Post is in a very serious situation. The future of Canada Post is in jeopardy and that makes it very difficult for the very people who that member claims to support. If the NDP were really genuine about that situation, it would support the government's back to work legislation. It is very simple.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister said that this was a work stoppage. Many of his caucus colleagues prefer to call it strike. The reality is that it is actually neither in the sense that it is a lockout, and there is a significant difference.

I believe that cabinet was aware of the lockout that Canada Post was putting into place. Does he believe that Canada Post did not tell the government about putting into place a lockout? Was the cabinet aware before Canada Post put it into place?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, all crown corporations are arm's-length from government. They are run by a board of directors. They have a management team. The management team makes decisions regarding the day to day operations of any corporation. The government does not get involved. As minister responsible for Canada Post, I do not get involved in the day to day operations of the corporation.

• (2245)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the minister's speech and found him to be very reasonable and very convincing.

What I find very unreasonable is the NDP turning its backs on the tens of millions of Canadians across the country who are not at the bargaining table but who are suffering material damage because of this strike.

I do remind members of the NDP that these are the Canadians who elected them and yet they are turning their backs on them tonight.

I would ask the minister to please comment on this.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, that is a relevant question when we look at the situation. The NDP just had its national convention. There was an opportunity for the NDP to cut its ties with organized labour but it chose not to, which is fine as that is part of being a democracy.

However, it shows Canadians which party in this House is beholden to which stakeholder and, obviously, the NDP are beholden to organized labour, which is obviously involved in this dispute.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's concern for the economy but the reality is that it is not only about the economy. This is about democracy. It is about how the checks and balances in our society function. We have to ask if there is such a thing as a right to strike when governments can make a simple call and lock out workers.

I will paint a picture. The government wants to privatize Canada Post so it creates a crisis, blames everything on union labour and prepares the ground to proceed to privatization.

Government Orders

Could the minister confirm that this is what the government actually wants to do?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I really want to see the member's artistic ability because I think the painting that he would draw would have a lot of black helicopters circling around our country. I have no idea how the member could come up with such a preposterous notion.

Again I go back to my previous comment that crown corporations are arm's-length from government. The government represents the stakeholders in Canada who are the people of Canada. The people of Canada have recently elected a strong, stable, majority government.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a quick letter from a constituent tonight. It reads:

We operate an art business in the Yukon that ships art to over 50 galleries in North America. With the current postal strike, our shipping costs have become insane. Our business is not viable without Canada Post.

With most of our business occurring in the summer, we will soon be realizing significant financial losses that we will not be able to recover from.

Could the minister please assure Shadow Lynx Artworks that the Conservative government is standing up for all Canadians and small business across this country?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Yukon on his arrival here in the House of Commons.

I think it is very apropos that a member from Yukon asks a question on this issue, because it is people in the north and in rural communities who will feel the work stoppage acutely because Canada Post is the only entity that can provide the service of mail delivery.

The sentiment of the business, if we take that and multiply it by a million times, we would have a sense of the magnitude of the situation.

The answer to the business and to all Canadians is that the government is absolutely committed to ensuring that mail service is provided so that businesses and individuals can get their mail and reach their full potential, be it as businesses or as individuals.

The Conservative government stands behind the people of Canada.

• (2250)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have one minute for a brief question and a brief answer.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it quite astounding that the Conservative government is claiming to stand behind Canadians and ordinary people who want to receive their mail, their letters, as well as behind SMEs that do not have access to all their mail. I would like to remind the Conservatives that they are the ones who caused this crisis. The Conservatives are the ones who imposed the lockout on workers.

Will the Conservatives lift the lockout and solve the problem?

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I am astounded by the lack of understanding of the relationship between the government and a crown corporation. The government cannot do what the member has suggested because the government does not play a role in the day to day operations of any crown corporation. It is an arm's-length organization.

What the government can do is help bring parties together. The labour minister has tried to do that over an eight-month period but the parties have not done so. There were rotating strikes that were causing huge problems for the corporation and costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

We are at the brink here. We need to bring forth back to work legislation, otherwise there will be a very difficult economic situation and a very difficult personal situation for millions of Canadians. There is no choice but to pass the back to work legislation. I wish the opposition parties would do this in a timely manner and save a whole lot of people a lot of grief.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was unable to ask the minister any questions, and therefore I will ask questions that will go unanswered. The minister just said that it is not the role of the government to meddle in the affairs of a crown corporation, and that we should have a better understanding of that. In my speech, I have one question that will go unanswered: In the bill, why is the Conservative government's offer lower than that of the employer, which is a crown corporation? The minister is trying to make Canadians believe that he is not interfering in the affairs of the crown corporation, and that such is not his role. And yet, he wants to pass a bill where he would impose a wage settlement.

He says that Canada Post's last offer for 2011 was a 1.9% increase. Instead, the Conservative government is offering 1.57%. For 2012, the employer, the crown corporation—and the government is boasting that it is not interfering in the operations of the latter—had offered 1.9%. The Conservative government, which does not interfere in the affairs of the crown corporation, is offering 1.5% in the bill. For 2013, Canada Post made a final offer of 1.9%. Again, the government is changing managements's offer to 2% for 2013 and 2% for 2014. The wage increases offered to Canada Post employees were 3.3%, well below the rate of inflation. There will be no response from the minister, but I would have liked one. Let us not forget that the government does not interfere in the affairs of the crown corporation.

In addition, the minister said that the government's role was to implement a mechanism to bring the parties to the negotiating table. According to the mechanism I am familiar with, when we bring the employees and employer to the negotiating table, we also bring an arbitrator and we do not tell the arbitrator what to do, other than to try to strike a balance between the two and come to an agreement. If the two parties cannot reach an agreement, it is up to the arbitrator to make the final decision.

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Again, the minister, who says he does not interfere with a crown corporation's operations and that we should understand that, says that the arbitrator must select the final offer put on the table. Let us consider that. I do not know whether the minister responsible for Canada Post, who just spoke this evening, knows what is involved in the bargaining process. However, I do know. I am a former negotiator and I have negotiated countless collective agreements. If a bill, which will become law, includes a provision for an eight-week mediation period—one of the proposals that has been made—and the arbitrator must then proceed with the final offer, what will the employer do? It will not pursue the mediation process. It will not reach an agreement with the employees because the arbitrator is supposed to make the final offer. However, in the past, every time an arbitrator went into the arbitration process with a final offer, the arbitrator has always sided with the employer, as the Conservative Government is now doing. That is what always happens.

So, if the government does not want to interfere with the negotiations, why does it not accept standard procedure: making amendments to the bill?

• (2255)

The leader of the NDP has said that we were open and prepared to make amendments that would give power to the arbitrator and, if the mediation process does not lead to an agreement, a collective agreement would be presented and the parties would have to accept it. The union proposed that part.

As we understand it, mediation involves an arbitrator and, at the end of the day, the final offer put forward by both parties must be accepted. That will prevent the employer from making an agreement because it knows that the other one is better. That is the same thing that the minister should understand: by bringing wages lower than what was previously offered by the employer, the crown corporation, how can we expect the crown corporation to return to the bargaining table to work out a collective agreement when it knows that the government will protect it?

In 2009, Canada Post made a \$281 million profit. How much profit did it make in 2010? I would like to know, because Canada Post is taking a long time to provide us with that figure; the information is already two months late. How many millions of dollars in profits did it make? Where does the money go in the case of a surplus? Canada Post has made a profit every year for the past 12 or 13 years.

Does Canada Post have several billion dollars in the bank, or has the money been transferred instead to the Government of Canada? And if the money has been turned over to the Government of Canada, that would explain why it is interfering in the collective bargaining process of a crown corporation. It wants this money. It is denying workers their vested rights. In its budget, the government boasted that it was cutting the taxes on workers, but at the same time, it is cutting their wages and in the process, offsetting any tax breaks awarded. That is unacceptable.

In his speech, the minister spoke of the elderly woman waiting to receive her lovely card, of persons needing their mail and of a small business needing postal services. At no time, however, did he mention the worker who needs his pension plan, or the worker who needs a decent salary or who cannot work if he is not paid the same

salary as his colleagues. The minister never mentioned occupational health and safety for the workers. He never said anything about the letter carriers who deliver the mail during the winter in rural areas, under the incredibly harsh conditions that we regularly experience here in Canada. He never once spoke up for workers—never!

However, he stated that the NDP could have resolved the matter in Vancouver by turning its back on workers, as the Conservative did. That will not happen. We are talking about the men and women who get up each morning and who work to build this country. Small and medium-sized businesses are also made up of workers and we respect them just as we do any employer.

I have always had respect for Noranda, the company that I worked for. It is a major employer. The only thing I told Noranda was that if it made money, it should share it with its employees. Is there anything wrong with that? I do not have a problem with a company making money. I want it to make money, but it should share it with the workers who helped it turn a profit. The president of the company was not the one who went underground to mine the earth and break the rocks and put his life in danger. The miners were the ones who did that.

If I understand correctly, the minister would like the NDP to forget about the workers. His approach is to single out certain workers.

• (2300)

This time there are just 45,000 workers and 33 million Canadians. But those 45,000 workers were shown the door and told that they would receive no protection because the other 33 million people need to be taken care of. Next it will be the men and women who work at Radio-Canada. Then it will be those working at the CBC. Everyone will be subject to the Conservative government's tactics.

And that is why I asked the Minister of Labour and even the Prime Minister what the workers did to make them hate workers so much? If they believe in free bargaining for a collective agreement, why, after the parties were not able to come to an agreement, did they intervene and offer a lower salary than the one on the table? What did these people, who work and build our country, do to deserve this? All of these people work hard. People leave Caraquet, Shippagan, Bathurst, Tracadie-Sheila, Lamèque, Miscou, Grande-Anse and Maisonnette; they leave their families to work hard out west. Yes, they make good money, but think about the cost of being separated from family. What did these people do to the Conservative government? The NDP has chosen to respect the working men and women of our country.

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The Conservatives and the Liberals are the same in this regard. I was in the House in 1997 when the Liberals legislated the postal workers back to work. They did the same thing. In the bill, they offered lower wages than what had been offered at the negotiating table. They do not have anything to brag about today. They do not have to come and tell us that things were different with them because the employees had been on strike for two weeks. The only thing they did in 1997 was legislate people back to work. Was it right to punish people and cut their salaries because they went on strike for two weeks? The Liberals should think about what they are saying. They should think twice about it because they did the same thing that the Conservatives are doing today. What are the Conservatives saying? They are saying that they are not doing anything different than the others; that the Liberals did it in 1997. Now, the Liberals are standing up and making a big fuss, like the member for Bourassa did this afternoon, and saying that what the government is doing is terrible.

It would be funny to go back through Hansard and read the member for Bourassa's speech. I would like to read what he said. I was here at that time. The hon. member for Bourassa and I can both speak rather loudly. Everyone in Quebec knows how the member for Bourassa can talk. That is what he did in 1997. When he rose, he did not speak in defence of the workers; he talked about just how selfish they were to have gone on strike.

I am telling the people at home and elsewhere in Canada that we are sympathetic to small and medium-sized businesses. We understand what they are going through. We understand the elderly woman who would like to receive her birthday card. If we let the Conservative government attack everyone the way it wants to, one small group after another, what kind of country will we create?

If I understood correctly, the Minister of Labour said that it is unacceptable for people not to receive their mail. She is saying that postal workers are second-class citizens who do not have the right to have a union, to negotiate a collective agreement and to go on strike like other people; she is saying that there has to be a lockout.

The government is going even further than that. It is saying that anyone who goes on strike is a second-class citizen because it is wrong. That person is bad because there are 33 million people who disagree.

Strikes are difficult. Things are not easy when there is a lockout. I know, I have been involved in a number of strikes. We went on strike many times. But today the miners have a pension fund and are able to retire because we took to the streets to fight the company for a share of the big bucks it was making.

• (2305)

In its bill, why does the government not ask Canada Post directors to take a pay cut as well? Why does the government not cut the salaries and pensions of the friends it has appointed as directors? It should also cut their salaries and pensions because they are well paid. Furthermore, the president of Canada Post gets a bonus. The leader of the NDP clearly made that point this evening. The greater the profit at Canada Post, the greater the bonuses for directors. This corporation wants to cut workers' wages after making a \$281 million profit last year.

The NDP leader spoke eloquently about the respect we should have for these workers. Each one of us should think about that. When letter carriers come to our homes, are they not courteous? Are we not happy to receive our mail? When this is over, they will continue to go to our homes, and we will have to look them in the eye. Are we going to be among those who tell them that we did not support their fight to keep their drug plan and long-term disability plan? We are talking about people who work for the crown corporation and who serve the public. Is this the 1940s? Are we headed back to the 1930s with the Conservative government?

The government is showing itself for the kind of government it is. That is fairly clear tonight. It has talked about the senior citizen, the person with a disability and the small businessperson waiting for the mail, but it has said nothing about the worker. I want the people listening tonight to hear that. I listened to the minister, and he talked about everybody except the workers. I am not ashamed to be fighting for the workers. Our parents and our grandparents were workers.

My father went out to cut down trees in the forest. He cut the wood. That was not the finest job, but it was respectable. The wood he cut was made into 2x4s, and rich people built themselves fine buildings with those planks. The miner who goes underground, the fisher who goes out to sea to fish, does the government not support them? I would like the Conservatives to think about that.

We could settle this tonight by amending the bill. We know the government wants to get its bill passed. Whether we like it or not, it has a majority. It says it has a strong, stable majority, but 40% of the people voted for them, of the 61% of the population who voted. That is not a large majority, but because of the system it has a majority in Parliament. The bill is going to pass, but that does not make it a good bill. Is the government using its bill to attack workers? Yes. Is the government putting a mechanism in place for signing a collective agreement with Canada Post workers? Maybe there will be one, but it will have been forced on them by the government. Does that make for good labour relations in future? No. I know that, because I have seen it.

When people are forced to do something, it does not work. If you force your child to do something, the child will not be happy. Would it not be better to help the child understand the reason for doing something? We call that bullying. That is what the government is doing.

• (2310)

[English]

It is bullying the worker and that is wrong. You are separating the workers. You are making a fight between the workers and the rest of society and that is wrong. I recommend to the government to think. We are going to be here all weekend and you have all weekend to think about it.

As a miner, I have done lots of night shifts and my first shift tonight is midnight to six and I even came in before to do my work. I will be here tomorrow morning at six. I will be here tomorrow. I will be here Saturday. I will be here Sunday to fight for the workers and we will do what we can to get respect for the men and women who built this country. That is what we will do.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I remind members to direct their comments and speeches toward the Chair.

[*Translation*]

The hon. Minister of State for Transport has the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I learned something tonight. The member and I were both involved in the mining industry before we entered politics, so we have something in common.

I am going to answer some questions that the member raised in his speech.

The wages are simply a reflection of what was already agreed to with the public service. That is where those numbers came from.

We are dealing with this in a very transparent manner and this is demonstrated by the fact that we are having this debate on the floor of the House of Commons. The legislation has been put forward so all Canadians can see what is going on.

The member talked about respect. These two parties have had eight months to come to an agreement and they have not done so. It is time for the government to demonstrate that it respects the people of Canada. Members in the House need to demonstrate that they respect small business, families, individuals, the stakeholders and the people of Canada. The best way to demonstrate this respect is through action and that is back to work legislation.

Would the member and his party demonstrate respect by supporting the government's legislation?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I was happy to hear that the minister worked in the mines and I hope the union negotiated a good contract for him. I hope he was happy to get his wages and that he was not on minimum wage. Miners in Mexico work for minimum wage. Miners in Africa work for minimum wage. I was hoping that he was getting that.

He said that the government had to get involved and do what it has done. Why did the government not come in with a bill giving workers 3% instead of 1.9% that the crown corporation was going to give them? That would tell Canada Post that it had better start to negotiate. Why did the government punish the workers? I think I answered the member's question.

• (2315)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have received a number of comments by email. For example, I have received comments from people who are waiting for cheques by mail.

[*English*]

I visited the picket line back home in Kingston and talked to the president of the local. Workers there say they want to work but they are locked out.

[*Translation*]

Everyone finds Bill C-6 unbelievable and believes it is a bad bill. I think a lot of Canadians agree with both points. They have heard what we have said tonight, but they are waiting.

[*English*]

They are waiting and they are starting to hear the same things over and over again.

[*Translation*]

What more can we do for them tonight, or even this morning?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, we can continue to call on the government to make amendments to the bill. Then we can vote, everyone can go home, the lockout will end and Canada Post employees will go back to work.

I am wondering if the member has received any messages from letter carriers who would like him to speak up on their behalf and ask the government or Canada Post to give them a good collective agreement. I find it odd that the members opposite are all receiving emails from people who work in small businesses. I have yet to hear them say that they had received an email from a letter carrier. I would like to know if in fact they have received any emails from letter carriers. I for one have received some from Canada Post workers.

Tonight, we can continue to press the government to make amendments to the bill. Maybe between now and tomorrow, the government members will see reason. If not tomorrow, then Saturday. If not Saturday, then Sunday. And if not Sunday, then Monday. All we can hope for is that they will be reasonable and make an offer. Then we can go home.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The speaker incorrectly identified the fact that we have not received emails from postal workers. We have. If he had been here previously, he would have heard them read out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That is not a point of order and we will move on.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, we are allowed to make comments.

What I said was did they not receive emails saying that the postal workers would like the government to be on their side instead of the employer's side? I was just asking a question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I think that is still a matter of debate.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as usual I enjoyed what my colleague had to say. He has a vast amount of experience representing working people and as a member of a trade union himself working hard in the mines.

We heard the minister earlier and the Minister of Labour as well speak with some frustration and impatience about the fact that negotiations have been going on for all of eight months and they have not been concluded. In other words, the government has decided that eight months is too long.

Would the member comment on his experience and what it was like to negotiate a complicated and complex collective agreement between two large parties?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, my experience has been that normally when negotiations last that long, it is because the employer does not show up at the negotiating table. If the employer does not show up at the table, the other party cannot negotiate by itself.

I ask the government to check how many times the union tried to get to the table but the employer refused to go. Maybe that would shed some light for the House of Commons. Maybe then the government would change its mind and tell Canada Post that it is a bad, bad crown corporation and that it needs to change the proposal in the legislation. Instead of a 1.75% increase which punishes the workers, maybe the government would put in a 3% increase to punish the employer because it is a bad, bad crown corporation under the government's wing.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned earlier the 2009 profits of Canada Post. I believe he mentioned \$281 million. He implied that the money went back into the coffers of the Government of Canada. If the member had read the annual report from Canada Post for 2009, he would have seen that Canada Post actually did not make a payment to its only shareholder, the Government of Canada. It put the money back into the transformative change and has done so every year since, the changes that are trying to keep a future for the corporation that would keep the union members employed.

The people I would like to ask him about, since it is not normal times, are the people who have been calling my office.

There is the lady who was a victim of crime and has been waiting for her small compensation cheque which has not arrived.

What about the injured workers who are not getting their provincial workers' compensation cheques because they are not being delivered?

What about the beekeeper? He has bees that travel across Canada, courtesy of Canada Post, to his customers who send him money. He is being hurt by this strike.

What about the small businessman who sent out his invoices and is waiting for some \$18,000 to come back at a time of economic recovery?

There is 16% unemployment in the Nanaimo. This strike is hurting people locally.

Finally, when the member says that we do not care about postal workers, I want to tell him that my dad was a letter carrier and I was very proud of that. He raised me and I am very proud that—

• (2320)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. We have to move on as we have little time left.

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The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member that out of respect for his dad he should vote against this bill. I would not be in the House fighting against my dad who was a woodcutter.

In answer to his question about the woman waiting for her cheque, how many unemployed people lost their EI cheques because the government took it away from them? It was the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. There was \$57 billion stolen from the working people because the government cut EI and they never got their cheques. Men and women who are having a hard time trying to live had their cheques taken away from them by the Conservative government. It should be ashamed. And tonight the government is trying to say that it cares for them.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The member is a well respected member in this House. I am sure he did not intentionally mislead Canadians by suggesting it was this government that in fact did that with the EI. The member knows full well it was not this government. He should stand and apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is really not a point of order. It is a matter of debate. Perhaps there will be opportunities for—

Is the member for Acadie—Bathurst is rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On that point, I want to correct the record.

Who passed a bill to have this new EI? Only \$2 billion will go into that fund, and yet \$55 billion was passed.

The Government of Canada passed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

I appreciate that there is interest in continuing the debate in this manner. However, we will try to restrict points of order to actual points of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give my 20 minutes to the member for Acadie—Bathurst, because I am sure he has a lot more to say and he is doing it in such an impassioned way, but I too am really proud to support the determined men and women who are locked out by Canada Post.

I have listened closely to the debate for the last few days, both on the two motions before us and now on the bill. I have to say the government is propagating the biggest misinformation campaign that I have ever witnessed in the House.

Let us look at the facts. Here is the actual timeline that led us to tonight's debate. On May 24, Canada Post issued a news release claiming that CUPW demands would cost \$1.4 billion. That number was never explained and indeed has never been substantiated. On June 1, Canada Post continued its misinformation campaign by claiming that mail volumes have declined by 17% since 2006.

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Then, on June 2 at 11:59 p.m., CUPW began rotating strikes. Almost immediately, on June 3, Canada Post cut off drug coverage and other benefits to all employees, including those on sick leave and disability insurance. On June 7, the Canada Post Corporation claimed that mail volumes have declined by 50%, just since June 3. The fact that this does not correspond with any information from postal facilities did not stop the government from propagating that myth.

On June 8, Canada Post announced that it would stop letter carrier delivery on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The following day, June 9, the labour minister requested that the union suspend its rotating strikes and that Canada Post resume postal service. Canada Post's chief operating officer responded by claiming that CUPW had more than 50 demands on the table, while at the same time renegeing on several of its offers. The union, on the other hand, agreed on June 10 to suspend strike activity and continue to negotiate. Sadly, that did not last very long. At 6 p.m., Canada Post management rejected the union's offer.

The first inkling that the government had the employer's back appeared on June 13, when CUPW astutely accused Canada Post of aggressively trying to force postal workers out on a full-scale national strike in order to secure back to work legislation from the majority Conservative government.

The next day, the quick movement from the ridiculous to the sublime began. In the morning on June 14, Canada Post claimed to have lost \$70 million in revenue since June 3, and in answering the question of a reporter at that time, the labour minister rightly said that there was no need for back to work legislation at Canada Post, since the labour stoppage was only a rotating strike and the mail was still being delivered.

By the evening of the very same day, Canada Post upped the ante on what was at stake and claimed that it had lost almost \$100 million in revenue since June 3, \$30 million more than it had claimed in the morning to have lost. Of course, it used that number as justification for an immediate national lockout.

It gets even better. Here is what happened next. Once again, pay attention to the shift between the morning and the afternoon position. In the morning of June 15, the labour minister said she had received very few complaints about the rotating postal strikes, but by afternoon, she announced that in response to Canada Post's national lockout, she would be introducing back to work legislation.

The manner by which Canada Post provoked the government to introduce back to work legislation explains its refusal to truly negotiate during the past eight months. It began negotiations determined to attack the rights and benefits of the workers who have made Canada Post a profitable company for 16 years, and it was rewarded for its intransigence by the Conservative government.

Clearly, it was Canada Post that caused the mail stoppage in the first place. To suggest otherwise is simply to spread a myth. Canada Post took that action because it was certain that the Conservatives would respond by bringing in the back to work legislation that the corporation had wanted all along.

That dispels only one myth in the government's tragic interference in free collective bargaining. Let me be clear about some other myths

I have heard on the floor of the House. In fact, I think there are at least eight more myths.

Postal myth number one: it is suggested that no one writes or sends letters. Now, it is true that letter mail volumes are declining slowly, but the letter is by no means dead and buried. In fact, transaction or letter mail volumes are 10% higher than they were in 1997, the last time that CUPW went on strike, and that is according to Canada Post's own annual report.

● (2325)

Postal myth number two says that postage rates are too high. Our 59¢ stamp is one of the biggest bargains in the industrialized world. People in Japan pay the equivalent of 94¢ Canadian to send a standard domestic letter. In Austria they pay 88¢ and in Germany they pay 78¢.

The real price of a stamp has actually decreased since Canada Post was set up as a crown corporation in October of 1981. At the time, the government of the day established a 30¢ stamp because the post office was losing hundreds of millions of dollars a year. The price of a stamp has increased 96.7% since this time, from January 1982 to March 2011, while the consumer price index has increased by 128.8% over the same period.

Let us go to postal myth number three: Canada Post is a drain on the public purse. The truth is that the post office and postal workers do not cost the public money. Canada Post has made \$1.7 billion in the last 15 years and paid \$1.2 billion in dividends and income tax to the federal government. By keeping Canada Post profitable, postal workers actually save the public money. Again, the source is Canada Post's own annual reports.

Postal myth number four says that Canada Post has low productivity. In fact, Canada Post is very productive. Unlike many companies, Canada Post has significantly increased productivity in the last two years. For example, mail processing productivity levels for transaction mail have increased by 6.7%; that is, the number of pieces of mail processed per paid hour has actually gone up.

In addition, the number of workers has gone down. The corporation has cut staff to compensate for the decline in mail volumes. Proportionately, the cuts to staff have been greater than the decline in volumes. The corporation is also expecting large productivity gains from its \$2 billion modernization program. Canada Post's high productivity has allowed it to keep postage rates low, make profits, and put substantial dividends and income taxes into public coffers.

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That takes us to postal myth number five. The Conservatives are saying there is a crisis at Canada Post: letter volumes have declined by 17%. In fact, as I said earlier, Canada Post transaction or letter volumes declined by 7.2% between 2006 and 2009, some of it due to the economic recession. The 2010 figures have not yet been released, but with an economic recovery, total volumes are likely to recover somewhat with direct mail rebounding and parcel volumes increasing as Internet purchasing gains more acceptance. Letter mail volumes are declining, but not nearly as much as Canada Post would have people believe when it trots out the 17% figure. Our post office is not at death's door.

Postal myth number six says that postal workers have their heads buried in the sand about challenges such as declining mail volumes and revenues. That is not true. Postal workers understand that there are challenges. That is why CUPW is trying to negotiate new services such as banking. In 2008, 44 countries had post offices with banking services that produced 20% of total revenue. A postal bank existed in this country from 1867 to 1969. Perhaps it is time to bring it back. As we know, CUPW has already negotiated provisions that allow the corporation and union to experiment with expanding services, creating jobs and new approaches.

Postal myth number seven says that Canada Post needs to negotiate big changes so that it can deal with declining volumes. Again, that is not true. CUPW's collective agreement with Canada Post already allows it to adjust staffing levels, and the corporation has already cut staffing hours proportionately more than the declining volumes.

Article 47 outlines a process for restructuring letter carrier routes. Restructuring allows management to reduce the number of letter carrier routes and positions based on volume counts.

Article 14 of the contract allows the corporation to reduce part-time hours and inside positions, so that myth too has been dispelled.

Then there is postal myth number eight: people think it is time to privatize or deregulate Canada Post. That is patently not true. It is true that multinational courier companies regularly lobby the government to deregulate Canada Post. These companies want the letter market opened up to competition so that they can increase their profits and their share of this market.

Lately, some media outlets and right-wing economic institutes have called for both privatization and deregulation, but pretty much everyone else is opposed. In 2008, the federal government conducted a review of Canada Post, which reported in 2009. The report clearly stated that there appears to be little to no public support for the privatization or deregulation of Canada Post. I am proud to say that New Democrats fully opposed both postal privatization and deregulation when the issue came before the House in the last Parliament.

● (2330)

If we are going to continue with this debate, why do we not focus on the real issues at stake rather than spending time on the myths being spread, which is completely counterproductive to achieving a negotiated settlement between CUPW and Canada Post?

Let me begin that discussion by focusing on one issue in particular: pensions. The hard-working women and men who make

up Canada's national postal system work for all Canadians, and they are locked out today because they are standing up not just for their own working conditions and benefits, but for fair conditions and benefits for all Canadian workers.

One of the central demands made by Canada Post management in this round of negotiations is that pension benefits for workers who have contributed for their entire working lives should be curtailed. Even more egregiously, management intends to all but gut pension benefits for new hires.

The attack on pensions that we are currently witnessing in both the private and the public sector is short-sighted, ill advised and fiscally reckless. As employers move to free up cash to finance lavish executive bonuses, they are increasingly looking at workers' pension plans as a ready source of cash. It is simply wrong. Pensions belong to the workers who earned them, workers who sacrificed pay and benefit improvements over many years to secure a reliable and fair pension plan.

Pensions are deferred wages, but Canada Post, it seems, is to be the government's flag-bearer in the effort to put severe downward pressure on employee pension plans, no doubt in the hope that the evisceration of pension benefits across the public and private sector will then follow.

As an opening salvo, Canada Post is attempting to divide and conquer members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. Management's demands include that all newly hired postal workers be covered by a defined contribution rather than a defined benefit pension plan.

It is worth pausing to briefly outline the important differences between defined benefit and defined contribution pension plans. The first is a real pension plan. The second is a wing and a prayer.

The vast majority of public sector workers, about 70%, currently have in place a defined benefit pension plan. This means that employers and employees both contribute through workers' deferred wages, as I have already mentioned, to the pension plan. As the nomenclature indicates, the defined benefit plan means that workers are promised a certain monthly benefit upon retirement, generally based on a formula that includes years of service, age and wage level. That means workers have a very precise sense of how much they will receive in their retirement and they can plan accordingly.

"Defined benefit" means funds must be set aside to provide for future payments. A defined contribution plan, on the other hand, means workers and employers contribute a fixed amount to the plan, but what benefit a retiree might derive is subject entirely to the vagaries and indeed the follies of the market. There is a post making the rounds on social media right now. It goes something like this:

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Remember when teachers, nurses, postal workers, librarians, social workers, airline employees and care assistants crashed the stock market, wiped out banks, took billions in bailouts and bonuses and paid no taxes?

No? Me neither.

Working Canadians were surely not responsible for the economic meltdown of recent years, but they certainly bore the brunt of it. For far too many, this meant that their registered retirement pension plan savings were decimated. Canadians who had worked their entire lives to save for their retirement saw it disappear in a puff of smoke. Some retirees were all but wiped out.

This is what the future is with defined contribution pension plans: insecurity at best and financial disaster at worst. This is what the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, on behalf of all Canadian workers, is fighting against.

To say that there is today in Canada a crisis in retirement security is an understatement. Even before the demographic shock of baby boomer retirement fully hits, one-quarter of a million seniors in this country currently live in poverty. The vast majority are single women. It is a national embarrassment that in a nation as wealthy as our own, we seem content to let the women and men who built this country face appalling poverty in their retirement.

● (2335)

While the government supported both our pension motion in the last Parliament and our motion on supporting seniors' income security just this week, those were clearly empty promises by the Conservatives.

What Canadians need and want is a fair, decent pension they can rely on to ensure they can retire with the dignity and respect they deserve. Just 38% of Canada's labour force belongs to a pension plan. Close to 10 million workers do not have a private pension plan. These workers must rely on their own individual savings through RRSP contributions or other means for their retirement security.

In 2007, fully 30% of Canadian households had neither a pension plan nor any RRSP savings. As we all know, the commercial accounts through which RRSP investments are held are subject to some of the highest management fees in the world. In short, Canadians are being left to fend for themselves in retirement and particularly in the private sector where a full 75% of workers have no pension plan at all.

With the demographic realities associated with the current and imminent retirement of a generation of "boomers", the untenable situation of retirees in Canada is set to become much worse. If we as legislators continue to ignore this crisis, we are going to preside over a situation in which the number of seniors who live in poverty increases dramatically. This will place more pressure on taxpayers as we see an increased demand on social services and, at the same time, tax revenues will decrease.

As one of the largest pension plans in the world, CPP has the capacity to provide a greater share of retirement income for Canadians. Because it is national in scope, it has the benefit of many highly skilled investment staff who can ensure a well diversified portfolio. It can offer tremendous economies of scale with lower administration costs and investment management fees.

For Canadian workers, it provides less risk, greater certainty, portability and increased benefits, like spousal benefits, death and disability benefits, and protection from inflation.

We need to expand our national, public, universal workplace pension plan. We can begin by laying out a responsible plan to double benefits over time. We should work with the provinces to build in the flexibility for workers and their employers to make voluntary contributions. We should immediately increase the GIS to a level sufficient to lift every Canadian senior out of poverty.

It is socially and financially irresponsible for the government to, in the first place, utterly fail to make the necessary improvements to CPP and GIS to lift those Canadians now living in poverty out of it. It is reprehensible to further compromise the retirement security of Canadians by aiding and abetting employers determined to weaken workplace pension plans as the Canada Post Corporation is now doing.

Canadians across the country understand that the struggle of postal workers for a fair and decent pension is the struggle of all workers and, indeed, all Canadians. Other public sector workers certainly fully comprehend the implications of Canada Post's unfair and unwise demands to weaken hard fought for pension provisions.

They know that if Canada Post is successful in its determination to strip pensions, it is only a matter of time before a government committed to giving billions in corporate tax breaks and building gazebos comes looking for their pension benefits.

All workers understand that undermining pension benefits would create a downward pressure that would leave workers and seniors more vulnerable to the indignity of poverty in their retirement.

It is just days since all parties in this House, including the Conservatives, voted in favour of the motion by my colleague, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe. That motion called on this House to end seniors' poverty, agreed that it is fiscally feasible, and called on the government to take immediate steps to increase the guaranteed income supplement sufficiently to accomplish that goal.

The government now has the opportunity to show Canadians it has more than hollow promises to offer workers and seniors. As I am closing, I just want to reiterate my solidarity with all the members of CUPW and in particular those in my home town of Hamilton, led by president Mark Platt.

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And of course I want to give a special shout out to all the men and women who work at the depots, in both Upper Gage and Upper James on Hamilton Mountain, whose service and sacrifice have strengthened our community and built friendships. We stand in solidarity to protect not just their pensions but those of workers who cannot yet conceive of the day they will need them. That solidarity is remarkable and inspiring, and it deserves the support of every member in this House.

• (2340)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's comments. Tonight we are talking about Bill C-6, a bill to bring the mail back to Canadians. This is an important piece of legislation. It needs to be passed in a timely manner.

I appreciate at least the sentiment expressed in the member's comments. One way to express that through action is for the opposition to allow the legislation to move forward. The parties will have an opportunity to bring forward their points of view before an arbitrator, and the arbitrator will choose which one is appropriate.

The process outlined in the legislation tonight is very transparent. It would allow for an opportunity to deal with the issues that are raised by the opposition, but more importantly, it would also allow Canadians to receive their mail, create the economic synergies that we need to have during this fragile economic recovery, and provide people with what they need in their day to day lives, which is the mail.

Will the member please accept the legislation so we can deal with the issues she has raised and get a sustainable framework so Canada Post can do what it has been asked to do by the stakeholders and the Canadian people?

• (2345)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. One way to resolve this dispute is indeed to go to arbitration and to have final offer selection. Another way to resolve this dispute is to allow free collective bargaining to happen.

When the Minister of Labour stood up in the House and said there was a strike that needed to be resolved, she was clearly and categorically wrong. There is no strike. We are talking about a lockout. The workers have been locked out by Canada Post. So how do we get the mail going again in Canada? We stop locking the doors. Doing that is entirely within the government's ability.

I would suggest to the parliamentary secretary that he get serious about that, and that he have those conversations with his colleagues, because like him, I agree that the mail service in Canada is indeed an important public service.

I would suggest to the member that every single member of CUPW agrees with that premise. It is an important national service. It is a service that ought to be supported. That is our responsibility as members of Parliament. I would encourage him to go back to his colleagues, stop the lockout, and return to free collective bargaining in accordance with not only the laws of this country, but in fact ILO conventions, UN resolutions and, as the member would know, a long, proud tradition of most jurisdictions in the western world.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and agree with the vast majority of what my colleague from Hamilton Mountain has shared with the House, and certainly the fact that this legislation is not only heavy-handed, but wrong-minded.

I think the best resolve is to get people back to work and to get the mail flowing, and I think we agree on that. During the comments made by her leader earlier this evening, he mentioned that he would be putting forth amendments in the very near future. Could she share with the House, within the time allotted, maybe two specific amendments that she would be putting forward?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member did not hear the response from our leader on that issue. We will be bringing amendments forward. This is not the time to be debating amendments, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, as the person who governs this process. That will happen in committee of the whole. We will be introducing amendments at that time. We will be debating them fully, and I would encourage the member to stick around and participate in that debate, no matter what time of night it happens.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words and wisdom of the chief opposition whip. We are always in store for an excellent presentation when she gets on her feet in the House.

I was quite interested in her comments in regard to poverty among seniors. That is a profound concern of mine.

The GIS was introduced in the mid-1960s because of the horrendous poverty among seniors in this country, and now we are seeing a return to that poverty. The GIS did indeed help.

The reality is that a quarter of a million seniors live in poverty in this country. My fear is that the blatant attempts of the government to undermine pension plans and to roll back pension security are going to lead to even greater disparity in the future.

I wonder if my esteemed colleague could comment on that.

• (2350)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for London—Fanshawe.

As I said earlier in my original comments, it is highly ironic that not only did the Conservative Party endorse my seniors' charter when I introduced that on behalf of the NDP in 2006 but it later supported a pension motion and just this week supported the motion by the member for London—Fanshawe, all espousing to support additional financial assistance for the poorest and neediest seniors in our country. While the Conservatives talk the talk, we have not seen them walk the walk.

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I am keenly aware that it is 11:50 in the evening and I just want to point out a supreme irony here. Members in the House might not be aware that today, June 21, has actually been declared Public Service Day by the United Nations. It is a day to celebrate the value and virtue of public service to the community, to highlight the contribution of public service in the development process, to recognize the work of public services and to encourage young people to pursue careers in the public service. What a slap in the face to all public service workers that this is the day the government decided to begin debate on Bill C-6 and to bring in this draconian back to work legislation for public sector workers.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the NDP is the official party of big public sector labour unions, and this week, particularly after the speeches we have heard tonight, it is fair to say that big labour unions are getting their money's worth.

As elected officials, we are elected to serve the interests of all Canadians. How can the NDP continue to ignore seniors, citizens, the small business community and a growing number of Canada Post workers who just want to get back to work, put food on their tables, and see this legislation get passed?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to see the member read that question from his iPad, because that means he has Internet capabilities. I hope that every single person who is watching this debate at this rather late hour will send him emails to explain to him exactly how this can be done. I ask them to send the member an email that simply says "end the lockout", because that is precisely the Conservative government's responsibility.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I know the member meant to say today is June 23, which is Public Service Day. Today is apparently Thursday. Tomorrow will also be Thursday, but we have kept the same days of the month.

I did hear the answer from the hon. leader of the official opposition and I have heard that member's answer as well. I understand that we are to wait for the amendments at committee of the whole. Is there any chance that the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain could give us a hint of the parameters of the areas she believes could lead to a resolution of the impasse in this chamber?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to do that. It basically requires that we allow negotiations to happen in accordance with the principles of free collective bargaining.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my efforts to understand what the government is doing here, I have read and considered Bill C-6, and I have also listened carefully to the government's reasons for introducing the bill.

What I see is a company that pays its CEO \$660,000 a year locking out workers, arguing that the company cannot afford a decent pay increase. What I see is a government forcing workers back to work under terms less provident than the employer itself offered. What I see is a government unmasked only three weeks into the 41st Parliament, revealing a face that is as mean-spirited as 60% of Canadians on May 2 had anticipated.

I am left with a couple of possible interpretations of what is going on here. The most obvious conclusion is that this bill, Bill C-6, reflects an objective much larger than the current labour dispute. In

listening to the questions and supporting speeches of the members opposite, it sounds as if this bill represents a profound contradiction of the purpose and commitments set out in the Canada Labour Code in that the preamble promises "the promotion of the common wellbeing through the encouragement of free collective bargaining and the constructive settlement of disputes". It sounds as if this bill reflects a shift away from, and I quote the preamble to the Canada Labour Code, "a long tradition in Canada of labour legislation and policy", a tradition informed by employers, unions, and workers recognizing and supporting free collective bargaining, and I quote again from the preamble of the legislation that is meant to govern this process, "as the bases of effective industrial relations for the determination of good working conditions and sound labour-management relations".

It seems that this bill represents an assault on the very concept of free collective bargaining, that this bill represents a challenge to the very existence of trade unions, and that this bill represents a challenge to the very right of workers to join trade unions.

This bill conflicts with the enshrined right to associate freely. This bill conflicts with the international commitments we have made as a country to the freedom of association and the protection of the right to organize, as reflected in Convention number 87 of the International Labour Organization.

Finally, what this bill most certainly breaches is the Parliament of Canada's stated commitment, as expressed in the preamble to the Canada Labour Code, to continue and extend its support to labour and management in their cooperative efforts to develop good relations and constructive collective bargaining practices. It also breaches the Parliament of Canada's commitment to the development of good industrial relations, in the best interest of Canada, to ensure a just share of the fruits of progress for all.

That is what it looks like from this side of the House.

However, I wonder too, as I listen to the members opposite, as they justify this bill, whether they have any concept of how the collective bargaining process, as set out under the Canada Labour Code, is supposed to work. This perspective has some credibility when I hear the Minister of Labour refer to this lockout as a strike. It has some credibility as I hear members opposite rise, one after the other, and repeat that this labour dispute is a strike.

What is meant to emerge as an end result, and what we all hope will emerge from the relationship between labour and employer, is a fair deal. We decided decades ago in this country that the way we in Canada would try to approximate such an outcome would be by developing a labour relations regime that allows workers, where they so choose, to bargain collectively with their employer. It is a system based on the recognition that individuals are relatively powerless in their relationship with their employer.

● (2355)

While that may sound like a radical notion to the members opposite, it is something that has held consensus throughout all western democracies for decades. We provide a labour relations regime that allows workers to collectively decide, always through some form of democratic process, whether they want to bargain as individuals or bargain collectively with their employer.

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At the core of this labour relations regime we have and have long had a system of dispute resolution that is essentially one of mutual deterrence. That is, it is a system designed, in fact, to focus the parties in collective bargaining on finding a resolution, understanding that if one side or the other in the bargaining process behaves in what is believed to be an unreasonable manner, a strike or a lockout is the resort.

It is or should be a system that provides the parties in the collective bargaining relationship with a predictable context in which to bargain and administer their collective agreement. For this system to work, both parties need to understand the rules of conduct and the norms of conduct. They must understand the consequences of unreasonable behaviour and understand the likely consequences of seeking something at the bargaining table that the other party finds too difficult to concede.

Within these rules, the parties get to know each other. They develop an understanding over time of how each other reacts and behaves at the bargaining table and away from the bargaining table. That is a critically important part of this system.

While the people at the table may change, what parties establish over time is a relationship, good or bad, that allows them to make informed decisions with respect to their bargaining relationship.

Within these rules and within the context of mutual understanding, the parties are meant to be free to negotiate. Sometimes somebody is going to make a mistake or a miscalculation, perhaps. Sometimes somebody is going to do something quite out of the ordinary, for a whole number of reasons. Either way, in order for the system to return to fair and good-faith bargaining, both parties need to understand and feel the sting of exercising their rights. They need to be able to assess whether the position they are taking at the table is worth the lost wages for workers or the lost revenue for the employer.

Let us be clear that it is a system whereby both parties are acknowledged to have a right to lock out or strike, and both parties have to understand that if they so choose to take that course of action, it is with full knowledge that it is fully and completely predictable that there are consequences for doing so.

Now, when one party is relieved of the consequences of its actions, as the Conservative government is doing with this legislation, then the entire labour relations regime comes crashing down. There is no longer predictability. The parties are relieved of the consequences of their calculations and their decisions. Now there is a whole new set of calculations that go into how one conducts oneself at the table and away from the table.

With the introduction of Bill C-6, the Conservative government has relieved the employer of the incentive, under this labour relations regime, of behaving reasonably, of behaving rationally, and of having to live with the consequences of exercising its economic muscle by locking out the workers in this dispute.

While the current government talks about its desire for a mutual settlement, it has, through this legislation, removed that very possibility in this round of bargaining. Moreover, because of its intervention, it has seriously undermined the likelihood of achieving a mutual settlement in the future. The only thing that has been added

to the predictability of this bargaining relationship is that a Conservative government will interrupt and undermine the exercise of free collective bargaining in a labour relations regime that is intended to bring some approximation of balance between workers and their employers. The only thing predictable is that a Conservative government will exercise its ability to nullify the ability of workers to bargain collectively with their employers.

● (2400)

More than that, the government has, in fact, signalled with this legislation that all employers under this code, and indeed across this country, are relieved of the consequences of their actions. This is a signal that will ripple across bargaining tables under federal jurisdiction, at a minimum, and will serve to undermine the chance of mutual co-operation and agreement between employers and workers across this country.

With this legislation, the government says to employers that they can try it on and see what they can get from workers. They will be sheltered from any fallout and will not have to live with the consequences of what they do at the bargaining table.

This is not a recipe for a labour relations regime that is supposed to serve Canadians and our economy well. This legislation does a profound disservice to all Canadians because of the broader implications it has for a mature, co-operative labour relations regime in this country.

To understand the extent of the disservice to all Canadians, one needs to properly situate the place of free collective bargaining in our history and in our economy. One needs to appreciate that free collective bargaining sits at the foundation of our economy and is responsible for much of the wealth this country has enjoyed since collective bargaining was adopted.

One needs to acknowledge that this labour relations regime is far from perfect. It excludes too many from unionization and therefore from the wealth that is created, but it is sufficiently extensive that it has created in this country enough well-paid workers with good, decent jobs to make up a thriving Canadian middle class. The regime has provided this country with a labour force that can afford to buy the goods they produce, to buy and furnish nice homes, to put their kids through college or university, and to retire comfortably on deferred wages in the form of workplace pensions.

This labour relations regime was intended to be, and was, a way for workers to share in the wealth created by their own skills and labour. So integral to our economy is this labour relations regime that we designed our country's pension system around it. Most importantly, we built around this regime a generous and compassionate country based on a tax base that is supported by decent, well-paying jobs. The regime allowed us to have social programs to protect the most vulnerable to allow them to live in dignity. It allowed us to have in place a post-secondary education system that was accessible to so many Canadians. Most significantly, it allowed us to afford a universal health care system.

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However, what we are seeing in our country are initiatives that undermine this labour relations regime and the practice of free collective bargaining that it is meant to protect. These initiatives take the form of free and open trade agreements that fail to protect the livelihoods of Canadians, agreements with low-wage countries around the world, agreements with countries that do not have a labour movement, agreements with countries that have child labour, agreements with countries, in fact, where collective bargaining is barred and where trade unionists are targeted by thugs and death squads. We are seeing direct attacks on the regime itself, such as the one before us tonight, that are giving licence to employers to escape, ignore, or abuse a labour relations regime that is good for all Canadians.

With the government imposing lower wages on Canada Post workers than their own employer was attempting to impose, we are seeing the sharp poison tip of a different economic plan, a plan to continue to take this country in a very wrong direction, a direction very different from the one in which we travelled when free collective bargaining enjoyed the support of Canadians and the Canadian government.

The Conservative government calls this stage of the economic plan the next phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan, but the only action here is downward—downward for workers, downward for their wages and pensions, and downward for the public services they rely on. We see this plan working its way through Canada as well-paying manufacturing jobs disappear, unionization declines, the middle class disappears, and public services and public sector workers come increasingly under attack.

• (2405)

We now live in a country in which one in four of all workers and one in six adult workers earn less than poverty line wages. We are second only to the United States in the OECD as a low-wage country. The proportion of workers who earn less than two-thirds of the median wage is about double that of continental Europe and far higher than in Scandinavian countries. This is leaving us with a country with distressing and increasing income polarization, as federal government after federal government in Canada fashions an economy where wealth is not fairly shared.

This trend is very clearly reflected in the bill before us: a corporation with a CEO making \$660,000 that is blocking out workers who are making a fraction of that, and a government that orders those workers back to work with wages that are even lower than the company was prepared to pay.

As a resident of Beaches—East York, in the city of Toronto, I have witnessed the impacts of such legislation in my own community. Toronto's neighbourhoods have fallen into three distinct groups in terms of income change. The middle-income area of the city has been shrinking dramatically, the high-income area of the city has increased, and the low-income area has increased substantially.

A number of years ago two-thirds of Toronto's neighbourhoods were middle-income neighbourhoods; today there are less than a third of them. Over the same period of time, low-income neighbourhoods have grown from less than 20% of all neighbourhoods to over half of all neighbourhoods. Over this period of time, Toronto has seen average household incomes drop by almost 10%.

This emerging income landscape is evident in my own riding of Beaches—East York. Once a community that was largely middle-income neighbourhoods, it is now a community with a large and growing number of people who are living below the poverty line.

My riding, my city of Toronto, and our country, could use a return to a time when our government supported and promoted our labour relations regime, and in doing so protected the livelihoods of Canadian workers. It was a regime that could bring good jobs, good pay, good pensions and healthy neighbourhoods and communities to our cities, indeed to cities and communities across this country.

That is why I can say with confidence that although this bill intervenes in a single labour dispute, it stands for something much larger, much more hostile and much more pernicious than it appears on its face. It represents a country that we are afraid of becoming, and it goes a long way to fashioning that country.

We need this government to uphold its commitment to the preamble of the Canada Labour Code: that is, the promotion of the common well-being through the encouragement of free collective bargaining, the constructive settlement of disputes, and the development of good industrial relations to be in the best interest of Canada to ensure a just share of the fruits of progress for all.

I am proud to stand up for the members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers tonight, and to do so I stand up for all Canadians.

• (2410)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I did not want to interrupt the member, but I do think we need to respect the conventions of the House.

In Marleau and Montpetit, on page 516, it clearly states that members should not read from a written prepared speech. Even in O'Brien and Bosc, on pages 607 and 608 it says that when points of order are raised about the issue the chair typically rules that members should use notes rather than written prepared speeches.

I think that in the interest of encouraging real debate in the House, with the real cut and thrust of debate, that we encourage members to use notes rather than written prepared speeches.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I always find it interesting when someone goes to the rule books, whether it is Marleau and Montpetit, Beauchesne's or the House Standing Orders, and recites something that says that a person should not read from a prepared text.

One thing that always has to be taken into consideration is the tradition of the chamber. From my perspective, I would love to see a debate where there are no prepared speeches, where members stand up and say what they really think and maybe put a little more passion in what they are thinking. I am all for that. I would not have a problem with that, and I would encourage it.

In terms of traditions, from what I have witnessed over the last number of months, 90% of speeches seem to be of a prepared nature. We have found that there is even greater latitude provided for newer members, who are afforded the opportunity to read their speeches virtually verbatim.

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I would encourage members to tell us what they really think and push the speeches to the side; in my opinion, it quite often leads to a more interesting debate.

I would suggest that in fact there is no point of order and that we should allow questions and answers.

● (2415)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on this point of order. While I appreciate the sentiment of the member's point, I would suggest, as the Speaker did earlier, that we certainly have to pay attention to the conventions of the House. I would also suggest that if the Speaker were to rule in favour of that point of order it would put ministers in a real pickle when it came to responding to questions from members on this side of the House.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Speaker, I would not want to differ from my colleague, but what he might be missing is the fascinating juxtaposition of history and philosophy that was in that speech. We are talking about freedom of association, and how can we discuss freedom of association without using notes on history?

Maybe other members in the House were wondering why he was using notes, but it made me think that perhaps it was because the NDP has a history of union involvement. The history is so closely intertwined that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I have heard from each party on this point of order. If the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has something to add, I will entertain a brief comment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I was sitting behind the member for Beaches—East York. It was a wonderful and masterful speech, and it was worth reading from notes.

I should mention, though, that earlier today in question period the Minister of Industry read the same prepared notes, not once, not twice, not three times, but five times. Surely if that does not contravene the regulations of the House, it contravenes all decent humanity to have the same prepared text read five times in response to questions from this side.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, for what it is worth, I can appreciate, particularly with new members, that sometimes there is a need to read from a prepared speech. After all, this may be the first opportunity that many new members have had to speak in this assembly.

I would suggest that one way we could perhaps accommodate both sides of this discussion is that when members are speaking in this debate, which is a very important debate, that they be encouraged to read from prepared speeches written by their own hands rather than from CUPW.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, if it pleases the House, I will apologize for the way I gave my speech. The finer distinctions between notes and a prepared speech have eluded me. However, I do understand the distinction between a lockout and a strike, I am pleased to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair is pleased that we were able to reach a resolution in this case.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a little nervous about standing up after that. Thank goodness I did not write down my question.

There has been a lot of reference to emails received from constituents. I received a text from a constituent about 20 minutes ago, and that text said, "Hey, Daddy, are you still in the House of Commons?"

This constituent is rather close to me, and I know she is watching right now, so I will say, yes, I am. I expect to be here for a long time because it is really important that we pass this piece of legislation.

There has been a lot of talk today from the NDP about threats to pensions. I would argue that the biggest threat to pensions in this country is the NDP platform. The NDP talks a lot about banks and oil companies, for example, and about other corporations wanting to raise their taxes by some 20% to 25%. That led to me want to do a bit of research.

I wondered who the owners of these corporations are, and I went to the Canada Post pension website. I noticed that the top five holdings by the Canada Post pension are the Toronto Dominion Bank, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Nova Scotia, Suncor Energy and Canadian Natural Resources. In fact, 15 of the top 25 holdings in the Canada Post pension are banks and oil companies. That is very interesting. That is \$1.5 billion right there.

With the NDP platform promise to raise taxes by 20% to 25% on these pensions, how can the hon. member justify that to the pensioners?

● (2420)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of an NDP platform that called for the raising of taxes on pensions. I ran for many months to succeed in the election on May 2, and I am happy to report that I did succeed and that issue never arose. I was unaware that the issue is in fact a part of our platform.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House all day, engaged in this debate, and obviously this could go on for many hours. How much new light is being shed? I think there is very little light being shed.

The NDP leader said in his comments that he would be proceeding with amendments.

My question to my colleague is that we want to put people back to work, so why do we not go right to the amendments?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I am in the embarrassing position of having been shown to not understand House procedures very well. However, I do understand from previous discussions that now is not the appropriate time to have amendments to this legislation. That time is forthcoming, and we will look forward to hearing the amendments when that time arises.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the NDP's speeches tonight, and a couple of times I heard the term "right to strike" being used. In Canada there is no right to strike.

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In fact the Supreme Court ruled, in 2007, in a decision that was partly written by Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, that the fundamental charter right of freedom of association does not guarantee a right to strike but rather it guarantees a limited right to collective bargaining. That is a right of process rather than a substantive right to an actual outcome in terms of benefits and pay and the like.

I am wondering if the member would be able to clarify his party's record on that issue.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I completely understand the question and what record the member is referring to. He has made an observation on legal comments by a chief justice, and I am not in a position to take issue with his arguments.

We most certainly do respect the fact that freedom of association is constitutionally enshrined in this country, and we do believe that the freedom of collective bargaining flows from that enshrined right.

• (2425)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was a labour lawyer for 16 years and I also read a lot of cases from the Supreme Court of Canada. I would beg to differ with that last comment, that freedom of association does include the right to free collective bargaining.

As a matter of fact, one should read the Supreme Court of Canada case in the HEU decision, where the Government of British Columbia, a Liberal government made up of Conservatives, actually interfered in the collective bargaining process, interfered in a contract and ripped up negotiated settlements. It interfered, much like this government is interfering in the collective bargaining process, by trying to write a collective agreement for the parties and directly interfering in the free collective bargaining process. I would dare say that violates the Supreme Court of Canada dicta that I have read.

I wonder if my friend could comment on that.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the question that the member opposite had asked previously is really more a question of relevance.

In my speech, read from notes as it may have been, I did remind the members opposite that we are in fact here dealing with a lockout and not a strike, raising the relevance in fact of the question.

In response to my colleague who is requesting a comment on this from me, I most certainly do believe that from freedom of association and the Constitution enshrinement of that freedom flows the right to free collective bargaining. Part and parcel of free collective bargaining is the right for workers to withhold their labour, which is in fact the right to strike.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the member for Beaches—East York to the House of Commons. I think he did a pretty good job.

The issue this evening is Bill C-6. The fact is that after eight months of negotiation the two parties were not able to come to an agreement. There was a strike that went into a lockout. Canada Post

is not providing the services that Canadians want, demand or need. The economic recovery is fragile.

Will the opposition party pass Bill C-6 in a timely manner so that Canadians can get the mail they expect when they expect it?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I heard the member opposite refer to the issue of eight months of efforts to resolve the collective agreement. If the member had listened to my speech, he would have heard that it is no surprise to me that the parties were unable to resolve that dispute in light of what has happened here. The very point of my speech was to suggest that under the labour relations regime, free collective bargaining depends on predictability and the predictability of the parties having to solve this dispute among themselves through the labour relations regime.

The intervention of the government into this collective bargaining dispute and previous interventions of governments into labour disputes have removed the predictability of collective bargaining and made it very easy for employers to sit back and wait for governments to act in the fashion that they have done with Bill C-6 before us tonight.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to engage in debate on this bill and the motion to take some time to consider more fully the implications of this bill. I think six months could be time well spent.

I think, had the government thought a little more about the implications of this action, it would not have gone down the road in such a headstrong fashion to trample on the rights of these workers.

I have heard a few themes throughout the day from members opposite. One of them is about big bad unions. They have talked about unions as if they are the devil incarnate. They have talked about them as if they were just plain bad.

• (2430)

I cannot comprehend this because I am sure there are a lot of women and men in their communities, in their constituencies, who through a democratic vote have decided to participate in a union, who have entered into a workplace where a union has been in place. Those constituents have realized a decent working wage, health benefits and perhaps a pension plan, if they are fortunate to be part of the 30% of Canadian workers who are lucky enough to participate in pensions. In other words, they are people who are benefiting from the rights and opportunities of bargaining collectively, of working together, of coming together to have some control within their workplace over wages, benefits and working conditions.

I do not see why any member of this House would want to argue against that. It is as though because people are in a group somehow that is negative as opposed to its being positive to be individuals. How could that be? That simply does not make any sense.

Government Orders

If members took the time to actually look into what kind of an organization a trade union is, they would actually recognize what I know having been a union member, that a union is one of the more democratic organizations in our society. The leadership is elected, not unlike political parties. Decisions and proper process of how that organization runs are set out in bylaws for all people to see. It inevitably has a constitution, which controls how that organization runs. The finances of the organization are completely public. The decision making within the organization is completely public. It has regular general meetings so that all members of the union can participate in the day-to-day activities of that organization.

● (2435)

Because I have been involved in unions for many years, I know for sure that if one member is not happy with how that organization is being run, he or she comes to a meeting, the second Wednesday of every month or whatever it is that the particular union membership decides is going to be its regular meeting time, and the member has an opportunity to stand on the floor to raise those concerns. That is the way unions operate. When it comes to how the unions spend the dues, how they decide to prepare for bargaining, that is all decided by union members.

It is not unlike some other organizations, like political parties, where not everyone who is a member wants to participate in the day-to-day activities, and sometimes members are not happy with how things happen and they grumble and gripe about the decisions that are made but they are not prepared to take a couple of hours on the Wednesday night to go out and participate in those decisions. That happens. However, the important point is that decisions are made by a majority, just as they are in our elections, and the rest of the members of the group or of the constituency live with those results.

I will not speak for any other party in this chamber but, just like our party, the union does not represent just the people who vote for it or the people who participate in it. The union represents all members because its mandate is to be responsible for and to act responsibly on behalf of all the members of the union, to bargain better wages, better working conditions, and to act constructively on behalf of all members whether they participate or not.

I can understand to some extent, given the way the government has acted, that it may not understand that. What I tend to hear is that the government seems to think that if a particular jurisdiction does not have a Conservative member, then that jurisdiction is not going to get the goodies. If people do not have a government member elected in their particular province, then they are not going to see the kind of spoils of the electoral competition that others would. I would say that is completely wrong and our leader, the Leader of the Opposition, has said on many occasions that our responsibility here is to look after the interests of all Canadians, and that is exactly what the NDP caucus has been doing.

That is exactly the role that is played by unions in our society in Canada. It has been for 150 years. Unions have played an important role throughout this country in ensuring we have good social policy. That includes things like our pension, the Canada pension plan; employment insurance; the labour laws that ensure there is a standard work week and that people are not having to work seven days a week, that we do not have child labour, that we have some

basic human rights in the workplace, that we have general health and safety, that people are protected and that they have the right to refuse. All of those basic protections that exist in all workplaces have largely resulted from the work by unions, and they have been doing that for 150 years in this country.

Again, I say to members opposite that I urge them not to think so negatively about unions and to recognize that, in fact, they consist of men and women and families who are out there working hard, trying to make their workplace better, trying to ensure they can provide for their families and working every day, tirelessly, to build their communities and make the lives of all Canadians better.

I must say further how concerned I am with a couple of other things that have been repeated by the government. There is this idea that the negotiations have gone on for eight months and that suddenly that is too long. I have been involved in public sector negotiations that have gone on for a couple of years, undoubtedly as a result of problems with both the employer and the union; that have gone on because of circumstances within a given jurisdiction. However, the parties keep negotiating. They keep working away. The parties continue to work to solve problems. Just because it has gone on for a certain period of time and the parties are beginning to apply some pressure to each other does not mean it is time to shut it all down, that we decide time is up and we are going to end this by stepping in. It is also setting a standard that is inappropriate. It is not up to the government to be setting that standard. It is for the parties to decide.

In this instance, we know, if we have been paying any attention at all to the debate and to the interventions by the NDP caucus, the official opposition, that what transpired here is that the parties were having trouble coming to agreement on a number of issues and that the union instigated one of the tools in its toolbox, and it has a number of them. One of the union's tools, the ultimate weapon, is the right to strike. It did not use that, for whatever reason. I think it was largely because the union itself recognized that it was the ultimate weapon and it did not want to shut down postal services in this country completely because it understood that they were at the early stages in negotiations and the parties were still far apart. Therefore, there needed to be some efforts to bring the parties closer together, so the union began to employ tactics that were more subtle and it engaged in slowly rotating strikes.

We have heard from a number of our constituents. We have heard it here. It is in the record. Members opposite have been reading from their toys about communications they have had from their constituents where the constituents said they did not have a problem with the rotating strikes, the strike action that was happening. They did not have a problem with that, but they did have a problem when the crown corporation decided it was going to padlock the doors.

That is when postal services completely ended. That is when the bills and the cheques stopped moving for the small businesses that everybody on the government side seems to talk about. That is when they were shut down, not when the union was employing its tactics. Postal services were shut down when management stepped in and put big padlocks on every single Canada Post workplace in this country. That is when things shut down. We have heard that again and again, so we understand that is what happened.

Government Orders

One would think that the appropriate response to that shutdown would have been to take the padlocks off, open the doors and let the workers go back in and deliver the mail. Would that not have been the solution? Would that not have been the best way to do that?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (2440)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would remind all hon. members that when people have the floor they have the floor. Some commentary takes place in this place, but it would appear we are going to be here for a long time so I would ask the co-operation of all members to respect their colleagues.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. I did not hear anything coming from the gentleman. I do not mind a little noise. I appreciate that because it is important.

Canadians have told us that the decorum of the House important. I know members of the official opposition are paying close attention to what Canadians said in order to conduct ourselves in that manner.

Let me get back to what I was saying. If Canada Post is causing the problem by having locked all the doors, then we would think someone in the government, the Prime Minister or the minister responsible, would pick up the phone and would tell to the head of the crown corporation, who earns about \$650,000 a year, to take the locks off the doors, that we want to get the mail running, that our businesses, our communities, our charities and other organizations are dependent on the mail service.

However, that is not what the government does. I just do not understand. I am from Nova Scotia. We do things in a much more simple way there. We just get it done.

Maybe I am not paying attention. Maybe the government has other motives. I do not know. It is not like me to impugn the motives of the government, but one has to wonder. If the easy solution is to take the locks off, which is pretty simple, then why has the government come in with this big honking sledgehammer, bringing it down on the backs of working people?

Why is the government doing that? Why would we not think that this is just the first group, the first salvo? The government has come forward with legislation which imposes a collective agreement and a wage rate, which is less than the wage negotiated by the parties. It has set conditions for the arbitrator, for the final offer selection, which will have real implications on the solutions that will be found to deal with the issues of the pension.

I read the bill, and I am quite concerned about the parameters that it puts on the kind of solution that could be found for the pension.

Again, the government is setting the parameters and conditions. It is telling the arbitrator, whoever that person might be, how he or she will go about finding the settlement.

Why is the government doing that? I do not know. Whose rights are next? Which organization or which group of people, which group of Canadians is the government going to point its finger at next, deciding it is its turn? That is my concern. That is the concern of working people across the country. It is not only working people, but

representatives of other groups that the government does not necessarily support.

Some members opposite and in the corner have asked why the NDP members are talking so much. They want to go home. They have things they want to do this weekend. They want to play some golf. The members of this caucus are going to speak up on behalf of working people. That is why we are doing it.

● (2445)

Two days ago the member for London—Fanshawe brought in the resolution about raising seniors out of poverty. Who stood up in the House and argued for that? It was the NDP.

In the campaign, who talked about affordability issues? Who talked about strengthening and expanding the health care system in our country? Who is trying to reduce the costs of drugs for seniors? It is this opposition party.

That is why we are doing this. We are doing this to speak up on behalf of people who are under attack by the Conservative government.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not a lawyer, which is probably a good thing, but the hon. member opposite indicated that there was a right to strike. Just for the record, I do not believe that is correct. I believe there is a right to bargain and bargain in good faith.

Why are all members of the House here? There seems to be a simple answer. Recent polls indicate that 70% of Canadians support back to work legislation to end this costly, disruptive, crippling work stoppage that is presently going on.

Could the hon. member opposite explain to all members and to all Canadians why his party is not on the same wavelength and in agreement with the Canadians who want Canada Post to get back to work and who want this work stoppage to end? Why do we have all this rhetoric about all the wonderful things the NDP has done? Let us get the right thing done and get people back to work.

● (2450)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, when I was elected to this place, and as I carry out my responsibilities in the House, before I stand to speak about an issue, I do not check to see what the latest pole indicates. I do not check the wind to find out what is going on.

I look into my heart and I ask myself if there are people under attack, or people who do not have a voice or people who are vulnerable. Those are the ones for whom I will speak up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's statement and I especially appreciated his comments about the democratic principles on which unions are founded. I think this is an extremely important point worth making.

We do not talk enough about the fact that abuse is heaped on unions for truly debatable reasons. The inner workings of a union are completely disregarded.

Government Orders

I would like my colleague to tell us how a union lives up to its democratic principles and how it operates in the same way that companies do when they hold shareholder meetings. They talk about defending a company's right to conduct business, whereas we are defending union rights.

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I spent many years as a part of unions, working for them and studying them. It amazes me the process that those organizations go through, oftentimes to the peril of the leadership, but they do these things because they are democratic. People have the opportunity to participate in decisions all the way along.

I appreciate having this opportunity, but the Canadian unions such as the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, which represents the workers at Canada Post, are involved in solidarity efforts with its sisters and brothers in the southern hemisphere for workers' rights and human rights for those who live nowhere near Ottawa or Canada. They and their members believe in the principle of solidarity of human rights and protecting working people around the globe.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague opposite, a fellow Nova Scotian. I grew up in a community not unlike his. There were a lot of coal miners and unions and they did a lot of good work.

NDP members have wrapped their arms around working people. I have heard numerous references throughout the debate this evening to working people. I have a very simple question for my colleague from Nova Scotia, who has a fine bit of that maritime lilt and lots of great rhetoric and fiery emotion and passion tonight.

I assure him that there is no ownership in working people in any party in the country. A lot of working people are being affected by this strike, which he will be the first to admit. Small businesses, seniors, individuals count on the mail every day for their very livelihoods and those of their families, to receive EI cheques, something very fundamental to a lot of people in Atlantic Canada.

I very sincerely ask the member opposite this. What does he say to those working people and how long should this dispute have gone on? As a former union member, he has probably been involved in similar situations where these long, protracted disputes cause tremendous hardship on all sides. Eight months is a very long time. We are hearing that a lot of union members themselves are anxious to get back on the job.

How long and what about the working people suffering as a result of the strike?

• (2455)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, the minister lives in an important part of the province of Nova Scotia that has a long and proud history, not only of work but of labour relations, trade and so on.

We are not claiming to be the only ones who represent working people. All we are saying is that members should open their ears, talk to their constituents, working people who vote for them such as union members. I know the people who vote for the member

opposite. They are union members as well. They have some rights and interests and they are being harmed.

The minister knows I come from a proud small business background in the valley, the Conservative valley, I might add. Therefore, I am very sensitive to the desires and concerns of the small business community. That is why I saying the government should take the padlocks off those doors and let the postal service resume. Get those guys back to work. That is all it has to do. The government locked the doors. Get them back to work.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what are the workers in Nova Scotia saying about the Conservative government and the Minister of National Defence, who also said he represents the workers? In the bill the government wants to give less of an increase in wages in the collective agreement than what the crown corporation was ready to give. The government says that it does not get involved in crown corporations, but in the bill it presented to the House it government would give less than what the crown corporation offered.

What do you think is wrong with the government and why does it hate the workers so much?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the hon. member, I would remind all hon. members to direct their comments, questions and answers to the Chair.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer why the member feels the government hates workers, although its actions seem to suggest that.

I received a couple of texts from workers in my community. One said that he appreciated the rights of the workers, but asked about the small businesses. I told him what happened and that the NDP was asking the government to take the locks off. He replied and said, "Good for you and good for the NDP caucus for standing up on behalf of working people and small businesses".

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate following the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. He is a very eloquent speaker.

My voice may be a bit hoarse at 1:00 a.m., and although our voices may be a bit hoarse and our throats a bit irritated, our voices will not be still in the House of Commons in standing up for the working people of this country.

I have a different background than that of the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. He spoke very proudly about his labour and union involvement. I have never been a member of a labour union although I was active as a manual worker. I worked in factories, but always non-union. I went back to school and became an administrator. I have negotiated collective agreements, but I have always done that from the side of management. I have been an operator of businesses and have won two Business Excellence Awards in 2003 and 2004. I understand from the business point of view the essential nature of having free collective bargaining and allowing unions, the workers and management to work together to resolve those issues.

Government Orders

However, this is not a case of free and fair collective bargaining. In fact, this is the opposite case. This is why members of the NDP caucus are standing up in the House of Commons at 1:00 in the morning saying that this is wrong. The government should be taking the locks off where the workers have been locked out, get the mail system working and let the union and management negotiate that collective agreement that so many Canadians want to see.

I would like to pay tribute to the diversity of the new official opposition NDP caucus. We have people in the House with various backgrounds: small business, management, nurses, doctors, lawyers and trades. We have a diversity in this caucus that has never been seen before in the House of Commons. That allows us to bring a depth and breadth of experience to bear in this debate in the House of Commons.

I must say that the lack of experience on the government side on the issue of collective bargaining shows through in the debate we have had thus far this evening. At my count, and I certainly have not been here for every moment of the debate, but at least two dozen Conservative members of Parliament, including members of cabinet, referred to the situation at Canada Post as a strike when it is a lockout. It is obvious from their lack of experience that they do not comprehend the difference between a lockout and a strike.

A strike is when workers refuse to do the work. A lockout is when management locks the doors. What has happened here is that management has locked the doors. The leader of the NDP and members of the NDP caucus are asking that the locks be taken off and get the mail moving. That is why we are here tonight.

I do not mean that in an unkind way, but this shows the lack of experience and diversity in the Conservative caucus. It has one or two members with any sort of labour background. However, and this is very important, we are talking about one-third of households in Canada where there is a breadwinner from organized labour, workers who have come together collectively to organize in the workplace.

That is an essential component of any democracy. If we do not have the ability to collectively bargain and join a labour union, then we are not in a democracy. That is a fundamental democratic principle that so many Canadians hold dear. One of the essential elements in collective bargaining is the balance, the equilibrium between management and labour. To come to that common agreement we need honest and sincere negotiations.

● (2500)

That has not happened in this case. Despite the government's speaking notes and unlike the diversity of opinions we have heard from the NDP caucus this evening, members of Parliament coming to this place to debate this issue from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, we have heard the same comments from Conservative members of Parliament, comments that are factually wrong in calling a strike a lockout when there is a fundamental difference between the two, but also saying that this has been some kind of eight month protracted negotiation.

We know that is false. We know that the workers at Canada Post have sincerely tried to come to an agreement, have tried to negotiate and what we have seen is bad faith from Canada Post. There is no other way to put it.

The workers have a 94% mandate and, despite the occasional email we have heard Conservative MPs read tonight, it is quite obvious with a 94% mandate that Canada Post workers are very solid on this issue of negotiating with management. Despite all of that, management simply refused to negotiate in good faith with the workers and then it systematically shut down the mail system. First, it shut down operations for two days a week, denying mail service to Canadians. The response from the people who work at Canada Post, the letter carriers who deliver our mail, the person who walks up the 30 steps to my house on the top of the hill on Glover Avenue and then walks down, the response of the letter carriers and the mail sorters was that essential services would be continued and that seniors' cheques would continue to be delivered. Management then played its hand by shutting down the entire system.

There should have been a mature informed response, but given the fact that there is no diversity on the Conservative side and the government does not understand that there is that balance in Canadian democracy, what we saw instead, as my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour said, is basically a sledgehammer, a piece of enforced legislation that rips up any sort of collective bargaining process and imposes on the workers at Canada Post the government's direction in this regard.

What does the government do? The first thing the government did was to impose a wage reduction. Any increase has to be evaluated against the current inflation rate. This is something that makes me and other colleagues in the NDP caucus apoplectic. There is an ignorance on the Conservative side of the House about the difference between the inflation rate and a real increase. If there is a 2% increase and the inflation rate is 3%, any member on the NDP side of the House would say that is a net reduction of 1%. The Conservatives are saying that is some kind of wage increase when indeed it is actually a wage reduction in real terms.

This is imposed by the government on the 50,000 letter carriers and mail sorters across the country, people who are hard-pressed to make ends meet. The government is going to make mandatory an imposed reduction in salary, year after year, after year. That is the first difficulty that I have with this government imposed interference in collective bargaining. This is highly inappropriate and if the Conservative caucus had the diversity of the NDP caucus, the government would have thought twice before wading into this matter in such an irresponsible way.

Second, there is the issue of pensions. As we know, the enforced differential that the Conservative government is bringing in also has profound impacts on pensions. On this side of the House, the NDP fought for pensions. Our predecessors, perhaps in another corner of the House when we had a smaller CCF caucus, originated the idea that was radical at the time and denounced by Conservatives and Liberals, that working people should actually have the right to a pension and that they should actually at the end of their working lives be able to somehow profit from those lives of working and have pensions paid to them.

Government Orders

● (2505)

It was the NDP that fought for that. We were denounced. We were vilified by Conservatives and Liberals but we persevered, working with working people from across this country and pensions are accepted now as something to the benefit of Canadian citizens.

We fought for public medicare. We fought for employment insurance. Each one of those fights had the same rhetoric from the other side and we won each one of those fights because there is nothing more dedicated than a New Democratic Party member of Parliament. We will not stop. Our voices will not be silenced until we succeed in building the kind of society that all Canadians want to see.

The pension element of this Conservative sledgehammer on the letter carriers and on the mail sorters at Canada Post means that for many of the younger people joining Canada Post, they cannot hope to retire at 65. They may be retiring much, much later and they will be retiring at a much smaller pension.

At a time when hundreds of thousands of seniors in this country are living below the poverty line, for the government to impose a forced poverty on those young people joining Canada Post is highly irresponsible. There is no other way to put it.

The third element is what the Conservative government wants to do to younger people. We know that Tory times are tough times, particularly for younger Canadians. Perhaps one reason why there are now two dozen members of our caucus who are younger Canadians is because younger Canadians are finding their voice, that the kinds of policies that are driving down wages, that are driving down opportunities, that are eliminating pensions later on, that are creating the highest level of student debt in our history, particularly in my province of British Columbia, that all of those policies work against young people.

This proposal being enforced, this sledgehammer, by the government makes sure that those younger Canadians or new Canadians who join the postal service will permanently work at lower wages and can never hope to have the kind of retirement security that all of us want to see.

Those are three reasons why we oppose this legislation. It is inappropriate, irresponsible and had the government been well informed, had the government the diversity of our caucus, the government would not have done that.

There may be another reason behind it. My colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour asked the question that perhaps this is ideologically driven.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I'm shocked.

Mr. Peter Julian: The member for Windsor—Tecumseh says he is shocked.

We all remember the events leading up to May 2. We all remember the orange surge in many parts of this country. Perhaps it was just a reaction by the Conservative Prime Minister, but at the time he said we should not worry, that he would be moderate in his actions if elected prime minister. This is a very immoderate action. This is an action that profoundly hurts 50,000 families across the

country, working people, people who have worked for the postal service, have served their country and are being treated, in my opinion, in a most disrespectful way.

One could say that this is another example of what increasingly seems to be a very radical agenda by the government, to wade into the collective bargaining process, as it tried to do with Air Canada, to bring in elements that are highly inappropriate, to penalize working people for the actions of what can only be described as poor management practices at Canada Post. We believe there could be a very strong, ideological component to what the government is trying to do tonight and it is highly inappropriate.

● (2510)

I would like to address the broader issue that my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour also addressed, which is, who is next? The precedent this sets is simply one that we cannot accept. The idea that younger Canadians must be paid a much lower wage rate, that pensions must become even lower for those who are entering the workforce in the coming years, the idea that somehow, year after year, public servants—that is the best way to describe them—who work for Canada Post, who deliver our mail every day, who sort our mail every day, should be subject to what is a net 1% reduction in salary each and every year of this imposed sledgehammer agreement, those are things that we fundamentally disagree with, because what we are seeing is an impact on the middle class right across the country. These kinds of policies are attacking the Canadian middle class. We have seen an erosion of our middle class throughout this Conservative mandate. Canadians in the middle class are earning less. Canadians in the middle class have seen their debt loads almost double over the last few years. Canadians in the middle class are working longer and longer hours and are being paid less and less.

It is the equalizer of free collective bargaining, the ability to join a union, that has often made the difference in the growth of our middle class in the past. There is only one way to describe it. The spectacular speech of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member for Toronto—Danforth, earlier tonight paid tribute to the historic role the labour movement has played in building our country and in building our middle class.

We want to make sure that the middle class in Canada is prosperous. We want to make sure that the system of checks and balances that comes from a labour movement interacting with management is preserved, that the fundamentals we heard earlier from the member for Beaches—East York in what was a fascinating examination of collective bargaining and the importance of that fundamental balance, which is somewhat lost on some members of the Conservative Party—those kinds of elements are vitally important.

We have seen the erosion and the erosion has to stop. The idea that mean-spirited policies that benefit very few at the price of many is something that we are fundamentally opposed to.

Government Orders

There is no doubt that what this legislation does is reward bad management practices. It rewards management that has not actively engaged in sincere labour negotiations. What it does is give them a blank cheque. It fundamentally erodes collective bargaining rights. It hurts 50,000 working families, and, more importantly, each and every year of this imposed sledgehammer will hurt further thousands of Canadians.

This is a fundamental principle. In our party the reason we have grown from 13 members to 19 members, to 29 members, to 36 members, to 103 members of Parliament is because working families across the country trust us when we say what we need to do is build the kind of Canada where everybody matters, where nobody is left behind, and where that balance is maintained and our middle class can grow and poor Canadians can be lifted out of poverty. Those are the principles that we bring to the House of Commons. That is why this caucus is fighting so terrifically this evening for the rights of working Canadians.

We will continue to do so because it is right for our country. That is why we are here, and we will not stop. Our voices will not be silent until the government hears reason.

• (2515)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take issue not necessarily with the comments made recently by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, but with many of the comments that I have heard from others in the NDP this evening during debate, particularly the comments about members on the government side being anti-union. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is well documented.

The Minister of Labour's father was a very active member of the CAW. In my own case, my father was a high-ranking official with the United Steel Workers of America. In fact, Ken Neumann, the current head of the Canadian chapter of the United Steel Workers of America, freely admits that he learned his trade at the feet of my father. My father was his mentor. I see Ken Neumann quite frequently and we talk on very friendly terms. I can assure members opposite, even the member for Acadie—Bathurst who wants to heckle because he does not want to hear the truth, that this government is not anti-union.

What we are saying, however, is that the NDP are propagating a myth tonight when they say they are representing working people. They are not. They are representing the views of union people.

There are millions of working people in Canada who want to see back-to-work legislation. It is fine for NDP members to represent unions and union workers, but would they admit the fact that they are representing a narrow perspective of views from union workers across Canada and not the wider range of Canadians? That is our role. That is what we will continue to do.

• (2520)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, actions speak louder than words, and the Conservative government is using a sledgehammer against working families today. There is no doubt about that.

I am a long-time member of the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce. I am a proud member of the Burnaby Board of Trade. I

have worked with small businesses all my life. Small business people understand that a strong labour movement means a healthy balance in the community. It means that more of the benefits of the industries that are in communities stay in those communities, recirculate through the community. That helps small businesses.

To say that it is only a third of the country where there is a breadwinner in the household who support the fundamental principles of collective bargaining, I can only fundamentally disagree.

All progressive Canadians from coast to coast to coast understand the key role that is played when we have that balance, when working people have the ability to organize collectively, to bargain collective agreements, and to ensure that the benefits of the industry stay in the community. That is something most Canadians understand. I wish Conservative MPs did too.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend from the NDP with great interest. He said his party went from 12 members to 103. That is indeed a remarkable feat, but a reverse process can also happen.

I wonder if my colleague could tell me how much this is really costing us to be here tonight and to have this process. There is no way we are going to win against the Conservative Party. They outnumber us; they have 167 members.

It has come to my attention that the NDP has collective agreements with its staff. If I am not mistaken, and I stand to be corrected, something did not happen and they have not come to an agreement for a number of years.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am proud and happy to hear the member for Scarborough—Agincourt speak about the idea of a reverse process. Our party has grown from 13 members to 103 members. I understand he is an authority on the reverse process, going from 174 members to 34. I would be very pleased to hear his comments about that. The way to avoid that reverse process is to be sincere and to work hard.

I have been in the House for seven years. I have never in those seven years seen an official opposition willing to stand up to the government on bad policies or bad laws like the NDP caucus, 103 strong.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for an excellent presentation, as always. The passion that he shows is genuine.

I want to go back to one issue he talked about and that is the lockout.

In question period on Wednesday I noticed that the Prime Minister said the wage increase in the government's bill is similar to that of other public servants. I think that was a slip of the tongue because the next day he said the wage increase is like that of civil servants. I really think he is talking about employees in the post office as being civil servants. If they are civil servants, then he is their boss. The Prime Minister, the head of the government, is the boss of civil servants. Why can he not take responsibility for the insidious lockout that is taking place in the postal service?

Government Orders

● (2525)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Western Arctic for his question. He adds a great deal to the debate, and always has since he first joined this House in 2006.

I believe he is absolutely right. The Prime Minister and the government treat postal workers as if they are the bosses. What we have seen are bad management practices that the government is now reinforcing. It is sending the message out that if you do not bargain in a sincere manner, if you do not put things out—as a former management negotiator, I can tell you, you have to be sincere and get things out to get an agreement made. There is no falsifying. There is no hiding. When you are talking about collective agreement negotiations, you have to be sincere, you have to be honest, and you have to be forthright.

The member for Western Arctic will gather from my comments that we are not seeing those kinds of abilities on the government side of the House. They do not seem to be able to approach the whole process of collective bargaining in the way it needs to be approached: honest, transparent, forthright. That is why we are in the situation we are in now. We are saying to the government, take the locks off, let us get the postal system working, and let us have a real arbitration or collective negotiation that allows this issue to be resolved.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having just listened to his answer, he seems to be willing to offer some advice. I wonder if the advice on negotiating contracts that he might give to us is the example of the member from Hamilton Centre, which I referenced earlier. What the NDP did to the workers the last time it had the opportunity to govern in the province of Ontario for five long, dark, miserable years was this: it allowed them to negotiate a collective agreement and then said, “Forget it. We are going to rip that agreement up. We are going to cut your pay and we are going to force you to take 12 days off a year. We are going to take \$1.9 billion out of the pockets of 30,000 civil servants unilaterally, we are going to call them Rae Days, and everybody is going to be very happy.”

Now the hon. member might not have heard because he lives 30 stairs up a mountain and deep back into the side of a hill. He might not have known that this is what was going on in Ontario at the time with an NDP government. I am wondering if that is the type of example and if these are some of the amendments that we are waiting for. Perhaps the member from Hamilton Centre might advise the member on how they negotiated with workers, the respect they had with the workers when they unilaterally—

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I live up a hill; I do not live in a cave. That is why I am so pleased to respond to the member's question, which is about NDP provincial governments.

Every year the federal Ministry of Finance, which certainly is not in any way an NDP sympathizer, publishes an annual compendium of which governments are best at managing money and paying down debt. For 20 years, year after year, the federal Ministry of Finance says the best party for managing the people's money in Canada is the NDP. That is the best provincial government in Canada.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise at this austere hour and speak on an

issue that I think is of profound importance, not only to the people of this chamber, not only to the women and men who are affected by this legislation at Canada Post, but also to all Canadians who believe in fairness, who believe in human rights, and who want a country where we have a thriving middle class as the backbone of this economy.

I would ask a little bit of indulgence from my colleagues in the House to quote from a piece of paper that I think is very instructive.

● (2530)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. There is so much noise across the way I cannot hear my colleague who is immediately adjacent to me speak.

The Deputy Speaker: I have just come to the chair. This is a very intense debate and I would ask hon. members to moderate their comments and listen to each other.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I would point out that I have been listening quietly to all of my colleagues who are talking and would ask that they extend the same courtesy to me when I am speaking and have decorum in the House of Commons.

I want to quote from something which I think would be instructive for all of us here. There is a saying that those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it. The title of this document is, “Postal Workers Organizing: A Look Across A Century”, 1900 to 2000. It says:

The first postal clerks' association was formed locally in Vancouver in 1911.

I am very proud to represent Vancouver Kingsway, the birthplace of the first postal clerks association. It goes on:

It soon added branches in the Atlantic, and by 1917, the Dominion Postal Clerks Association (DPCA) had branches across the country.

It describes the post office working conditions at the time:

When one looks at the working conditions prevailing during this period, it's no wonder the postal associations soon tired of begging and petitioning for improvements. Post office workers often work 60 to 70 hour work weeks with no overtime provisions.

If a train was late, postal clerks might have to come to work in the middle of the night. Letter carriers were forced to wait around until the mail was ready for delivery. At Christmas, the work day had no limit. And for this, they received very poor wages.

These circumstances came to a head in 1918, when FALC, after failing to convince the government to appoint a conciliation board to establish regulated collective agreement conditions, called a strike. It was strongest in the West, Toronto and Hamilton.

By the way we have fine representatives in those areas who continue to this day to fight for working people in this country.

The document goes on to say:

By the end of the 10-day strike, letter carriers, clerks, railway mail clerks and porters...were all on strike west of the Great Lakes.

The first national civil service strike ended with a huge victory. Postal workers won a 44-hour week, overtime pay, salary increases, no discrimination against strikers and a Civil Service Commission of Inquiry into working conditions at the Post Office.

Who today would quarrel with any of those victories?

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That came from brave and courageous women and men who stood up to governments like this one, to people who would take away their right to strike, and look at what they were striking for: a 44-hour work week, overtime pay, rest between shifts.

Moving forward to 1965, the document says:

The year 1965 was a turning point, a defining moment in the history of post office workers. In July, the government—

—I think it was a Liberal government at that time—

—announced in proposed legislation a rejection of the right to strike for government workers and a wage increase of less than half of the union's bottom line.

A strike ensued which lasted for two weeks in Montreal and a shorter period in other locations. They were rotating strikes.

The immediate results of the strike included:

- wage increases
- no reprisals against strikers
- a Royal Commission into working conditions, headed by Judge Montpetit
- the inclusion of the right to strike in the new federal public sector labour legislation.

I would also point out that the leaders of all three postal workers brotherhood unions failing to back the strike lost their positions.

There has been some talk here about whether or not there is a right to strike. It is true there is no right to strike that is implicit in the freedom of association provision of the charter. However, it is true that under the Canada Labour Code trade unions that are certified or voluntarily recognized under that agreement who go through the legal provisions can put themselves into a legal strike position and when they do so, they are validly on strike. That is the case with CUPW today.

We are not arguing whether or not there is a theoretical juridical right to strike.

An hon. member: Come on, Don.

Mr. Don Davies: We are talking about a union that is legally on strike. If the government thinks the union ought not to be on strike, then it should have the guts to go to court and challenge that.

An hon. member: They're locked out.

• (2535)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I sit quietly while they speak and I would ask them to do the same.

The right to bargain collectively has been talked about in this House as well. That right is guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is also guaranteed in international conventions to which this country is a signatory. Therefore, those international conventions are binding upon this country.

The concept of bargaining collectively is about free collective bargaining. This is where it gets interesting and challenging for the government. Free collective bargaining involves negotiations between two private parties. It recognizes each party's right to sit down and negotiate a private collective agreement. A collective agreement is a contract. Collective bargaining is governed by Canadian contract law. The right of two parties to sit down in this

country face to face and freely bargain a contract is something I would think the Conservatives would support.

The Conservatives claim to support private enterprise and the right of people to freely contract in this country. If the Conservatives believe that, then they have no choice but to allow a private enterprise which is a crown corporation, an arm's-length entity from the government, to sit down with another private entity, a trade union, and respect their right to bargain the terms and conditions of their relationship unmolested by government, without having the heavy hand of government imposing a settlement on them. I do not think the Conservatives would tolerate for one moment government intervening in two businesses that were bargaining a sales contract. If they truly believe in the freedom to contract, then what is good for the goose is good for the gander. They must be consistent, but the Conservatives are not and this legislation shows that very clearly.

The law clearly recognizes that government has no right to intervene in free collective bargaining except in two circumstances. One is essential services. One of the members over there, who I understand used to work for the police force, would understand that. I think it is why he erroneously thought there was no right to strike, because that is true for essential services. Legislatively, very often the right to strike is legally prohibited for a reason. We cannot have our police on strike. We cannot have our medical staff in emergency rooms, sometimes firefighters, paramedics on strike. Those sorts of groups often cannot strike.

The second exception to the right to strike is when a strike reaches a point that the health and safety of the public is threatened. That situation usually demands that a party wait until it has evidence. It can go before a labour relations board to establish that fact.

I would respectfully submit that neither of those situations is the case here.

I want to talk about the strike. From what I have heard from the members opposite, I think they fundamentally misconstrue and misunderstand the purpose and the nature of a strike or a lockout. Once again, not to belabour the point, we are not talking about a strike situation but about a lockout. However, what I am about to say would apply equally to both situations.

Collective bargaining is a process of negotiation. It involves a gradual increase of pressure. There are graduated measured processes taken that are calculated toward urging the parties toward agreement. These can involve things like taking a strike vote. The union will leave the bargaining table, canvass its members and come back to the table with a strike mandate and that will indicate to the employer how much support it has. It usually indicates to the employer that perhaps it has to change its position.

The employer can invoke a final offer process where it can present a final offer to the union and force a vote on that final offer. That also can force pressure on the union to change its position at the bargaining table. There can be work to rule where a union will not declare a strike but will work exactly according to the terms of the collective agreement as a precursor to taking strike action. There can be rotating strikes which are short of a full strike. Each one of these graduated steps is part of the acknowledged process of collective bargaining. Ultimately there is a strike or lockout.

Government Orders

• (2540)

The very purpose of a strike or lockout is to cause hardship. It is the ultimate weapon to exert maximum economic, political and social pressure on the other party. The government seems to think that only strikes that have no consequences for anybody ought to be allowed, that only strikes that do not cause hardship ought to be permitted.

The government would tolerate strikes only if they were ineffective. That misconstrues the very purpose of a strike. It denies workers whose labour actually has an impact on the community around them the right to strike. It leaves the right to strike to groups that have little economic power. There are a couple of examples that illustrate that very starkly in this country.

One example I do not think anybody would remember, except for my hon. colleagues from Alberta, is the strike in Edmonton during the 1980s. Workers at the woodworking plant, Zeidler, went on strike. That strike went on for eight years. Why? No government ordered them back to work. No government ordered the employer to get back to the table. No government sent it to binding arbitration or final offer selection to result in a collective agreement. Why? The Zeidler workers were a small marginalized group and did not have an impact on anybody else. In that case, the government let the workers suffer. Of course, many members on the opposite side would have been totally in favour of that.

Just last year at Vale Inco, workers in Canada were subjected to the actions of a billion dollar multinational corporation and they went on strike for a year. Did the government send them back to work? No. Why? Because the employer had billions of dollars and could easily go through that strike. A small community with hundreds families suffered intensely from that strike but that was okay.

In the present case, the withdrawal of services, I would argue, was being done in a tempered and managed manner by the union, but when it started to exert some pressure, the government panicked. It said that the workers had to go back to work right away as they were causing pressure. Talk about a one-sided application of the strike and lockout weapon.

When unions have gone on strike, or when they have pressured the employers, what have they done it for? I could do much more research, but I have a short list of some things unions have fought for over the last century and obtained for Canadian people: minimum wages; paid vacations; minimum periods of time off between shifts, including the weekend; paid statutory holidays; parental leave; occupational health and safety committees and safety standards; pensions; health and welfare plans, including dental, eye care and prescription plans.

These are the things unions go on strike for. Very often it is small groups of people who sacrifice their own financial interests for the betterment of groups as a whole. All Canadian families have benefited from these brave men and women, and they are going to benefit from the brave actions of the CUPW workers today as well.

When we talk about interference in the collective bargaining process, the government would be aghast at anybody interfering with the contractual relations between two private actors, but it is quick to

jump in and do it when a union is involved. Let us look at the government's interference.

Not only did the government jump in and interfere, it started contracting for one of the parties. The government has put in this legislation lower wages than management was prepared to pay. How can that be justified? A private contract is being written by the state. Holy mackerel, they are a bunch of socialists over on that side. I have not heard one single justification for that from the members opposite.

I also want to talk about our colleagues in the Liberal Party because, of course, their position changes depending on the week, month, year or decade. I will be careful. I will just tell the truth.

In 1997 the Liberal Party brought in the same kind of legislation that is currently before the House. It ordered CUPW workers back to work and imposed wages on them. It is quite interesting to hear Liberals talk about this legislation.

• (2545)

And that is not the only time. It is a shameful history, because in 1965 the Liberal government proposed legislation that would strip all government workers of the right to strike, period. I hesitate to bring that up, because given that this Conservative government has copied what the Liberals did in 1997, I certainly do not want it to copy what the Liberals did in 1965. I want to be careful there.

In 1993 the Liberals fired 10,000 part-time advertising mail workers, the largest single layoff in Canadian history, and they handed over unaddressed advertising mail to the private sector. I think Canadians should know that when they see the Liberals stand up and try to pretend that they are actually on the side of workers in this dispute.

I also want to talk a little bit about what is on the table and what is at risk by this legislation. We have a proposal by Canada Post to treat new hires completely differently. They want to have two tiers of workers, where new workers who are hired receive 18% less wages than the current employees, where they have to work five years longer before they are eligible for retirement, where they join a defined contribution plan instead of a defined benefit plan. Do honourable members know what a defined contribution plan is? It is not a pension, it is an RSP; that is what it is. There is no guarantee of any kind of pension amount when an individual retires, and the entire risk of the pension plan is on the workers, none on the employer. And there are reduced benefits on retirement as well.

I also want to talk about what is at stake in terms of pensions, which are of interest to all Canadians, because retirement security is very important. There is a two-tier plan here once again, and this is something workers are fighting for. They are fighting for their retirement security.

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This government has bragged about its creation of jobs. It brags about the number of jobs it has created, about its fiscal performance. I note that it always compares it to July 2009, which is the trough of the recession, and then it compares how many jobs have been created from then. But it is the lack of quality jobs that is important, because what has been created in that time are part-time, temporary, and usually service sector jobs. We should ask Canadians, are there more, better, family-sustaining career jobs today than there were in 2006, when the government was elected? I would argue that is absolutely not the case.

The kinds of jobs that Canada Post is proposing here—lower wages, reduced pensions, longer working till retirement—are these the kinds of jobs the government is bragging about creating? What a legacy to offer the young generation, to offer poorer jobs on which they cannot raise their families.

I come from Vancouver, where the average price of a house in east Vancouver is \$850,000, where a two-bedroom apartment rents for \$1,200 a month, and where the median income in my riding is \$43,000, total household income. And this government wants to create more jobs to have reduced standards? That is not the way to create a healthy economy.

The way to build a healthy economy in this country is to have strong, family-sustaining, middle-class jobs with dental plans, pensions, medical plans, and job protection, jobs on which an individual can raise a family and maybe take a vacation once a year and actually be able to buy some goods and services in the community and support the business sector that this government claims to support.

If we do not have a strong working and middle class in this country, we do not have a strong economy. I wish this government would start to understand that.

• (2550)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's comments, and I have to say that the government is trying to bring together two parties that have been unable to reach an agreement. That has been demonstrated over the last eight months. The union went on strike, which caused huge problems for Canada Post. Canada Post then had a lockout. The labour minister has gone to extraordinary lengths to try to bring the two parties together. She has not been able to do so.

The same economy that the member espouses is experiencing great harm. Small businesses are experiencing great harm, particularly in rural and remote communities in the north. Individuals are not able to get their mail. Things that keep our country together are not being delivered.

Will the member stand up and support the government and its legislation to bring all the parties together and get our economy going again? Will the member support the government's initiative in a timely manner?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, what my honourable colleague left out is the fact that Canada Post locked out the workers. He fails to mention that the union offered to go back to work and back to the bargaining table if the corporation agreed to operate under the

expired collective agreement, and the corporation refused. That would have allowed the mail to be delivered.

I cannot think of a more reasonable position for the union to have taken than that, but it was rejected by the employer. Of course it is no surprise it would be rejected by the employer, because there is no incentive for the employer to bargain in good faith with the union, since it knows the government has already said it will order workers back to work and give them lower wages than management has already put on the table. Where is the incentive for the employer to get back to the table?

I want to conclude by saying that a disturbing pattern is emerging in my time in Parliament. When I was elected in 2008, the first thing this government did was attack the public sector by attacking pay equity and rolling back negotiated wage settlements with the public sector. It also, by the way, reneged on its promise to pay RCMP officers the promised wage increases it claimed it would during the campaign.

When the Conservatives were re-elected in 2011, what was the first thing they did? They brought in draconian back-to-work legislation and attacked CUPW.

It is very important that we stand up against this attack on workers' rights in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Madam Speaker, even though I am two hours late, I want to wish everyone a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

We are faced with a bizarre situation. Under the current government, Canada is the only country in the world where the money saved to stave off poverty in retirement is considered a nuisance.

That impression is so deeply ingrained among government MPs that the following question seems relevant: once the most powerful, the oldest, the most active, the most modern and the most democratic of Canadian unions has lost its right to a defined benefit pension plan, what will happen to the rest of the Canadian population?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question. That is one of the reasons the NDP official opposition is taking this issue so seriously. There is a principle that what happens to one can happen to all. New Democrats believe it is very important on the official opposition side of the House that protecting the rights of workers in every situation is important.

Rights cannot be carved up. Rights either apply to all Canadians or they apply to nobody. It is very important that we recognize that and stand up for these rights, because if this government can unfairly attack the collective bargaining rights of CUPW workers, as has been pointed out by many of my colleagues, they can do it to anybody.

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I want to conclude by providing a couple of facts, lest anybody thinks that Canada Post cannot afford this agreement. The Canada Post group recorded its 15th consecutive year of profitability, and its income before taxes in the last year we have figures for, 2009, was \$319 million, an increase of \$253 million from the previous year. At the bargaining table, of course unions have to be sensitive to the economic situation of the employer, but in this case the employer is on a sound financial footing.

• (2555)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the debate has been going on for a while and many points have been made and made again. We have talked a great deal in broad generalities, and in order to move this debate ahead we should try to at least throw out some specifics, whether it is suggestions, ideas, or amendments. I know New Democrats have not wanted to go where amendments have gone before, but we should at least be talking about some generalities.

At the outset of the minister's presentation she gave a bit of a chronology, saying the contract lapsed January 31 and she appointed a mediator and she went through the sequence of events through to the tabling of the legislation.

That being said, when does one bring in the arbitrator, and when does one not bring in the arbitrator? We know the NDP has unionized staff, and we know they are currently without a contract. We also know that their last contract was served by arbitration. When is the perfect time to bring in an arbitrator?

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I ask for a little bit of order, please, in the House. This is a difficult issue, but I hope the debate can continue respectfully.

The hon. member for Vancouver—Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, the real question is when are the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party going to actually respect their workers that they employ on the Hill here and voluntarily recognize the union to bargain for them to improve their conditions?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: What about you guys?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, there is a lot of cat-calling from the third party behind us, so I will elucidate for them.

The collective agreement that we have expired in March, and we are currently in collective bargaining, if that makes any sense to them. I would just urge them to start collective bargaining with their own employees. That would be a nice start.

What is very interesting as well and what is of interest to Canadians is the comparative price of the postal service in this country. Canadians enjoy one of the lowest prices for mail delivery of any country. To compare by the 20-gram rate in U.S. dollars, the U.S. is at 42¢; Canada is at 52¢; the U.K. is at 72¢; Japan is at 77¢; Germany is at 87¢; France is at 87¢; Austria is at 87¢; Sweden is at 93¢; Italy is at 95¢; and Finland is at \$1.11. Canadians know they are getting excellent service at a very reasonable price, and that is because of the hardworking women and men who work for CUPW. Let us treat them respectfully.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech.

I listened intently to the hon. member's treatise on labour law in Canada. It was a little bit like going to a labour law 101 lecture, and it was all very interesting. What I did not hear him talk about was what he heard from his constituents during the last general election a few weeks ago. When I went door to door, house after house, day after day, I heard people say "We just went through this terrible recession where lots of people lost their jobs. The economy is starting slowly to come out of the recession. It is fragile, and we need the economy to stay strong and we need you to do something about it."

I do not hear anything from the other side. All evening I have not heard anything about what they want to do to keep the postal service running for the benefit of all Canadians and our economy—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

We must give the hon. member equal time.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, that is a valid question, and I will tell you what I heard from my constituents who are concerned about the economy. They want good jobs. That is what they want. They want good, family-sustaining jobs. They do not want jobs that have 18% lower wages than currently exist. They do not want jobs where they have to work until they are 70 years old before they can retire. They do not want jobs that have inferior pension plans on which they cannot plan their future. They want good, middle class, sustaining jobs.

By the way, my riding is almost entirely small businesses, and the small businesses in my riding also want good, family-sustaining jobs, because it is those people who come to their stores and buy their goods and services.

• (2600)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise, although it perhaps is not an hour I would have chosen. It is not even prime time in British Columbia anymore.

I will begin by acknowledging that many Canadians go to work every day at this time. I acknowledge those who work as cleaners, those women and men across the country who clean our office buildings and our schools. It is not a very big sacrifice for me to be here at this time. They quite often work a second or third job to support their families.

I also acknowledge those who work in restocking the big box stores and the food stores across the country who often have to struggle to find child care at that time of the night so they can hold down the two or three jobs they need to afford housing and a better future for their children.

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I acknowledge the health care workers, the health care professionals, the doctors, the nurses and the other professionals who work around the clock to help all of us enjoy better health. They are often working at this hour of the night.

In particular, I acknowledge the emergency services workers, the police, fire and ambulance, who are working at this hour of the night and quite often dealing with those problems that the rest of us do not deal with during the daytime, those problems of addiction and mental illness that we leave them to deal with at this hour of the night.

I also acknowledge those who serve in our military who work day and night around the clock to keep us safe and are quite often working at this hour.

On a normal day, postal workers would be working at this hour sorting the mail to help keep our economy running, sorting the mail to get it out to those seniors and charities who depend on the mail, and sorting the mail for small businesses in my riding that use Canada Post to deliver their products and make a profit to support their families.

For me, it seems late, but for many of those people, it is a normal time to go to work.

Why are we here tonight? I think there is one thing we share on both sides of this House. We share the importance of Canada Post to this country in so many ways.

I mentioned seniors and the disabled who wait for their cheques in the mail. I mentioned charities. Many workers receive their paycheques through Canada Post. Many small businesses do their business using the services of Canada Post. However, perhaps even more important to many families, they wait for Canada Post to hear from their family members across the country or abroad as a way of keeping in touch, one of the only ways they can afford when they are having trouble making ends meet at the end of the month.

One of the things I wish we would agree on is that Canada Post has done a fine job providing this service as a publicly-owned service that makes a profit on behalf of all Canadians while still delivering an excellent service that would not be delivered to so many communities if it were left to the private sector.

We clearly differ on some things tonight and I will talk about some of those differences.

One area on which we differ is the narrative of this dispute. The government likes to talk about these long negotiations but it leaves out the basic fact of those negotiations, which is that Canada Post was making a profit of \$281 million. Where does that profit come from? It comes from the labour of those people who go to work every day and work hard to deliver that quality service that Canadians use. Therefore, when it comes time for collective bargaining, it is time to share some of that profit not just with taxpayers in general but with those people who go to work every day and work hard to ensure Canada Post is a profitable corporation. When they see the CEO being paid nearly half a million dollars, plus a 33% bonus, then it is not hard to understand why workers voted more than 94% for a strike to get their fair share of those profits. They voted for a strike because they are faced with a company that is

trying to roll back their wages and roll back their benefits when there is no economic necessity to do so.

The second difference we have is in our understanding of what makes for a successful economy. The government seems committed to moving Canada to a low wage economy and thinking that somehow this will promote growth and prosperity in the future. I would like to remind all members in this House that Canada's greatest period of growth came in the 1950s and 1960s. What was that period in our history? That was our period of greatest equality in this country. It is equality and sharing the wealth that leads to economic growth and progress in the future.

• (2605)

The government's agenda is really something other than the financial health of Canada Post. I think it is to put us firmly on that path of a race to the bottom and a belief that this low-wage economy will somehow make us more competitive with other countries around the world, and that somehow this will produce the miracle of prosperity in the future.

I have heard from small businesses in my riding and they understand when workers do not have enough to make ends meet, do not have enough to go to the corner store to buy bread, do not have enough to pay for child care or do not have enough to buy houses. They know that an economy offering solid wages and providing a good living for families is the best way for small business to prosper as well.

There is a very important work that influenced me greatly over the last year called *The Spirit Level*, written by two British epidemiologists, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. The book's subtitle, *Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, is very interesting.

The authors looked at the scientific evidence in 11 different areas of health and social measures. They looked at physical health, including how long people live and how often they are ill. They looked at mental health and what the frequency of mental health problems were in a society. On drug abuse they studied how high the addiction rates were. They looked at educational achievement and how long people stayed in school and how successful they were. They looked at the rates of imprisonment and how often people fell into conflict with the law. They looked at obesity, an increasing health problem in our own country. They looked at social mobility and how equal was a society and how likely were kids from different economic backgrounds able to succeed. They looked at social trust and whether people could trust their neighbourhood and feel safe in their neighbourhood and in their own homes. They looked at teen pregnancies and they looked at child poverty.

What did they find? They found that the countries that do best on the equality measures do best in every one of those 11 measures of social progress.

Thus, when we look at what is happening with Bill C-6, we see exactly the wrong remedy being applied for a successful society, not just economically but as a place all of us want to live and in which we want our children to live in the future.

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The three key mechanisms for achieving equality are: a living wage, sound pension plans and equal access to education and health care. The problem for me with the bill that is before us is that it makes a very direct attack on two of those three key mechanisms.

The first of those mechanisms is obviously a living wage. I have heard people catcalling, which is perhaps the best description used by the hon. member, and asking why workers should earn these high wages and why postal workers earn this much money. They earn these wages because that is what it takes in our society to support a family. Their union has struggled to ensure they receive enough to make ends meet at the end of the month, to set a little bit aside for their retirement and to put some money away for their kids' education. That is what this is really about.

The government has brought in a proposal that suggests lower wages than Canada Post actually had on the table at the beginning of this dispute. This is an attack on a living wage in our society.

We will all do better and we will all be more prosperous when everybody can afford to make ends meet at the end of the month.

The second key mechanism for achieving equality is a sound pension plan. What does this proposal do? It says that we cannot really do anything about the fact that some workers have good pensions and those pensions cannot really be taken away from them. Instead, it could have tried to ensure that all workers enjoy a secure retirement future by doing something that would be very easy, which is to expand the Canada pension plan. The NDP campaigned very hard on that and we found a very broad agreement across the country.

Instead, this legislation proposes taking the new workers and denying them pension security in the future. That is the wrong solution both for economic and for social progress in this country.

• (2610)

I will return to the question of why this is important by telling members a couple of stories. My grandmother was a postal worker and her husband, my grandfather, was a self-employed plumber. When it came time to retire, if it had not been for my grandmother's postal worker pension, they would have had nothing. Why was that? It was because they did not earn enough to save and buy RRSPs and pay fees to Bay Street to manage their wealth. They donated heavily in their community to support very important church and community work in which they were involved. They raised four kids and tried to put through university. At the end of the day, if it had not for my grandmother's postal worker pension, they would have been living in abject poverty. However, because she had a pension, they were able to get by and live with dignity in their retirement. After my grandmother died, my grandfather was able to live, through a survivor benefit, on her pension.

In my family, we know the great importance of these public pension plans. What we had in my family, I very much desire every Canadian family to have, which is a secure retirement for their parents and their grandparents.

My second story is about postal workers in my riding. My letter carrier is Julie. We move rather frequently but we move within the same postal walk. Therefore, no matter where that mail is addressed to, Julie writes on the front, "Please change your address", and puts

it in our box anyway. She has become a great friend of ours over the last four to five years.

I have heard from her colleagues many times today and I want to cite one of them who asked to be named tonight. She said, "I want you to tell the government", from Sherry Partington of Victoria, "yes, I want to go back to work, but I want to go back to work under a contract that is fair and negotiated and not forced down my throat by the government".

I want to address another issue because the members on the other side have tried to turn this into a union worker versus a non-union worker kind of dispute. I am very proud to stand and say that I am a member and my dues are still current in my own union as a college instructor.

When I was on the campaign trail, I knocked on a door where a young man said to me, "Well, you're pro-union. What have unions ever done for me?" We talked about what the labour movement has achieved for all Canadians in this country through collective bargaining and through political action and alliance with the NDP. We had a lot to talk about. My colleague from Vancouver Kingsway has already mentioned some of these things, but I asked my constituent if he got sick pay at work. He said that of course he did. I said to him that he was not a union member and asked him where he thought the sick pay came from. I also asked him how many hours he worked a day and he replied that he did not work more than eight hours. I then asked him where he thought that came from and told him that it came from the union movement. I then asked him if he had weekends off and if he liked weekends. I then asked him whether he still thought the union movement never gave him anything.

We then went on to talk about holiday pay, overtime pay, extended health benefits, shift differential, pension plans, health and safety committees, parental leave, and now, many unions are leading the way on childcare, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment in the workplace. By the time we were done, he said that maybe he could vote for me after all because I had given him some important information on the contributions unions have made. He really did not know that history.

Therefore, I am very proud to stand here tonight. I believe we are still discussing the hoist. When other members ask why we are not moving amendments, it is because we are still on a hoist motion and, therefore, it is not the appropriate time to do that. However, I believe it is not too late for a deal here and it is not too late for the government to come to its senses. There are a couple of ways this could be done. If the government does not want to just take the lock off, end the lockout and let postal workers go back to work under the existing contract, as they offered to do, then there may be some other compromises that can be reached in this back to work legislation.

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However, this debate is not just about the mail and not just about collective bargaining or union rights. This debate is about the kind of Canada in which we all want to live in the future: the vision we have for ourselves as a community and the vision we have for all of our children and our grandchildren to come.

Unions, particularly the postal workers union, have fought hard for decent pay and benefits to support their members' families. Locking out workers and imposing a contract tramples on those hard-fought gains. It turns back the clock. It sets dangerous precedents. Canada Post belongs to all Canadians and the benefits that go to Canada Post workers, we stand on this side and say, are the kind of benefits we should work to achieve for all workers in our great country.

• (2615)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member opposite in terms of what he was talking about in his riding. In particular, he talked about business and small business and wanting to ensure that they are helped in this process.

I've also heard from my own constituents. In fact, small business people are saying, "Get those guys back to work because we need to have postal service". They send out invoices to get cheques, but they are not getting those cheques. I also have heard from other people, who are not employed, and they are saying to me that if the postal workers are not happy with \$18 an hour they will take those jobs.

We know that the NDP is a very socialist left-wing party. We understand that. In fact, that party wants to ensure that it supports the union because it has a direct line to the unions. So I would ask that member what his party would do for businesses. We know that businesses need to get their cheques in and their invoices out.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I talked to one business person in my riding today by phone. I asked him if he realized that CUPW said it would continue to negotiate under the existing contract, and he said that really changes things, that maybe we do not need back to work legislation and maybe we do not have to stay here all weekend. The government could just let the workers go back to work and let them reach an agreement through free collective bargaining.

I also talked to a woman who runs a small business in Sooke in my riding. She very much depends on being able to mail out the products she produces. She does hand embroidery work and sells it all across the country and around the world. She uses Canada Post for shipping. What she said to me was that she understands why there is a dispute and, she said, "I just want it to get settled". That does not mean she wants to take sides. She does not want to side with the workers or with Canada Post. She wants to see the process of bargaining go on so that there is a resolution. We all know that could start immediately if Canada Post would open the doors, go back to the table and negotiate in good faith.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was moved by the situation of my colleague's grandmother who used to work for Canada Post, because this brought back memories of my own youth in connection with another economic

sector, that of construction, where my dearly departed father used to work.

Unfortunately, for many years in Quebec, given the impossibility of concluding agreements, the Quebec government simply decreed the working conditions that were in effect in the construction sector. This affected our family greatly. I remember that my mother was affected by it, and that it had an impact on her children.

Can my colleague tell me why, ultimately, postal workers are being prevented from negotiating with management?

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I promise that in the near future I will be responding in French.

I think there is a misunderstanding among some members on the other side. The last hon. member asked me if the postal workers were not happy with \$19 an hour. Let me tell members about \$19 an hour in my community. The community social services council members sat down and asked what it would cost in greater Victoria for a single person with one dependent to rent a house, to pay for the basic costs of getting to work and getting a child to school, and to pay for food—nothing else.

Do members know what that costs in my riding? It costs \$17.31 an hour, and that leaves nothing to put away for the future, nothing to put away for the kids' education, nothing for savings, nothing for emergencies, and nothing for a vacation. That \$19 an hour in my community is not a princely wage.

Most workers in my riding who work for less than that have to work at more than one job, and that's with not just one parent working, but two. Many of them have three jobs between the two parents and very little time with their kids. There is a fundamental misunderstanding that somehow Canada Post workers have achieved some great princely sum of money when all they are getting is the amount that it takes to make sure a family can live a decent life in our society.

• (2620)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments but would like to state that this strike is essentially killing businesses. I would like to talk about one of the notes that I received from one of my constituents. I have it here. I actually received it today as a letter, not an e-mail.

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My constituent stated: “I was enquiring to see if there was a need for constituent support for legislating the postal workers back to the job. As the comptroller of a rural business, we rely heavily on the mail system for our operations. The majority of our consumers are sole proprietors living in rural areas. To get invoices to and payments from them requires mail services. Electronic options are limited to the location and demographics of our customers. Without the mail delivery I’m struggling to keep everything balanced. We employ 13 people with well-paying skilled jobs without the option of union contracts, benefits or pension packages. It’s frustrating to be held hostage by a powerful union fighting for wages and benefits that from the outside looking in seem already excessive.”

So my question for the member opposite is this. The official opposition has chosen a side in this dispute and it has been clear that it stands in solidarity with CUPW members. Can the member please explain to this House how he can justify his focus on just CUPW as opposed to the rest of the Canadian public, such as the rural folks in my riding of—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I must give the hon. member equal time.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I suggest that perhaps the hon. member was not listening all that carefully to my speech, since I spent very little time actually talking about the union specifically as a union in this dispute.

I find it interesting that she received a letter today. Not many of the rest of us have.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Would the member like to see it? It’s right here.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Perhaps it came through one of those private couriers.

I do acknowledge that this dispute is causing—

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I am just wondering if my colleague is asking unanimous consent in order to table what she just pointed out in the letter. Is that what she is asking?

The Deputy Speaker: I thank you, but I did not hear the hon. member ask for any kind of unanimous consent. I am sure she understands that she can do that at any time.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, what I would say in response to the member’s question is that I do understand that this dispute is causing hardship for many people, not just businesses. There are many other Canadians who depend on Canada Post. What I would say is that it appears that who is holding these people to ransom is the strong, stable, Conservative national government those members like to talk about, because that is who locked out these workers and shut down the postal services.

The Deputy Speaker: Very briefly, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I will try to make this brief, but I want to thank my friend from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca for his presentation.

We have had some discussion in this House about the right to strike and the nature of the law in this country. It was a few speeches back, so I ask my friend from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca to forgive me for asking him if he can recall the B.C. hospital workers’ case at the Supreme Court in the year 2007, which I believe made it very clear that governments cannot interfere in the basic rights of all workers, not just unionized workers. Labour rights are human rights. That is, I believe, the main ratio of that case, and if we recognize that, this legislation may well be illegal. I wonder if the member from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has a view on that.

●(2625)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has 40 seconds to respond.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Let us see, Madam Speaker, if I have a 40-second view. What I would say is that I thank the hon. member for her question, and I think the important part of her question is to move the emphasis off this specious argument about right to strike, when what we are talking about is the right to free collective bargaining and the importance of that right in our society.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am looking at the clock, and I do not know whether to say it is 7:25 in the morning, which it would be if I were in England right now, or 11:25, which it would be if I were in B.C. Whichever it is, at this time I want to wish all my colleagues in the House a *Bonne Fête nationale*.

As we debate this very important issue, I want to take a minute to recap. What is it that we are talking about here today? We are talking about a crown corporation, not some entity that is off on another planet, but a crown corporation of a Canadian government, a crown corporation that makes a profit each year and last year made a very hefty profit of hundreds of millions of dollars that went back to support Canadians in other work. That is okay.

This same crown corporation went into negotiations with its employees as if it was taking a loss. That is what I find hard to understand. That company is making a profit and doing very well, but for the very people who help make that profit, who work 24-7 in shift work, who have given years of service, and who deliver mail to some of the remotest communities and keep our businesses going, what the corporation says when the parties get to the table is, “By the way, we are going to pay new people who start to work here 18% less”. Is that the respect we have for the next generation?

Are we saying to the next generation of workers that they are not going to get jobs with decent pay, that they are going to have to make do with a lot less, that they are not going to be able to afford to own a house, and that they are not going to be able to afford a decent living?

At the same time, that corporation turns to its workers and makes a direct attack on something that is dear to every Canadian: their old age security. It goes after their pensions, and not only theirs, but those of the next generation coming in.

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When I was growing up, and I have been growing up for a long time and I'm still waiting to grow up, what I used to hear all the time was that with each generation things get better. That is what our parents worked very hard for. My parents immigrated to the U.K. They arrived there with a very young family. My father worked two or three jobs in order to give us an education and the kind of life that he thought would be better than the life he had had. He belonged to unions, absolutely, and instilled in us the importance of the collective: that when workers stick together, they make gains not only for themselves individually, but they make gains for everybody in society.

He also told me something else. He told me that things were going to get better for me and my children. I have a 13-year-old, although maybe she is a bit older than 13 now. By the way, if I was not here, I would be celebrating my 40th wedding anniversary this weekend. As it is, I could well be celebrating it with everyone here. As I look at my children and a lot of my colleagues in the House, and think of the hundreds and thousands of children I have taught over the years, it saddens me that things are actually getting worse for our youth. It saddens me that in this House the government is choosing to make things worse for our youth by reducing the starting wage, a differentiated wage. Those wages should be going up.

● (2630)

Hon. members have heard about the cost of housing in B.C. from my other colleagues. In the area where I live, the cost of housing is very high. As I went door to door, I met family after family, and these are the things I heard them say. They did not want a Rolls Royce, by the way. They did not ask for limousines. They were not asking for transnational holidays or even going overseas to sit by the beach and read a book. They were asking for decent paying jobs so they could go to work, come home, spend time with their families, support their kids through university and college and, at the same time, help to look after their parents. That is what the average Canadian told me as I went from door to door.

However, they also told me what their day-to-day lives were like. Many of them, by the way, used to have what many people call well-paying union jobs in the health care sector in B.C., but we have had a coalition government in B.C. Some members may know that coalition, because it is made up of Conservatives, Liberals and Social Credit Party members. They call themselves Liberals, but we know who they are, because they also went after working people and stripped their collective agreement and fired thousands and thousands of workers.

Later on, the Supreme Court found that to have been incorrect. It found it to be the wrong thing for the government to have done. Those workers, who used to make a decent wage, now have to work two full-time shifts doing exactly the same work. They get paid \$9 to \$12 an hour for something they used to get paid \$18 to \$20 an hour to do.

I heard stories of mothers, fathers and grandmothers who are working these two full-time jobs. They said, "We are getting sick to death of politicians telling us how important family is, because we do not have time to spend with our children". Is that the way we want all working people in Canada to go? We want to have a race to the bottom, to reduce their hourly wages so they have to work two or

three jobs. I really want to believe that not a single parliamentarian would want to do that.

I make a very handsome salary right now and would find it very hard to sit in this House and suggest that others can make do on \$18 or less per hour. We are not talking about minimum wage any more, but we all need to talk about a living wage, because we know what the cost of living is like. Those are the kinds of things we need to talk about.

Let me get back to my narrative about this corporation, if my colleagues across the room would just give me a little of their attention. A corporation making a huge profit asked its employees for clawbacks of their rights, salary and old age security. Then in its wisdom, it put forward a salary increase as well. Then, out of the blue, which is the part I find hard to explain to my grandchildren, the government stepped in. It first needed a reason to step in, so Canada Post locked the door on its employees, knowing full well there was a government waiting to step in with legislation. Not only did the government step in with legislation, but it also now says that an arbitrator is going to come in and there will be a final offer. However, even that is not enough for the government.

● (2635)

What Canada Post employees have now been offered is a lower hourly wage increase than they had been offered by Canada Post. How can the government be wanting to move things toward a resolution?

Though it was not supported by the 4.5 million Canadians who voted for this side of the House, this is a government that wants to use its majority to smack working people on the head by saying, yes, the corporation is making a profit and, yes, we benefit from that as Canadians but, no, the workers have to pay the price because we need to extract more profits.

I just do not see how that is the right or fair thing to do. I also wonder what productivity is going to be like in that corporation when there is a settlement.

There is one truth, by the way, that I have learned in my lifetime, that whenever there is strike between labour and management, there is going to be a settlement at some time. There will be a settlement.

When a settlement is imposed externally by legislation, I can say from personal experience that the impact on the workers and on productivity is huge.

I am a teacher. I also come from B.C. I am used to being legislated by government, not once, but twice by a coalition Liberal-Conservative government. I know the impact it had on teachers in that province, what it did to morale, what it did to people who were not able to teach and the impact it had on students' learning.

This week a report was released that said a very high percentage of Canadian workers are depressed at their workplace. If the Conservative government believes it has found an antidote to depression, this legislation is not it. I would really urge the government to go and have another consultation to see what that would look like.

Once again, if we want to have employees who are productive, happy at their work and who will give their all, let them negotiate their own collective agreements. By imposing a collective agreement on this group of employees, what the government is doing is taking away one of their fundamental rights, their right to negotiate their own labour.

Surely that is not too much to ask for. It is not too late for the government to see daylight, which will soon be upon us. It is not too late for it to say to Canada Post, "Take off the lock. Let the workers go back to work". They have agreed and will work under the contract. Furthermore, "Go back to the negotiating table. If need be, call in a mediator". Let the two sides negotiate an agreement.

● (2640)

That is all it would take from the government, which would send a huge signal to working people in this country that they actually had a government that respected working people and a government that believed in free collective bargaining.

We hear a lot from the government about the free market. Let us use those same principles in this bargain. Let the bargain take place without any government interference.

I will tell a small story about a young man I used to teach. He would come into my class. He had a family background that was very heavily into business in the north end of Nanaimo. His parents were very business-centred and had no time for unions and said "You are going to be teaching this unit about unions to our kids, and we really do not want our son to learn anything about the union movement because he is not going to be a worker. He is going to move into the business world". I discussed this with them and said if that were so, their son had nothing to lose by learning about the union movement.

I spent about three months going over the industrial revolution and the reasons the unions were formed. I mentioned that it was to make a level playing field, so that employers would not abuse employees and people would not get killed on the job, or work 20 hours a day, and so that kids would not be sent into the mines. It was for all of those reasons.

When we had finished that unit, the parents came to the school. They came into my classroom and said they wanted to thank me. I asked what I had done, and they said they wanted to thank me because their son came home and they had a conversation about how to grow their business and what they had to do and how they had to look after the needs of working people as well, the people they employed.

That young man went on to manage his family business and I am still in touch with him and he still tells me that it was an amazing unit that he did.

I wish my colleagues across the room would also realize that we do not have to demonize unions. What we need to do is to celebrate people who work collectively, people who realize that to build a strong Canada, to build our health care system and our education system and to have decent pensions, we must stand as a collective.

Whether we are unionized or not, this is about the rights of working people to earn a decent wage. This is about average

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Canadians and their right to live in Canada in a way they can support their families and not have to go to food banks. This is about our youth having a future that will be a little rosier than it looks right now. If not for ourselves, let us please think of our children and grandchildren.

I ran in this election because I wanted to help build a better Canada than we have today, where health care is stronger, education is stronger and old age security is stronger.

I read a book a long time ago that said this: "One judges a society by how well it looks after its young, its old, its sick, its disadvantaged".

Colleagues, I would say that the CUPW discussions are about exactly that. As Canadians and parliamentarians, we cannot fail our children, our grandchildren and our working people, so I ask everyone to stand with us.

● (2645)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the members opposite and this member have been talking about the need for workers to have high quality, high paying jobs. That is precisely what our government has been doing over the last 30 months. In fact, we have had the best economic job-creating engine in the developed world.

Do not take it just from me. Take it from the latest release from the labour force survey of June 10, some two weeks ago, from Statistics Canada. It says that over the past 12 months, full-time employment rose by 224,000 jobs while part-time employment was up 50,000 jobs. In other words, for every one part-time job the Canadian economy created in the last 12 months, we created five full-time jobs.

These are not just low quality, low paying jobs. These are good jobs. On May 9, CIBC released its economics report by Benjamin Tal. I will just quote from that.

It says:

More than 60% of the full-time jobs created since April of last year have been high-paying positions.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I will say this. I live in Newton—North Delta and if these jobs exist, I wish many of them were in Newton—North Delta. I have talked to many of my other colleagues from around the country, and they do not find them there either.

I have told the House stories of women and men in my riding working two full-time jobs, eight hour shifts, and working at \$9 to \$12 an hour. That is the kind of jobs they are working at.

Nobody has denied that this strike led to a lockout. Nobody has denied that it was a rotating strike that led to a lockout.

The lockout is about reducing wages for people who are working, for current jobs. No matter how often we are told that the job market has grown in Canada, I want to know where those jobs are.

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Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have no doubt that the hon. member speaks with great sincerity. I know of her from British Columbia. I listened to her speech and in fact I have sat here and listened to a lot of the speeches made by the hon. members of the New Democratic Party. They are sincere and I know that they believe in what they say.

I want to ask a question though. The question is simply this. I am a physician. As far as I am concerned, what is done must result in a positive outcome and one that will change the status quo. I do not understand standing in the House and repeating those same things over and over. The point is made.

We in the Liberal Party actually agree with everything that the NDP is saying. It is not only its members who have any sort of hold and great ambition for the workers. The Liberals also believe that workers need their rights. We believe that the government has been extremely intrusive and heavy-handed in this piece of legislation. It has intervened itself at the table and it has set some restrictions on arbitration or on bargaining that are unfair.

We agree and want the outcome to be a win-win. I am listening to a lot of discussion here that in the end will change nothing. It will be a lose-lose. I would like to suggest that if all of us really do care about a win-win answer, one that will support the needs of Canadians and that will also support the rights of the workers, then we should do something about it.

The Liberal Party has some amendments here. I would like to see us go to the amendments. They are solutions. If the government says that it has goodwill, then let us see it listen and change its mind and show goodwill by listening to those amendments. Let us get to a resolution instead of the talk.

• (2650)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I really glad that my Liberal colleagues agree with everything the NDP is saying.

However, I do want to say that it has been a Liberal-Conservative coalition in B.C. that has time and time again gone in and stripped collective agreements and forced workers back to work with back-to-work legislation.

We are here today, and I can tell members that I am not wasting my time. I am here today even though it is my 40th wedding anniversary and my husband's 60th birthday, because I absolutely believe that the rights of all working people, and not just unionized working people, have to be defended.

We are going to continue to speak and advocate for as long as we have breath. We will continue to do so. This is not an inconvenience. This is a necessity, folks.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find this debate wholesome and informative, and I intend to stay here until the end of this debate.

I also appreciated the speech and comments by my colleague. I do not have a labour union background. My family is not from labour unions. For a short time I was in a labour union.

I am wondering if my colleague could tell me about the effect that a lockout has on workers and on morale within companies.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I have heard a lot about letters arriving by pigeon or somehow. I have also heard about people getting emails and tweets and Facebook messages. I have actually been receiving emails as well.

I have been receiving emails from postal workers who are asking me to speak up for them. They want me to be their voice, and to not let the government do this while I remain silent. They are counting on me.

All of us are getting emails very similar to that. I will say that when I hear people talking about the inconvenience, asking why we are here, it actually saddens me.

Standing up for rights, whether it is for ourselves or others, is an absolute honour and privilege. As an NDPer, I feel absolutely privileged to have the opportunity to speak up for the rights of workers who are being legislated back to work by government legislation that absolutely disrespects collective bargaining and disrespects even the deal offered by the employer. The government has gone in and been intrusive in a way that is way beyond what is acceptable in a free and democratic society.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite, also from my home province of British Columbia, seems to have a selective memory.

The NDP government also legislated union workers back to work, just as it did to the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

Why is it that when the NDP government is in power it uses legislation to put union workers back to work and that is acceptable to the NDP, but it is not acceptable when it is in opposition? Why does the NDP have a double standard?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my dear friend over there for that wonderful question. I really do want to thank him.

The member knows my history and has heard me speak many times before. When an NDP government legislated, I stood out there and spoke. I was on television and radio, and I went out publicly and I spoke out because it was the wrong thing to do then, and as far as I am concerned workers need to be allowed to work out negotiations between the two parties. I believe in that today as well, and that is what I am sticking up for.

• (2655)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. I would first like to say, as a Hamiltonian facing a similar situation in which workers are being locked out, I just wish the government were as quick to take on U.S. Steel as it is to take on the workers at Canada Post, and that it would order that company back to the bargaining table and put almost 1,000 workers back to work who have been locked out because of the policies of the government. I wish the government would start with Hamilton before talking about improvements it thinks it is making.

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Next, I want to state a couple of things I think are important here. First, Canada Post is profitable: \$281 million. Yes, some of that is due to management decisions. However, one cannot deny that the workers who work at Canada Post have played a significant role in ensuring that Canada Post is profitable for the Canadian people. The workers have contributed to the profitability of Canada Post and now the government uses economics as an argument to say it has to bring in this legislation. It has been said over and over that this is a lockout, and I say to the government members that they are going to hear it a lot more over the next 10 to 20 days.

The fact is that the union began rotating strikes. That is a tactic that is meant to put pressure on management at the bargaining table. It is not meant to cripple the organization. Before the government introduced its legislation, the union offered to end its rotating action and to go back to work while negotiations continued, and all it asked was that the management continue to enforce the current collective agreement. Had that happened, the rotating strikes would have ended, the management and union would be at the bargaining table, and we would not need to be here dealing with this mean-spirited legislation.

One of my colleagues over here talks about eight months. That is just about the same length of time the U.S. Steel workers have been out too. Why is it okay that after eight months of negotiation, while Canada Post is still working, the government has to bring in legislation but those steelworkers and their families are out there without a paycheque for over eight months? That is okay somehow. They can stay out there. The government is not worried about the economic damage to them and their families in my community in Hamilton.

It is also interesting that the company or the government or management, which are pretty much all the same in this circumstance, wants to reduce the amount that the workers were offered in free and fair collective bargaining, saying that it has to constrain costs. Yet, it is okay to pay the CEO over \$661,000. The Conservatives are going to go after the workers at Canada Post for nickels and dimes and pennies and anything else they can possibly get. It is okay for the CEO to make that kind of money but not for the people who are actually out there doing the work everyday. That is just not right.

Let us also keep in mind that we have legislation here that would reduce the amount of money that is already on the bargaining table. That alone justifies our being here and holding up this legislation for as long as we possibly can. How can that be right?

• (2700)

How can it be right that there is a negotiated agreement on a wage piece, and the government takes the opportunity to bring in back-to-work legislation and in that same legislation reduces the amount that was offered? That is not fair, and everybody knows that it is not fair. That is another good reason for us to be here and to stand firm with the workers at Canada Post.

There has been some talk that maybe the government is getting ready to soften up the company to sell it and privatize it. There is actually evidence that it has already started. It has already started.

Here come the facts. I hear one of the members asking for facts, and I appreciate that.

We all know that Canada Post has a very difficult job in terms of providing the same level of service to the far reaches of our country for the same price one pays if a letter or envelope is going only halfway across a city. That is not easy to do. It is a big country in terms of providing service.

The legislation mandates that Canada Post has to be financially self-sufficient. A number of years ago, some private entities decided that they were going to horn in on that business, because there was money to be made. It was the issue of remailing. I will not get into what that is, but postal workers know what that is. It is an important component of what Canada Post does.

Canada Post, at that time, still defended the fact that all that work belonged to it and that it needed the profitable pieces to pay for the parts of Canada Post that were not profitable, because it has to deliver to the far locales we have in Canada. Canada Post took these small companies to court saying that they were infringing on its business, that it had a legal mandate to do all this work, and that the other companies were doing it. Canada Post asked the court to please stop them. The lower court agreed.

Being the fine citizens they were, the private entities that lost the case appealed to the appeal courts. The appeal courts, guess what, supported the fact that Canada Post is entitled to all of the work it does, if for no other reason than because of the economic aspect of having to be financially self-sustaining. In the beginning, the minister defended it and said that this work should not be done by anyone other than Canada Post and that the government would continue to pursue that policy. Then it changed.

We suspect that the lobbying started big time, because all of a sudden, government policy changed. To their credit, the Liberals were on the same page at that time and supported Canada Post. The Conservatives continued that when they came to power. When it changed, it was a huge change.

What did the government do to these companies that were taking away the lawful work of Canada Post? It introduced a bill that would legalize what they were doing. It would legalize the work it had been fighting in the courts to keep at Canada Post. The government brought in a bill, after it flip-flopped, that would make the work that was taken from Canada Post legal. The Liberals supported that legislation, but the bill died, because there was either a prorogation or an election.

The Conservatives introduced another bill to make it legal, and the Liberals supported that bill, too.

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They then ran into another storm, and we in the NDP were part of that storm and fought to defend Canada Post in maintaining the work it needed to have to be financially self-sustaining. When they ran into that storm, do members know what they did? It was rather typical of the government. They stuffed it into a budget bill so that it would not be a stand-alone bill any more and would not get the attention of the Canadian people. The opposition parties could not point to it and say that the government was privatizing Canada Post already, because, quite frankly, in the context of a broader budget, it was one piece.

● (2705)

Now, as we debate this today, it is lawful for that work to have been taken from Canada Post, which makes it that much more difficult for Canada Post to remain financially viable.

When we raise the issue of the government not really caring about Canada Post and its services, we think there is darn good evidence to support that, up to and including the legislation here today that is taking away wages that were already properly and fairly negotiated at the bargaining table. That is the kind of government we have here. That is the kind of attitude it has towards Canada Post, and that is the kind of attitude it has towards working people who are just trying to get a decent collective agreement and go on with their lives. That is all they are looking for.

We were saying earlier that we thought others may need to keep their eyes open, because the government is coming after them. Talk to my friend from Sudbury about what went on at Vale Inco and the damage that was done there and the economic harm that was done to those workers and their families and the community of Sudbury. It was all because the government refused to stand up for the community and the workers at the time and allowed the takeover. It was not much different from what happened with U.S. Steel.

Here we have a government in the early days saying that people do not need to worry, that they are not scary, that people do not have to worry about them, and that they are not hard right wing. Yet here they are, at three o'clock in the morning, trying to defend not just back-to-work legislation, which in and of itself is always problematic, but a vicious attack on those workers and their negotiating rights.

I cannot get past the fact that there is a government that would stand up and say that it is okay to take away, through legislation, something that barely was dry on the page in terms of negotiating. Why would the government do that? The answer we get from the Prime Minister is that it has to make sure that everything is in line with the rest of the public sector. The difficulty there is that Canada Post is part of the government. The government sets out the parameters for all of government.

The mandate was there. The people at the head of Canada Post know where the government is at and what its thinking is. They also know that they are sitting on at least \$281 million in profit. They offered what they thought was, I would assume, a fair offer of a wage settlement, and it was agreed to. That is not the whole contract. Things can change. I have been in bargaining too. However, that is what happened. They had an agreement. They understood the mandate.

For the government to come around now and say that it cannot live by what Canada Post has negotiated does not make any sense. It makes about as much sense as the government saying that the main reason it is bringing in this legislation is because of the economic damage being done by Canada Post not being at full service, while it is the one that locked the door. Come along. If the government wants to get Canada Post working again, open the door. The workers will be there.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: I suspect that the days will go on, and we will be here for a while.

An hon. member: How many days will it be?

Mr. David Christopherson: I hear one of the members asking how many days it will be. I do not know exactly how many days it will be. I just know that 102 other New Democrat MPs and I are prepared to stay here and hold this up as long as we possibly can, night and day and weekend. We will do all we can, because it is just so wrong.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: I think we are finding some unity in the House. I am not sure that it is what I was attempting to do, but if that is what happens, we could use some unity around here.

The fact is that what we are really worried about is the tenor that is being set in this country as employers see what is happening here.

● (2710)

We all know about the fights going on to save pensions and to save defined benefits. We are losing that battle. It breaks my heart to say it. I believe that there are a lot of working people and working families out there who are moving from defined benefit to defined contribution plans, and their dignity in retirement is predicated on whether they are good at stock market management and guessing.

How many people here did not feel the pain of seniors when the tech bubble burst in 2000? Those people were 69 years old, and by law, they had to convert their RRSPs. They were forced to turn them into annuities, and those annuities were worth about half of what they were just six months before. Why did those people lose half their income for retirement? What is the answer? There is none. There is none as long as the stock market decides.

We are so much better off as a country when we have defined benefits. Yes, leave it to the corporations. They can hire the best advisors and all the best brokers and analysts, who, by the way, do not get it right. How can Canadians be expected to guarantee that they will have \$1 million or three-quarters of a million dollars in their portfolios, when people who make half a million dollars a year doing it get it wrong? That is not right.

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Our worry on this issue is that working people in this country are going to lose a little more ground. We will not see it in a few weeks or a few months and probably not even in a few years. However, in five, 10, 15, or 20 years, as people begin to retire, particularly the younger boomers, who were affected by the switch from defined benefits to defined contributions, and begin to cash in their RRSPs when they are close to 70 years old, they will find out that even though they worked longer, maybe 50 years, the dignity they thought they should have in retirement, that they could have had, that they are entitled to, is not there, because the stock market crashed at a bad time for them.

Who do they blame? Where do they take that anger? Where do they take the fact that they cannot have the standard of living they are entitled to as retirees? Where do they go? Because there is no answer to where they can go, the best we can do is make sure that we are here, in the people's place, taking on these fights as best we can and start turning things around so that people have hope for the future, not despair. They can think that maybe there is a government that is on their side or is at the very least not their enemy.

We can do so much better as a country in terms of the approach we are taking towards public service, towards our public institutions, and certainly towards those Canadians who work in those public institutions.

I am proud to be here tonight. I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with every one of my NDP colleagues as we take on the government and this bad, vicious legislation.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my friend's comments, which ebbed and flowed like the great tides. He spoke with tremendous passion. I give him that.

To be quite frank, we have heard a number of comments about vicious attacks on individuals. I heard several references to hating working people. There is no need to delve into that kind of rhetoric in this discussion.

We have heard about who is being hurt. Reference has been made to seniors by members on all sides. We have heard about small businesses, in rural communities in particular, that are predominantly dependent on mail, because there are a lot of places in the country that still do not have access to high-speed Internet.

However, there is another group that is being hurt, and I believe that I will be forgiven for mentioning them here tonight. They are the men and women of the Canadian Forces, who receive cards and letters from loved ones, such as their children, their spouses, and their support back in Canada. I would like the hon. member to address this quite specifically. It is a very serious question.

During a break in the action, mail is perhaps the one thing they look forward to at the end of a long day when they have been out on patrol. They come back to their forward operating bases with the hope that they might have a letter from home. That ceases when the mail is not flowing.

I would ask my hon. friend to say something about the Canadian Forces who are serving us overseas as we approach Canada Day, hoping that they might receive a letter from home. If that is not

reason enough to bring this debate back to a serious level, then I can think of nothing that will.

• (2715)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, first, I thank the hon. minister for the tone of the question and the substance of it. I am pleased to provide the best answer I can because I agree it is serious. Believe me, there is not an MP in the House who is not riveted and focused 100% on the best interests of the Canadian armed forces.

First, the government has the key. Unlock the door, the workers will go back to work and everyone will get their mail.

Second, though there could be disagreement on this and I accept that, though I suspect maybe not, I believe those fellow Canadians are there because they love our country and they are patriots. How could one be more patriotic than putting one's life on the line, particularly if leaving a family behind and putting oneself at that risk?

I believe that most of those soldiers in Canadian uniform are there fighting for the kinds of principles we are talking about this evening and for the kind of democracy they want Canada to be. Though I stand to be corrected, I believe most of them would understand, because a lot of them are working people, that fellow working people are just doing the best they can to have a decent income and to have a fair collective agreement.

Again, I thank the hon. minister for the tone of his question, which we have not had a lot of tonight and it was appreciated.

My third point is that after World War II, it was the soldiers who came back and found there were no jobs for them, there was no housing for them and the things they needed to raise their families and to be a part of the community were not there. It was that generation of soldiers that came back during the 1940s and 1950s and went out on the picket line and put everything on the line to create the unions we are here tonight defending.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am really struggling tonight. This is a very polarized debate tonight. One side feels it is right and the other feels it is wrong. When there is a polarized debate, we end up hurting those we are trying to help.

I have also learned a lot about my new colleagues and their history, even about their grandparents, which is nice to learn. However, we need to focus on solutions.

My background is as a scientist. We look for solutions. I am hearing about history instead of hearing solutions regarding a living wage, pensions and improving well-being. I would like to hear real, evidence-based solutions from the hon. member rather than the polarization.

• (2720)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the tone of the question, too.

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The evidence is there. The leader of our party committed that we were prepared to do work. It is not a secret that there have been discussions going on in the background. People of goodwill are trying to find a way through this. However, in the absence of that solution, we, on these benches, have two choices. We can either fold and collapse and give up and let this go through, or we can do what we are doing, which is standing up and fighting.

There is still hope that there will be an agreement either between the government and the opposition in some way that we could resolve where we are right now, or even better, if we could get an agreement from the management of Canada Post and the union representing the workers because there would be no need for this debate in either of those two cases.

With the greatest respect, in the absence of either of those two negotiated settlements, even in a democracy sometimes one has to stand up and fight to defend what is right.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I turn to the question that was put earlier to the hon. member, and to the tone of my colleague across the floor to our party generally, about the kind of approach we would take in making decision if we were in government. What troubles me is the government does not seem to be taking into consideration the people who are hurt by this legislation and by previous government decisions.

I sat in the House in the last Parliament and heard colleague after colleague say that their rural post offices were being shut down. In my constituency of Edmonton—Strathcona, Canada Post is threatening to reduce the hours of the post office, closing it at 5:00 p.m. Workers cannot get to the post office by then. The government talks about seniors being able to mail a letter or seniors who have to go back to work. How will they get to the post office to mail their letters and buy their stamps? Could the member speak to the bigger issue of public interest?

I come from a province where this is an ongoing debate, and the debate is becoming quite serious. When the government makes decisions in the public interest, of whom is it really thinking?

One has to think about the ramifications of a decision like locking out the postal workers in a situation when some of the complaints by the postal workers are hours of work being reduced and post offices being shut down so there will be less work. It is not just a case of wages and pensions, they are seriously concerned about the continued delivery of this public service.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, the two words that jumped out at me was “public interest”. I was a former critic for the post office, so I am familiar with the closures, cutbacks and implications for communities.

I will say this as sincerely as I can within this context. One of the things that would make a huge difference would be if Canada Post did a lot more outreach and consultation with communities. I know it does some and has some formula, but the union does not feel it has been given an opportunity to have a say. The union will not make the decision, management will, but it would like to have some input. The workers are the experts. They are the ones out there doing the job every day. Communities are affected.

The reason we hear it as a complaint in anger is because it is always after the fact. People go to their local post office and suddenly it is closed or there is a notice that it will close. Their cousins who work at the local post offices have been cut back in hours and laid off and there is not as much service. Everybody wants to know what happened, what is going on, especially when they see the corporation is still making \$281 million a year.

Therefore, there should be a little more consultation and an understanding that Canada Post is a public interest as much as it is a tool to carry out business. There is a huge public interest here and there needs to be more consultation with the people for whom this corporation exists.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think everyone in the House knows that we are currently debating a hoist motion on Bill C-6. The hoist motion goes back to Westminster. It has been around for about 150 or 160 years. When the Leader of the Opposition moved the motion yesterday evening, it was done advisedly.

The hoist motion is specifically designed to deal with legislation that is either premature, irresponsible in its nature, or just plain bad legislation. It is a motion that should not take up the time of the House for any one of those three reasons. Bill C-6 meets all three requirements. It is premature, it is grossly irresponsible and it is plain bad legislation. Again, I say that advisedly.

● (2725)

[*Translation*]

Today is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. We and the members of the Bloc Québécois have tried on several occasions to convince the government to adjourn today so that the members, especially those from the province of Quebec, could return to their ridings to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. But the government refused.

[*English*]

It is irresponsible on the government's part to do that. It is a national holiday for the francophone community in Quebec and across the country. Bringing the bill forward at this period of time shows that the government does not know what it is doing. The government believed it could shove this down our throats. Because Saint-Jean-Baptiste is June 24, it thought we would buckle and give in to that intimidation. That is also a typical bullying tactic for which the government is well known.

This is a bad bill, so the hoist motion should proceed successfully, I would urge. It is a very clear interference by a government in the collective bargaining process.

The NDP has a long history of opposing this type of legislation. We recognize that there are times when this will come forward. Even by those standards, using the standards of the Conservative government or a Liberal government, this bill is premature.

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It is also incredibly naive on the part of the government. It shows a serious lack of understanding of how the collective bargaining process works. It so clearly and blatantly takes one side, not only on this bill, but on the bill that was before us last week with regard to Air Canada. A very clear signal goes out to the management side. It should not worry about bargaining in good faith. It should not worry about performing its job on the management side, of engaging their employees in proper collective bargaining. All it has to do is create either the appearance of, which is usual in these two cases, a crisis or create an actual crisis by its conduct. If management does that, it knows the government will step in. Not only will it step in, it will step in and take management's side. There is no other message from the government that one could take, based on these two pieces of legislation in these last two weeks.

The government has made it very clear, both from the bill we saw last week with regard to Air Canada, and Bill C-6 this week with regard to Canada Post. There were clauses in the bill last week, and I say this as a lawyer who has looked at a lot of collective agreements over the years, that could very easily have been written by the management side. There are clauses in Bill C-6 that similarly could easily have been written by Canada Post, entirely in its interest and entirely against the interest of its employees.

We have heard repeatedly this evening of the clause. It gets back to the intimidation the government uses all the time. It is saying to the workers that since they did not take what was offered to them on June 9, they will get less now.

Mr. Brad Butt: You should've signed the deal.

Mr. Joe Comartin: That heckle is typical of the attitude of the government. It is typical of the ignorance that it shows. Members opposite say on this one that they should have signed the agreement, but what about the other clauses that are very much against the interest of the union membership.

● (2730)

From a profitable corporation they are asking for clawbacks of a significant nature, changing the collective bargaining arrangement that has some clauses that have been in place for over 20 years, and over a series of collective agreements during that period of time. In spite of their profitability the government is saying it is going to take that away and they are going to lose some of the benefits.

We could go down the list. There are a number of them that Canada Post has asked that of.

I want to deal with another issue with regard to the bill and why it is just bad legislation. This bill, as opposed to using the traditional mediation-arbitration clauses as contained in most back-to-work legislation, has completely done away with that in Bill C-6 and replaced it with final offer selection.

In the last two to five years in Canada and in the United States, we could go back and find studies, decisions by labour boards and decisions by courts that have said that the use of final offer selection works fine when you have a professional athlete, when you have a very small workforce. It does not work, and it has been shown repeatedly, when there is a large workforce and a complex collective agreement.

That is what the government is trying to force on the parties with this legislation. Final offer selection almost always works to the benefit of the management side. The government knows that. It has decided that as a policy. In all back-to-work legislation we are going to see from the government it is going to enforce that in every single one of them, in spite of those decisions from the labour boards and our courts.

The hoist motion is very appropriate here. I would urge all members of the House to support it when it comes to a vote some time in the next 24 hours.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was certainly encouraged to hear the member talking about evidence-based solutions. We are hearing this now in the wee hours of the night. When we ask that question of the NDP opposition, it is only going to be their solutions that are satisfying to them.

We heard much earlier in the evening about talking from the heart, and new members of Parliament being here. I, as a new member of Parliament, would rather talk from my heart and not from scripted notes that we had a feverish debate on earlier.

I would like to say that back in 1910, Inspector Fitzgerald of the RCMP led a group of RCMP officers from Fort McPherson to Dawson City to deliver the mail. That became famously known as the Lost Patrol. That issue, that commitment to deliver the mail, was done because they understood the needs of communication and commerce in the north. They did so on December 21, four days from Christmas.

They were not battling pensions. They were not worrying about wages. They were doing this because they understood how important commerce and communication was to the north and to the people of Canada.

Can the member please tell us, where have we lost that idea that this service to the north is so important? What is so wrong with a Conservative government trying to protect that and re-instill that for Canadian people?

● (2735)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I know he is a new member of the House, and it is probably not fair for me to say this to him so I will say it to the two ministers who are here.

I would suggest to the member that he walk across the chamber and tell those two ministers to do their job. He should ask them to go to the Prime Minister and tell him to pick up the phone, call the CEO of Canada Post, and tell him to unlock the doors, honour the collective agreement, and go back to the negotiating table. If he wants to get something done and he wants it done right now and he wants to get those workers back to work who want to work, that is what he should do.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the intimidation theme referenced by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh and, also, to come back to a question from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands earlier.

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It strikes me that the legislation is probably unconstitutional. It strikes me, also, that my friends across the aisle would not be particularly concerned about it because they are going to have this collective agreement enforced long before the courts will be in a position to judge the constitutionality of the legislation.

Given the member's expertise in this area, I would invite his comments on my observations with respect to the constitutionality and whether it matters to those proposing the bill.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I have to say to the House, and anybody out there who is watching, that I am not allowed to give opinions any more. The Law Society of Upper Canada has told people like myself who have withdrawn from practice not to give opinions.

Having said that, the reality though is that I do not think the current law would be unconstitutional. In the case of the decision that came out of British Columbia, the government there was tearing up a contract. There is no contract here. That is obvious. It has expired. That is the difference in that case.

I do not see a constitutional argument here at all or a Charter of Rights and Freedoms argument.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here today, this evening, tonight, to debate a bill that is totally premature. It is truly our duty, as the opposition, to object strenuously to this piece of legislation.

I live in a lovely riding far from Ottawa. We have many extremely proud residents. We have fishermen and artists. We have aboriginal communities, the Mi'kmaq in particular. We are independent, but we also stand united. Because of our remoteness from large urban centres, we understand what solidarity truly means. We depend on our neighbours, on our business people. Each of them has a place, and each of them makes an invaluable contribution.

When a member of our community is wronged, we all lose. We depend on their services; we depend on every taxpayer and every public servant. We depend on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The closure of the rescue centres in Quebec City and Newfoundland and Labrador will cost us dearly. The government seems to be saying that those who live in the regions are less important.

In the regions, we depend on our port infrastructure. It worries us when the government tries to convince municipalities to assume responsibility for ports, when they cannot afford to maintain or even improve them. We depend on Environment Canada. We expect the minister to fulfill his role when public health is at risk, when outside companies come in to exploit our natural resources without seeking the consensus of our communities.

● (2740)

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand that we are debating Bill C-6 this morning. I did not realize that it would maybe turn into a Friday free-for-all. The member has not yet mentioned the bill in question that we are debating in his presentation. Perhaps he could get to the subject at hand.

The Speaker: I would urge the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine to keep his remarks to the motion before the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): I am coming to that, Mr. Speaker. I began by speaking about Bill C-6 and I will continue to speak about it. I am trying to provide some context.

I was saying that this same spirit leads us to support letter carriers in their demands. We are a united people. Post offices are the cornerstones of our communities in the regions. They are indispensable for communication between communities. We depend on them for affordable communications, to communicate amongst ourselves and to communicate with other Quebeckers and other Canadians. It is an essential service and the daily prejudice that we are subject to is intolerable.

The letter carriers in our communities understand that we depend on their services. They have never failed to give us excellent service. Throughout their negotiations with Canada Post, they continued to sort and deliver our mail. It is easy to understand why. These people are part of our community. They are our brothers, sisters and neighbours. They are just as much a part of our community as our other constituents. They know that, without them, we all lose.

Right now families cannot communicate with one another. Small and medium-sized businesses are having a hard time getting paid for services they have provided. Seniors are not receiving their benefits. Unemployed people are having a hard time receiving their benefits. The workers are not the ones preventing the mail from being delivered. During the negotiations, they made sure that the mail was delivered. It was the employer, Canada Post, that declared a lockout. The Conservative government is the one trying to force them back to work. Canada Post Corporation—a crown corporation—and our government seem to have forgotten that the workers offered to go back to work. What is worse, the bill before us would impose a lower salary offer.

I want to quote a statement from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers:

The bill legislates wage increases that fall significantly below Canada Post's last offer of 1.9% in 2011, 2012 and 2013, and 2.0% in 2014. The law includes increases of 1.75% in 2011, 1.5% in 2012, 2% in 2013 and 2% in 2014. This would take \$875.50 out of the pockets of an average full-time postal worker during the four years of the agreement. It represents a theft of \$35 million from postal workers and their families.

It is shameful. Postal workers work hard to guarantee a good, reliable, profitable service, a crown corporation service that generates a profit for the Canadian government. It is a corporation that provides an essential service, and that is able to do so reliably and even generate a profit. Should we not rather get the workers involved, motivate them, and show them we appreciate them by giving them an appropriate salary that reflects their contribution? We should also protect their pensions. Questions must be asked.

Our Canada Post Corporation employees in the regions provide exceptional service. They know us and we know them. They want to do their best to help us but the government wants to decrease their salaries and reduce the services.

Government Orders

I will quote the Canadian Union of Postal Workers once again:

On Saturday, September 12, 2009, the federal Conservatives quietly announced a Canadian Postal Service Charter that outlines the government's expectations for Canada Post in regard to service standards and other matters.

The Charter largely reiterates existing policy and includes an expectation that Canada Post will maintain "the moratorium on the closure of rural post offices."

The Charter also acknowledges that providing postal services to rural areas is an integral part of universal postal service.

While it's a good start, the Charter isn't altogether reasonable.

● (2745)

Retirement, illness, death, or the corporation's infrastructure—for example, the termination of a lease or even a fire—"may, nevertheless, affect the ongoing operation of a post office."

Rural post offices are threatened. The post offices of , Quebec's Gaspé region have a long history. I would like to share some facts provided by Daniel Arpin, a philatelist. In 1705, in the territory we now call Canada, a postal service between Quebec City, Trois-Rivières and Montreal was established by the French regime. That same year, a postal service was established in New Carlisle—in my riding—in the Gaspé. In 1763, the service fell under the control of the British Empire and was managed by Benjamin Franklin. In February 1851, the New Carlisle postmaster created his own stamp, an unauthorized stamp, one that is much sought after by stamp collectors.

All that to say that the postal service has a long history in Canada and the Gaspé. Postal services are vital to our communities, but they are continually being whittled away. Rural mailboxes are being replaced by superboxes. Increasingly, we find ourselves collecting the mail on the side of the road, in places that could be dangerous. We are distancing ourselves from the rural post office that serves a community meeting place, and which is often the only place that flies the Canadian flag. It is considered a cultural symbol representing Canada in the region.

The new philosophy is no longer based on providing service, and services are now being curtailed and eliminated. This philosophy leads to the reduction of services in communities and the erosion of workers' rights. It makes life difficult for my constituents, for small and medium-sized businesses. We must support our fellow workers against attacks by this intolerable bill. We will do all we can to oppose it.

[English]

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debates most of the night. I think it may be time to put the sequence of events into a little bit of context.

We know we have a lockout. We know we have disruption of the postal service. However, when the negotiations started it went on for some time with no resolve. As a result, it was the union that decided to start some rotating strikes in order to get the attention of Canada Post, and that is what they did.

Although rotating strikes may sound fairly neutral in their effect, in fact they really disrupt the postal service across Canada. The corporation does not know where it is going to happen next and it cannot prepare for it.

That had happened, and it was the union that started the rotating strikes. The post office said that did not work for it so it would lock the workers out and maybe that would get some results. That has not happened.

I understand the NDP's allegiance to the unions. They are their biggest supporters. The NDP always has to side with them. But let us put into context the sequence of events as they happened.

● (2750)

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone: I would like to thank the member for his comments. I really did not hear any questions, however.

[English]

Mr. Richard Harris: It was a comment.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, as far as the comment is concerned, I am pleased that the member is able to present a certain sequence of events. I think the important one there is that the employees have been locked out. The government has taken note of this.

I think it is very important that we recognize that postal services have come to a complete and utter stop. Until collective bargaining is put back into place so that the two parties can come to a proper solution between the two of them and we and the government can go back to our respective homes, and we in Quebec can actually celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste, we have to sit here and debate a law project that we should never have been presented with in the first place.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought that was a very interesting speech by my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, a part of the country that I visited four years ago.

I found it particularly interesting that he spoke about the small isolated communities with great distances between them. That is a very important aspect of life in those communities. He spoke specifically about small villages where the post office used to occupy a central position. We are talking about bargaining and reaching an agreement. What about the impact of a decent wage and a worthwhile retirement in the future?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, which is a matter of great concern for us outside the urban centres.

In those areas, a wage and a pension are essential. People outside urban centres are often disadvantaged, when compared to others. These are not big cities, and the economy does not develop at the same rate as in the major urban centres. People depend to a very large extent on each family member who has a job and the opportunity to have a pension and a good life after working at their job for many years. It is essential for us that all our jobs and our workers be protected and that we make sure that wages are commensurate with the need and the contribution made.

The bill that is before us is a disastrous and draconian step backwards and we will not tolerate it.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask about solutions again. That is what Canadians who are involved in the lockout and those who are looking for a resumption of service need.

What could be done to address the most controversial elements? What overtures have the postal workers made? What action could government take to find new ways to improve the relationship between labour and management in the 21st century in terms of looking for solutions?

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): I certainly think the first step would be to stop defining a lockout as a strike. We should definitely be looking at realities as plain as day.

We are attacking workers for having attempted to exercise their legal right to strike and their legal right to put pressure on their employer. I do not think that is a tactic that should be lost in the 21st century. It is a right that is enshrined in our Constitution. The Constitution is something that we are going to continue to defend, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

● (2755)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at this rare hour it is my first opportunity to debate in this new Parliament. I am not pleased that I have to debate this particular issue, but I am happy that Parliament is making the effort to look at this issue. It is a very serious and important issue to many people across the country, especially in my riding in the Northwest Territories, where postal service has been an essential part of the communications system for far-flung communities over thousands of miles.

As my colleague mentioned in his case in Quebec, community post offices are very important and serve a function that in many ways goes beyond simply business service and becomes part of the culture of the community. Many join with their friends at the post office because there is no door-to-door delivery in the Northwest Territories. People go to post offices to get mail from their mailboxes. It is an experience that brings people together.

In many respects, many of these communities absolutely need the service. There was a case in Colville Lake last Christmas. The chief of Colville Lake was working with me to try to get COD service for his community so that people could acquire gifts for their children after buying them online. Those types of services for northern communities are limited but extremely important. What happens with the post office means a lot to northerners.

Let us look at this move by the government and what it means. The Government of Canada really is the boss of the post office and through its crown corporation runs the post office. We have heard the Prime Minister say in question period that he wants to offer a wage settlement to the postal workers in the same way it was offered to other public servants. The government knows that its responsibility for the postal service is quite large.

What has the government done in the north in the last number of years in terms of policy with Canada Post? One thing it has done, which has turned out to be an abysmal failure, is the revision of the

food mail program. The food mail program was an essential public service to northerners across this vast land. People needed it to provide them with the basic essentials of life.

With the Conservatives having privatized this service to select businesses, there is a situation where the opportunities for people to take advantage of food mail have been severely curtailed. Protests have gone up around the north. The Conservatives' policy changes to privatize an essential part of the northern service of Canada Post has been nothing short of abysmal.

Northerners do not have a system that works now and it is essential that this be changed. People are going hungry. People are not getting the proper food. This is not working. When changes are made to the postal service and the kinds of things that it provides, there are sometimes very serious results.

When we talk about the relationship between the postal corporation and its employees, we are talking about a very serious matter that can affect many of the things that go on in this country. I really do not want the postal service denigrated to any greater extent than it already has been for the people in isolated communities right across this country.

● (2800)

Are these people simply a drain on the public purse? No.

Quite clearly, the resources which are driving the recovery that we see in the country come from the isolated regions. Our regions are important to the future of Canada. We need good services. We need services that work for us. We need public services that are fair.

My concern with the actions of the government early in the term of its first majority is that it is trying to take on this essential public service and force it down, to take the wind out of its sails and change this into something else, as it did with the food mail with an incredible result.

When I first came to Parliament, the Conservative government, led by the Prime Minister, had a great friend in John Howard. The Conservatives brought him here and he spoke in Parliament. It was clear that the Prime Minister liked Mr. Howard a lot. In fact, he liked him so much that he took some of his speeches and gave them in other places. That was quite entertaining for many of us who could recognize the problem he had with his great friendship with John Howard.

The Howard government took on workers in its country very successfully at the start. It was very successful at the start. This is a word of caution to the Conservative government. The Howard government was very successful at taking little bites at the rights of workers. Then, toward the end of its time, it took too big a bite.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Was it a megabyte?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: It was a bigger bite than he could chew and now Mr. Howard is enjoying a forced retirement. He is out of government and he has been replaced.

Government Orders

For the Conservative government which is starting off its majority by taking this rather draconian action against the workers of the country, take this as notice. If this is the members' start on the Howard road, we will be after them throughout this Parliament, and when it comes to the next election, if they continue down this road, they will end up in the same place as John Howard, in the dustbin of politics.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sitting here after 4 a.m. is always a bit of a surprise.

I listened quite closely to what the hon. member had to say and I know he represents a very large rural area. He visited the beautiful Thousand Islands in my riding of Leeds—Grenville last summer.

In a news report just a couple of days ago, the local CUPW union representative said: “We want to deliver the mail especially in a small town like Gananoque where there are a lot of elderly residents and small businesses that rely on us for their mail”. She also went on to say that she had hoped the labour minister's legislative motion to put them back to work would be passed.

The hon. member mentioned in his presentation how important the mail is in rural ridings. Are those important considerations and does he believe that unions are always correct?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, do I think unions are always correct? No, I do not.

However, do I think that the process of collective bargaining, where two bodies have the opportunity to interact, is a good process? Yes, I do. That is the process we use in this country.

We did not see much impact from the rotating work action that was taken by the union. It did not upset our service in the Northwest Territories. What we have seen though, with the lockout, is obviously a major disruption. Emails and complaints have flowed to me since the lockout. People were not too concerned about the rotating work actions that the union took because those were reasonable steps.

● (2805)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that the member talked about the importance of the mail being delivered to the north. As well, he talks about the union members as if they are the only workers. I am a business owner as are many of my friends and we hire bookkeepers, receptionists, groundskeepers and cleaners. These are all people who are average workers. We depend on the mail. Our businesses depend on the mail. What is the member going to say to these average workers when they cannot get paid any longer and they lose their jobs because our businesses are going under?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I would tell them to look at the Conservative government that would not tell the postal corporation not to have a lockout.

What is wrong with the government? Why was it silent in this regard? That is what I would say to people.

When it comes to the importance of Canada Post, yes, I do not think we have had one disagreement in this Parliament about the importance of Canada Post, but what we have had is a major

disagreement about the failure of the government to stand up and tell management it cannot act in this rather ridiculous fashion.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the north on his expression of how important postal service is to our northern communities and remote communities. I have had the chance to work with him on the food mail file and I would like to hear how he sees what happened when the government unilaterally took away the food mail contract and gave it to the northern stores. Does he feel that action and others against Canada Post may be part of a more general pattern or direction along with the draconian legislation that we have before us here, a direction that leads only to privatization?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development wrote an excellent report on the food mail and I hope the government looks at it because the situation with food mail has to change. We cannot simply go on with the policy the way it has been outlined. It is not working.

If we do not have changes, we will have problems. I appeal to the government to get busy and change that policy. It is not working.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by telling the House and everyone who is listening how very proud I am to see my party standing up so unswervingly and with such determination for the rights of workers. I am honoured to stand in the House and speak for the workers who live in my riding, and for all Canadians from sea to sea.

I find it very hard to accept a government that is turning back the clock on the quality of life for workers and their families, a government that is turning the clock back significantly for our society, with such archaic and quite simply irresponsible measures.

Everyone, and I mean everyone, without exception, is being penalized by this lockout at present. Yes, it is a lockout, not a strike, because, let us remember, the Canada Post employees themselves were prepared to return to work. The union has acted completely responsibly. It offered to end the strike if Canada Post agreed to keep the old contract while bargaining continued. Canada Post refused. Let us also remember that urgent mail was being delivered during the rotating strike. It was the employer, and no one else, that decided to lock the employees out and simply put a padlock on the postal service doors. That is easier than bargaining. That is the real explanation for why Canadian individuals and businesses are no longer getting their mail.

The government is truly acting in bad faith. All it wants to do is impose a labour contract on employees, which I find completely unacceptable. That is not at all a government's responsibility. A government should instead be concerned about the quality of life of its citizens. But that is clearly not the case here. What the government is doing does not give both sides an opportunity to reach an agreement.

Government Orders

The government is once again siding with the employer and with the CEO of Canada Post, who made \$497,000 in 2010, not to mention a 33% bonus. What a perfect example of just how similar the Conservatives are to their Republican counterparts in the Tea Party in the U.S.

Employees are simply asking for better working conditions for a better quality of life for themselves and, by extension, their families. They are fighting for more job security, an entirely legitimate demand. They are fighting for a decent wage for all so that everyone can pay their bills, feed their families and enjoy life. They, too, have the right to enjoy life.

They are fighting for the right to retire with dignity. Everyone deserves a rest, especially after working for many years. Nothing could be more irresponsible than the unilateral legislation being proposed by the government. The government is flouting the right to negotiate a collective agreement and, furthermore, is proposing even lower wages than Canada Post's offer.

Is that really the kind of country we want? Do we really want a government that flouts the rights of workers? If we let the government behave this way with Canada Post workers, what will happen next? Whose rights will be violated? Children? Women? The elderly? Aboriginals? People with disabilities? Which rights will be next?

Personally, I find this extremely troubling. This debate is not just about mail carriers, it is also about safeguarding workers' rights to negotiate a collective agreement, an entirely legitimate demand. A negotiation is between two parties. In this case, however, only the union has behaved responsibly. Canadians have fought too long and too hard for a fair and equitable working environment. They fought tirelessly for adequate wages and benefits so they could support their families. The government must stop meddling in this situation and telling workers to take even more steps backward.

It is important to keep in mind that Canada Post belongs to all Canadians. We share a collective responsibility to ensure that our workers are treated fairly, because Canada Post has a mandate to provide postal service across the country. Everyone needs those services: citizens, small businesses and community agencies. We are lucky to have the best postal service in the world. The elderly need to receive their pension cheques so they can live. Small businesses need to send out their invoices so they can continue to operate.

● (2810)

Organizations must continue to receive their grant funding so they can continue to deliver services and pay employees. The government is looking to dismantle and privatize this service. That decision would have serious consequences for all Canadians. There is no—I repeat—no solution where the private sector could fulfill the mandate of Canada Post. On the contrary, we would pay much more for inferior service.

In Germany, for instance, citizens pay 77¢ to send a letter. In Austria, they pay 88¢. Why? Both countries have a privatized mail system. Here, where it costs just 59¢ to send a letter, the public option is far and away the best solution.

This is a government that opposes public postal service for purely ideological reasons. Its true motive is clear: maximize corporate profits, at the expense of workers yet again.

The employer argues that it cannot afford to agree to the workers' demands. They are too costly, too expensive. That is odd, especially given that Canada Post generated revenues in the neighbourhood of \$281 million last year. It makes you think.

In closing, I would ask you to think about this and to ask yourselves some questions. Where are we headed with a government that is not even able to protect the interests of workers or their families? Where are we headed with a government that does not care about giving Canadians a better quality of life? Where are we headed with a government that puts profits above all else? Where are we headed with a government that scoffs at democracy when it is convenient? My fellow Canadians, is that really what you want? Is that the future of your country, our country? I say no. You deserve better, a lot better.

We, the NDP, will not give up. We will fight for the rights of workers, so they can have a decent wage, so they can have a safe working environment and so they can retire with dignity.

We will fight for a country where no one—I repeat, no one—is left by the wayside.

● (2815)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here this evening working on behalf my constituents.

I stand with 165 members of the strong, stable, national Conservative majority government who ran on a pledge to be here for Canada, and here we are defending the rights of every Canadian worker. Is that not interesting?

It seems, from what I am hearing from the NDP this evening, that working families have a union card and everyone else does not work. That seems to be what I am hearing. What I seem to be hearing is to heck with small business; we are not worried about them. To heck with the economy; if that stops, it does not matter. Let us just be irresponsible. Let us take our marching orders from the big union bosses who will not even allow a vote from their membership. The tyranny, the intimidation—women working at Canada Post are afraid to say anything other than, “I will fall in line. Sure, I will follow the big union boss who will not allow me to vote on contract offers.”

That is what she is fighting for. Is she proud of it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: I would remind you that it was the employer who locked out the employees and shut down postal service; it was not the employees who decided to stop delivering the mail.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): I would like to thank my constituents for re-electing me in Nepean—Carleton. I know they are all watching me right now, at 4:20 in the morning, as we debate this important subject.

The member talked about the importance of pensions for Canada Post workers. I have here the portfolio of the Canada Post pension fund. The top 10 holdings of that pension fund are Toronto-Dominion Bank, Royal Bank of Canada, Bank of Nova Scotia, Suncor, Canadian Natural Resources, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, Canadian National Railway, and Talisman Energy. All of these companies' profits belong to the shareholders of those companies, in this case the employees of Canada Post.

Now when the NDP talks about raising taxes on these very businesses, they take a bite out of the money that flows from those businesses directly into the pension fund of the workers. Why is it that the NDP wants to raise taxes on the pension fund of the workers at Canada Post?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, that question was asked earlier this evening. We have never called for higher taxes on pension funds, either during the campaign or at any other time. So the member's question is not pertinent.

• (2820)

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member.

Two days ago, I was in Montreal with union members on the picket line. A number of people were there, and they told me that Canada Post management wanted to impose orphan clauses. Could the hon. member tell us what an orphan clause is and what she thinks about such a clause being imposed?

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I am not an expert when it comes to strikes or lockouts. I have no idea about the question the hon. member just asked. I apologize, but I am not able to answer the hon. member's question.

[English]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the opposition.

The union voted 94% in favour of a strike vote, which it has every right to do, and I applaud it for that. My question is this. Would the member and her party support the union on a free vote on the offer put before it, rather than following what it is being told to do by the bargaining committee?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, all I have to say in response to the hon. member is that going on strike is a right and that workers have the right to negotiate their collective agreement. That is all I have to say in response to the hon. member's question.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House, along with our NDP team, and bring forward

the voices of the people in northern Manitoba, to stand up for the workers who build our communities and who have built our country. Standing in the House I also feel, in a way, that I am living history.

As a 28-year-old young woman who was born and grew up in Canada, I am seeing the Canada that I grew up to believe in fade away. It was a Canada where people enjoyed one of the best qualities of life, the best health care, some of the best education, some of the safest workplaces, and some of the most stable futures. Yet with this kind of legislation, that Canada is being chipped away.

Canada is being chipped away because the people who have built it, the working people of Canada, are having their rights rolled back. Number one is the right to collective bargaining, which is all that the Canadian Union of Postal Workers has asked for. It has asked to go through an enshrined right, a process that working Canadians go through in many workplaces, to say, "This isn't fair", or, "Times are changing, things are getting more expensive, and there are more challenges up ahead, so let us find ways to keep wages, benefits, and pensions in line with a Canada that is moving forward.

Instead of having a partner with whom they could negotiate, they were locked out. When that partner locked them out, just a few days later, the government, which has control over crown corporations, came around and did not just agree with what was presented by Canada Post, it went even further. The government proposed wages that were lower than what Canada Post, the employer, proposed to their employees. With this legislation in front of us today, the government has gone further and silenced the very people who hold up our communities, the very people who are asking for nothing less than dignity and fairness.

But that Canada is also fading away because of the specific attack on my generation. It is my generation that will have a double standard in the kinds of pensions that are proposed as a result of the Canada Post program. These are the kinds of pensions that have already been largely taken away in the private sector.

I come from a proud mining community. Vale, a foreign-owned company, has put out the workers, our brothers and sisters in Sudbury, for over a year because they were asking for a proper pension, a defined benefit pension, so that they would know that their money—their deferred wages—was not going into a black hole to be played with by the markets, which we have seen cause great havoc with people's savings, but that it was locked up somewhere secure, because that is their money, that is our money.

Government Orders

Now we are seeing a new page. We are seeing a crown corporation, which is controlled by government, take that very same approach and say that because you are young and new, you do not deserve the wages and pensions of those who have gone before you. What will result from that? It will result in a generation, my generation, being less well off than our parents. That is not just in an individual sense; it is in the kinds of communities we live in.

I think of my community of Thompson, one of the youngest regions in Canada. Rhonda, who delivers my mail, and Jen and Ian, good friends of mine, are people just like the rest of us. They want to buy a home, build a family, maybe buy a vehicle, and maybe once in a while take a holiday from one of the coldest parts in Canada. But they know they will not be able to make the same plans as their co-workers who are nearing retirement or their parents who have retired.

● (2825)

That double standard also applies to people who live in rural areas of the country like the one I live in. Much has been said about the challenges people face in rural areas.

I really wonder how so many of the members opposite, elected from the same region of Canada in which I was elected, representing rural areas like the one I was elected from, can stand here and say that what Canada Post has been doing is okay. Not only has there been an attack on working people in general, but the kinds of allocations and terms of funding that Canada Post has made have far prioritized urban centres rather than investing in rural areas. The postal service in rural areas is not a luxury. It is absolutely integral, integral in not only communications and entrepreneurship but communication between people.

Most recently Canada Post took care of the food mail program that serviced some of the poorest people in our country, aboriginal people in the regions like the one I live in and represent. These are regions that are isolated, and this program allowed them to access healthy foods. Now that has been taken away.

Much was said about the \$2 billion Canada Post committed to the modernization projects. I saw a fancy PowerPoint presentation about the new vehicles people would get. Those vehicles do not work in places like the one I come from. But I do know from people like Barb and Lorna and Bertha, who I talked to in Flin Flon today, that the permanent workers who are retiring are leaving empty spots that are not being filled up. There is increasing hiring of casual workers. When they bring forward challenges they are facing with rural postal delivery, Canada Post is reticent to respond to those concerns.

The hypocrisy in having a government that claims to stand for rural Canada or western Canada, that claims to stand for the future, leaves behind not just rural areas with this legislation but also begins the chipping away of the foundations that would help hold up my generation.

This type of approach is not singular here with Canada Post. We have heard that very question: Who is going to be next? What about those institutions where we all belong and come together to find ways for all of us to be better off?

The Canadian Wheat Board is another one, the single desk marketer of a very important product that comes out of my part of Canada.

What about our other crown corporations? Which one will be attacked next? We already know their funding has been challenged and cut. But how about the workers who work for these crown corporations?

It doesn't have to be this way. Our leader of the official opposition put forward the statement that it does not have to be this way. What we ask from the government is to get Canada Post to take that lock off the door and allow the two parties to come to the table and find a resolution in terms of the challenges that workers are facing on the ground and to recognize that these workers are the people who hold up our communities. These workers are raising children who are going to grow up in a world that is going to be increasingly more challenging.

The role of government, if nothing else, is to stand up for its people. That is why our fight today is not just for the workers of Canada Post but for every worker in Canada and every Canadian who deserves dignity in a country as wealthy as ours.

● (2830)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard today over and over again from members of the opposition talking about the rights of the union. It is the only thing we seem to hear about.

What we have here is that postal delivery and postal services are not happening. That is not what we are talking about. Strike or lockout does not matter as there is no postal delivery. The refusal to support our back to work legislation is causing real harm.

Here is one example. A constituent emailed me yesterday that she has lost her key to her postal mailbox. Her CPP cheque is in that mailbox. Canada Post told her it would take three to four weeks to get her a new key. Her rent is due on June 28th. Why is the opposition choosing to support its union friends instead of supporting a Canadian senior like this lady? I want an answer.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I will respond with another question. Why is the government not standing up for Canadian working people who are asking for nothing more than a fair wage, a fair pension and dignity in the workplace? That dignity is something that will contribute to the communities in which seniors live with such great challenges ahead of them and in which young people are growing up. These are the fights of not just Canada Post workers but all of us, and we ask to see leadership from the government in standing up for a brighter future for Canadian people, instead of rolling back their rights and making their futures a lot more uncertain.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but get into the debate. My colleague from the Conservatives said that Canada Post tells the seniors that they are going to get the key in four weeks. I am failing to see how a postal worker will be part and parcel of ensuring that the lady in his riding will get the key in four weeks. That is management.

Government Orders

We are having difficulty between the management and the postal workers' union. My question to my colleague from Manitoba is: Should the government not order them back to the negotiating table, without interfering, and should the government not allow the two parties to come to a conclusion? That is where our party has put amendments. I just wonder if my colleague will encourage her party to follow our amendments in order to ensure this is concluded, fairly, quickly—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the hon. member there to allow the member for Churchill a chance to respond.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, what we are saying is that, just as the government has interfered with the process here, it ought to reverse that act, tell Canada Post to remove the lock from the door and allow the parties to come to the table.

Canada Post employees have been saying for quite some time that they want to work, but they want to work with a fair, negotiated agreement.

• (2835)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I follow up on a question from my hon. colleague from the Conservative side who referred to us as supporting the union as if the union is some sort of inanimate object divorced from the people who actually make it up. Having worked for a union for 16 years, I know that a union is nothing more than a collective grouping of the men and women who work at a particular place of employment. It is a very democratic organization in which people vote to become certified. They vote whether or not they decide to join a union. They vote on their strike votes. They vote on whether a collective agreement is ratified or not. In my experience, it is one of the most democratic organizations in Canadian society.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Don Davies: I hear some jeering from the other side. I do not know that they have spent any time in a union, but I spent 16 years of my life in one.

What does my hon. colleague have to say about the men and women who make up the union? Does she share the opinion that the union is something to be disparaged as the Conservatives are doing?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to come from a community that enjoys the quality of life it does because of the hard work of unions like the steelworkers, UFCW, CUPE and CUPW that are out there because they fight for all of us. They ensure our wages are fair and that we have safe workplaces. They ensure we have health benefits and they ensure our communities are better off.

I am concerned by the negative, aggressive attacks on what is a basic right of unionization. This, to me, is language that I hear from the U.S., from the Republican Party, from the Tea Party. This is not the inclusive, tolerant language that—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Jonquière—Alma.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have spent the day in the House. I spoke this afternoon. This evening, I have two comments to make. I am a new parliamentarian, a new member. I am starting, as everyone has done. My eyes are

wide open. I look at these people and I admire them all, because I think we are doing everything we can to pull Canada out of a bad situation and to improve things, both for the workers and for the country as a whole.

This evening, a Conservative member rose on a point of order and made a comment about reading from a prepared text. We are starting out here and we are being told not to work from a prepared text. That is how I understood his comment this evening; it struck a chord with me. So we will put the texts away and proceed differently.

After that, a Liberal member behind me rose to say that we should be talking about real issues. It is true that we should be talking about real issues: the people are suffering, too. I experienced a six-month lockout. People lost their homes; they were unable to buy groceries. The union fixed their appliances and bought them groceries. That is the reality when people are not working and when no paycheque arrives on Thursday. That is what we need to be looking at here in the House.

I am part of the labour movement; I am a factory worker. When we talk about unions in the House, I can feel the contempt people have for workers and unions. That is not normal in a country like ours. It is not normal, and I can feel that contempt.

I have negotiated collective agreements. In 1992, I spent 14 months negotiating. A conciliator was brought in; there was no strike and we signed our agreement and got back to work. In 1976, I was locked out and in 1979 we chose to go on strike.

In 2006, I was the spokesperson at the bargaining table with Alcan. In one month we managed to negotiate a \$1.2 billion contract to build a new factory with new technology. We did that in one month: a team of eight people worked night and day for one month. We had a deadline and we met it. Anything can be done in this world. Anything can happen when both parties are willing.

I urge the Conservative government to bring these two parties together in the same room and force them to find a solution. That is the only way this is going to be resolved.

In any case, I am a bit disappointed. This is my first time and I would have liked to read my speech, but I will not. I have spoken from my heart. It will not be more than five minutes, but I can say one thing: we need to start taking care of people, the people around us. I spoke on behalf of people who are not even unionized. I defended them. I defended people who wanted to have a home. That was not my job; I was the union representative.

The unions helped create progress in both Quebec and Canada. We contributed to Quebec's occupational health and safety legislation. We participated in the arbitration panel and all these things. People in unions are not so bad. We are not all some kind of insect. For example, today we have FTQ and CSN investment funds. We participate in society. Other people must stop holding unions in contempt.

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• (2840)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to once again engage in some questions with hon. members from across the floor.

A number of members across the floor talked about Canada Post as being an “essential service”. Essential services in Canada often have special rules that apply to them, including—

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): No lockout.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: And no strikes, Mr. Speaker. The member is right: no lockouts, no strikes.

Would the member be in favour of listing Canada Post as an essential service? If so, does he think it would be a good idea that the workers would not be able to strike or be locked out in the future? Would he support that?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Mr. Speaker, I said it this afternoon and I am going to say it again: we can force the parties to sit down and find a solution. It has been done. I have seen it happen. It involves setting deadlines and assigning the right people to the right places. It happens when everyone acts in good faith.

If everyone is not acting in good faith, an agreement will never be reached. The union, management and the government all have to put some water in their wine. I call on the government to ask that the doors be unlocked and that the employees return to work. People are prepared to work under the former collective agreement while finding a solution for the future. That is what is important. That is how I see the situation.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my honoured colleague how much I appreciated his passion, especially at this time of the morning. He has probably been up for about 23 hours and he still has that passion because it comes from his deep belief system.

What action does he think the government needs to take to put an end to the fiasco that is happening this morning?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Mr. Speaker, I do not know; I am not a miracle worker, but I believe it can be done. In fact, I worked in the labour movement with management and with big multinationals. It is not easy dealing with big multinationals either, but we found solutions. Why? I would like to give an example. In the last negotiations, we put five issues on the table, the company added others and then we had to work on them. Of course, we sometimes had to make painful choices, but that is how you get to the end and get something out of it.

Canada Post, as well as the union, will have to compromise. They need to sit down and do it the right way. If they all go back to work and are forced to sit down with either a conciliator or a mediator—it does not matter which one—to reach a solution, they should find common ground. At any rate, we know that if the employees are forced to return to work after a lockout, the work environment will

be intolerable for everyone. I have experienced this situation in factories.

• (2845)

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I cannot relate to the member's experiences in 1976, because at that time I was three years old.

My generation are first-time homebuyers. My generation are young parents and owners of small businesses. My generation and constituents are northern, rural, and vast, and my generation is pleading, “I hope this strike ends somehow, soon, because it's killing small businesses like mine”.

The key to ending this strike is not a key held by anybody but the opposition, and it is by supporting this legislation.

I ask the member to stop fighting the legislation and to support it so that Canadians can get their businesses running again and get back to work.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The member for Jonquière—Alma has 30 seconds left.

Mr. Claude Patry: Mr. Speaker, the first thing to be done tomorrow morning is to unlock the doors, bring everyone back in, sit them down and make them negotiate. They will deliver the mail, everything will get back to normal and the parties will negotiate and find a solution. That is the first thing to be done tomorrow.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here at this time, and I am going on my 22nd hour today, to discuss this unfair back-to-work legislation.

Before I came here for midnight, I quickly wrote my speech. I am going to be reading from the notes I made before I came here, if the House will accept that.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst is rising on a point of order?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, twice now I have heard members ask, in essence, whether or not they could read their notes. And I do not think it is right that the person advising them told them it was not acceptable to read from their notes in the House of Commons. Ministers are not even able to answer the questions put to them in question period without their notes. It is well recognized here in the House of Commons that members are fully entitled to read their documents and they should not be embarrassed to do so. Those are their documents. I invite the member to read her document; she is welcome to do so in the House of Commons.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for clearing that up for me.

We are here to discuss the unfair back-to-work legislation. The Canada Post Corporation decided to lock the doors and not allow in the 48,000 postal workers who want to work.

To defend the rights of all workers, I stand in solidarity with my sisters and brothers in the CUPW who want to work but cannot, with my colleagues here in this caucus, and with thousands of members of my community and other Canadian communities.

The postal workers started a legal rotating strike on June 3. When exercising their legal right to strike as part of the collective bargaining process, they made sure that it did not stop the mail delivery so many Canadians depend on. Actually, it was only after Canada Post shut the doors and locked the workers out on June 15 that we started to notice that the mail service had been interrupted. This past week, the government chose to interfere with the collective bargaining process and institute back-to-work legislation.

The government's proper role in this process is not to interfere, but rather to tell its own crown corporation to get back to the negotiating table and to work out a fair and equitable collective agreement. The government's role is not to aid the corporation to achieve its bargaining goals through back-to-work legislation. This legislation removes all incentive for Canada Post to come back to the negotiating table and relieves Canada Post of its obligation to bargain, never mind bargaining in good faith.

This act by the Minister of Labour is undermining the collective bargaining process that many women and men have struggled, sacrificed, and fought for over the course of many years. When I was a conciliator with the provincial labour board, we pushed for all parties to come to a negotiated settlement on their own.

The strength of those who came before us and defended the right to collective bargaining created benefits for all Canadians. Today's young women and men who are entering the workforce are able to do so knowing that they will be able to enjoy benefits such as the eight-hour workday—of course, I do not have this but most Canadians do—the concept of a weekend, standards and measures to ensure safe working conditions, parental leave, and many others.

Basically, we all have an improved standard of living because of the work that the union movement and workers have accomplished over the years. It is also important to note that the workers of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the CUPW, have themselves been responsible for many advancements over the years.

As a young woman, I would like to outline a few of them.

In 1974, the CUPW members stood in solidarity with the mostly female workforce of the coder machine operators. These workers went on an illegal strike to defend the need for equality for the women who were in the low-paid coder classification.

In 1981, the CUPW workers went on strike and won paid maternity leave. This allowed many young women the freedom not to have to choose between raising a family and following and building a career. We women now know that we will not have to worry about financial barriers to taking care of our newborns, and that we will have a job to return to after maternity leave.

In 1985, the CUPW organized and obtained a collective agreement representing cleaning staff in Toronto, one of the first bargaining units in the private sector, many of whom were women.

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The union movement and CUPW in particular have a strong history of standing up and fighting for the struggles that led to workers' rights and increased equality for women.

● (2850)

As women, young workers, workers of all ages and community members with a conscience, we cannot sit idly by as the rights of all workers are taken away and deteriorate.

Postal workers are our neighbours and friends. They are everyday Canadians who deserve decent wages, benefits and good working conditions.

They provide vital services to my constituents of Scarborough—Rouge River and to all Canadians alike, including single parents who depend on the monthly child tax benefit cheque, seniors receiving payments through their GIS or OAS who do not have direct deposit, Canadians who depend on the CPP disability benefit payments, low-income Canadians waiting on a tax return cheque, individuals waiting for their passports and newcomer families who use the mail service for their family sponsorship applications to be reunited with their loved ones. These neighbours across the country are waiting on Canada Post to unlock the doors and unseal the red mail boxes so their lives can return to normal.

The postal workers are asking for the same thing my neighbours are asking for: to go back to work and continue to deliver the millions of pieces of mail every single day.

Through this back-to-work legislation the government has decided to punish the workers by imposing a contract with wage increases much lower than Canada Post's last offer. Let me outline some of the details.

Canada Post's offer was 1.9% in 2011, 2012 and 2013 and 2% in 2014, well below the 3.3% rate of inflation.

The government's legislation, however, would offer something much lower than that. It offers 1.75% in 2011, only 1.5% in 2012 and 2% in 2013 and 2014. This is despite the fact that Canada Post is profitable, earning \$281 million last year alone. Its CEO, as we have heard, earned an incredible \$497,000 plus a 33% bonus, whereas the offer on the table offers a two-tiered wage system discriminating against young workers because Canada Post wants to roll back the starting salaries for young workers.

This proposal is unfair and unwarranted against young workers.

As Paul Moist said, "There are no such things as two-tier rent or mortgages: young and new workers don't get a discount on utility or grocery bills".

I agree with him. I never got an opportunity to pay a discounted rent because I was a student working a part-time job. This is an outrageous—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You were staying at home.

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Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Sorry, I actually lived away from home for nine years, seven years when I was in university and after that as well. I did not have the luxury of staying at home in the way one of the hecklers just mentioned.

It is outrageous to say that young workers do not deserve the same wages that other workers do. Women are still fighting for equal pay for equal work, and along the same lines, young workers deserve equal pay for equal work. This legislation is eliminating the right of public sector workers to negotiate collectively.

● (2855)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening with interest to the debate. It is almost five o'clock in the morning and we have all been up 22 or 23 hours.

I am amazed by the rhetoric I am hearing from the opposition members. I have heard that we are operating in bad faith, that we do not care about workers, that we are battering the rights of workers, and it is amazing to me that when the opposition talks about workers, it is only talking about unionized workers, specifically the 50,000 unionized workers in this dispute.

The truth is that over these last eight months our government tried to facilitate and help the parties to come to a negotiated agreement. Negotiation is just that. Until there is a settlement, it is just negotiation. Nobody is taking anything away from anyone when we put these measures forward.

I would ask the member opposite, when she speaks of the rights of workers and specifically women workers, of which I am one, why there is no concern about the over 33 million Canadians who rely on the postal service and all the workers who are not—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, I understand that we are speaking to the bill that is in front of us, so I speak of the current situation where 48,000 unionized workers are locked out of their workplace. That is why I am speaking of currently unionized workers.

The actions of the government have caused a deterioration in the quality of the rights that workers have obtained over the many years of the labour and civil rights movements in Canada. This attack on the unionized workers who are members of CUPW is a direct affront to all workers in Canada.

Today I stand with my New Democratic Party colleagues in solidarity with all workers in Canada to preserve all of their rights.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what practical solution would my hon. colleague recommend to reduce the polarization that is occurring?

I would ask that we refocus the debate on what really matters, and that is Canadians, Canadians who want to work and who cannot, and Canadians who want a resumption of the postal service.

What three things would the hon. member recommend to reduce the polarization?

● (2900)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, this is a question that has been answered time and time again tonight. What must happen to bring about resumption of the mail service wanted by so many million Canadians is that Canada Post needs to unlock the doors and allow the workers to—

An hon. member: Unlock the doors.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, I was a little confused by the heckles. Canada Post needs to unlock the doors and allow the workers who want to work to go back to work and to deliver the millions of pieces of mail they deliver on a daily basis.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is 5 a.m. on June 24, and it is Quebec's national holiday. This is a great day. I am very sorry that we could not get unanimity to adjourn so that we could go and celebrate with Quebecers. That being said, I nevertheless want to rise in order to wish all of Quebec a happy national holiday, and I extend the same wishes to the members from that province who are in the House.

Last Monday I was on a picket line in Montreal and I met a number of workers. They were very angry, disappointed and indignant. In fact they gave me this handsome cap because they wanted me to show it off in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to remove the prop. There is a standing order against the use of props in the House, so I would ask her to respect that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard the word “disguise”. I would not say it this is a disguise, but perhaps the translation was inaccurate.

In the House, several other members also have headgear. The workers talked to me and gave me this cap and this tee-shirt which says “The struggle continues”. These people are outraged because they do not feel respected given today's events. This is not going to help things in future nor improve labour relations. That is what they told me.

In its 2009 annual report, Canada Post confirmed that for a fifteenth consecutive year it had a consolidated profit and net benefit of \$281 million, out of \$7.3 billion in revenues. Moreover, Canada Post is still not releasing—in case people do not know this—its financial statement for 2010. A bare minimum of transparency would require that it release its accounts for the past year. We don't know how many million or billion dollars it made.

I would like to remind parliamentarians and those at home watching us today that the Canada Post Corporation Act establishes that this public service must be financially self-sustaining, not that it must seek profit at any price, such as no longer offering equitable service throughout the country, particularly in smaller communities. Subsection 5(2) of the Canada Post Corporation Act states the following:

While maintaining basic customary postal service, the Corporation...shall have regard to

(b) the need to conduct its operations on a self-sustaining financial basis while providing a standard of service that will meet the needs of the people of Canada and that is similar with respect to communities of the same size;

The Canada Post Corporation Act mentions self-sustaining finances in a global sense; it does not target specific operations. It makes sense that certain aspects of Canada Post are profitable, even very profitable. Those services should finance the necessary operations that run at a deficit in order to develop and maintain services in communities. We know full well that it is difficult to maintain service in some small towns.

From the beginning of this labour dispute, the federal government should have clearly instructed Canada Post management to make an offer to the postal workers that would respect the spirit of the act.

I asked a question in the House and requested that the government allow us to resolve this dispute not with special legislation, as it is doing now, but with a clear message to Canada Post management that they need to sit down and resolve this dispute in a respectful manner.

Instead, the government introduced a bill stating—at least this is how we interpreted it—that if the employer's overall offer is not accepted, the workers will be given a salary that is lower than the employer's last offer. That is unfair, shameful and unacceptable. This bill will take \$875.50 from full-time workers during the four-year agreement. In total, the government would deprive these people and their families of \$35 million. That is truly unacceptable. And this is all in a context where Canada Post itself decided to declare a lockout and deprive people of their mail.

● (2905)

The union represents men and women who enrich our society. These people responsibly decided to hold a rotating strike rather than a general strike. That is called being responsible. However, Canada Post decided to close the doors and prevent everyone from coming in. We are seeing the purpose of this action today: a special bill to force people back to work in unacceptable conditions.

When I asked the question, the Conservative ministers said what they are still saying and that is that Canada Post is an independent entity and that they are not getting involved. However, in actual fact, this government was a full, silent partner in Canada Post's actions. The government is now the key player in this labour dispute and calling all the shots. The government got involved, not as a mediator of justice and equality, but as the organization's true employer, and not even a good employer but a dictatorial one that imposes its rules by force. It is a shame and the government is bringing shame to Canada. It is a bit difficult for me, as a sovereignist, to say this, but I am going to say it anyway: this is a shameful thing for Canada.

One of the most important issues in this dispute, and what the workers have been telling me, is that Canada Post wants to impose orphan clauses. As a result, the salaries and benefits of new employees, in particular their pension and vacation plans would be subject to clauses providing for different treatment, known as orphan clauses. That means that, once these clauses come into force, any new people who are hired will not receive the same starting salaries and benefits as those who were hired previously. This creates two classes of workers within the same institution, which is unaccept-

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table. In Quebec, significant measures have been taken to ensure that these infamous orphan clauses cannot be applied systematically.

This is quite a dark day as a result of this bill. In my opinion, the government decided to leave its mark of inequity, lack of respect, discrimination and injustice on the labour relations that will prevail at Canada Post. That is too bad because, according to Brand Finance Canada in 2009, Canada Post employees made this organization the most iconic brand in Canada. In addition, *Corporate Knights Magazine* considers Canada Post to be one of the best 50 corporate citizens in Canada, and all that—

● (2910)

[English]

The Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remember over the years when the member for Ahuntsic was a member of the Bloc Party, which is not recognized here anymore, she and her colleagues would constantly demand that the federal government become more and more involved in the affairs of Quebec by way of sending more funding for this, more help for that. They wanted the involvement of the federal government. Now the federal government, through this legislation, wants to get involved in a way that will be for the good of all Canadians and end this postal strike. The member cannot have it both ways. It is one or the other.

It is curious. The member said that Canada Post must unlock the doors. Well, if Canada Post were to unlock the doors tomorrow, would the postal workers go back to full delivery and get back to the negotiating table with the promise of no more rotating strikes until an agreement has been worked out? Has the postal union said that it would do that? I have not heard that mentioned at all tonight during the debate.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to remind my colleague that I am still a Bloc Québécois MP; that has not changed. Second, I would like to remind my colleague that, for many years, the Bloc Québécois always fought against federal government involvement in provincial jurisdictions. When he says that we rose more than once to ask the federal government to intervene, I swear that I do not know what he is talking about.

We are asking that the federal government give Quebec what it is owed, whether it is the \$2.2 billion we asked for and received—and hurrah, it was a victory—or the right to also work in French in federal institutions in Quebec. We will continue to put forward demands.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member posed a question to the Bloc Québécois member. He asked her if the postal workers would be prepared to return to work with no more rotating strikes, to deliver the mail and to negotiate a collective agreement.

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Does the Bloc Québécois member recall the question I asked the Minister of Labour last week in the House of Commons? I informed the minister that the union had asked for that on one condition, which is in the legislation we are discussing: that Canada Post honour the expired collective agreement and that it restore the drug and disability benefits. If that were put in place, the union would return to the bargaining table and the workers would return to Canada Post offices to deliver the mail to Canadians.

Does the member recall that the question was asked in the House of Commons and that there was the assurance that everyone would return to the bargaining table?

● (2915)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. That is also what the unionized workers were telling me. They are acting in good faith and they are willing to return to the bargaining table. They would like to see the old collective agreement prevail until negotiations on a new one are complete. Unfortunately—and I want to say so in their presence—the government has taken advantage of the lockout by Canada Post to table this special statute. The workers feel insulted by all of this, because they were acting in good faith. Deciding to hold rotating strikes is a right; it is legitimate. People have the right to go on strike. They have the right to organize rotating strikes. However, the Conservatives waited for Canada Post to impose a lockout to do precisely what they are doing today.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at this time of the morning a few months ago, I would have finished delivering a little over half of my newspapers to my clients. I used to deliver *Le Soleil*; yes, I was a paperboy before I being elected to the House of Commons. At the time, I had 160 clients. However, I want to point out that today would have been a holiday for me. Delivering newspapers to 160 people, in all kinds of weather, year in, year out, makes me feel particularly qualified to understand the working conditions of our letter carriers. This makes me all the happier to be here in the House, despite the fact that we are celebrating Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day today. I have to mention that I am missing the celebrations on the Plains of Abraham, to which I was invited this year.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about unions, about their operating principles and their democratic principles, it is important to put things in their proper perspective and understand what they represent. Regarding the back-to-work legislation and the negotiations around it, there has been a lot of confusion and shortcuts and simplification, if not simplistic speeches made in the House. This prevents us from seeing the real situation for all postal workers, and the impact that the lockout and the threat of forcing workers back to their jobs may have on the Canadian population.

We have to start by understanding clearly that the union bargaining unit represents tens of thousands of people. When we look at an organization the size of the postal employees' union, we have to understand clearly that these tens of thousands of employees are not all sitting at the bargaining table with management. Quite the opposite. The basic starting principle is several tens of thousands of members who organize locally, who delegate powers to an executive body, which itself delegates powers to higher bodies and then instructs a bargaining committee. This is a basic principle that we see in all kinds of organizations. These are widely accepted principles,

operating methods that have been tried and tested, and rules that the postal union members apply and follow today. So there is no reason now to show them no respect by pointing a gun at their head to force them back to work without allowing them to bargain as equals with the management of the corporation.

Unfortunately, as we know, unions have a bad image among a certain segment of the public, among certain groups of people. We might even say certain elites who would like, at all costs, for them to disappear. After all, the freedom to organize and come together to achieve a common goal is a very widespread principle and operating method in our society.

Take the example of a large corporation, a company that is listed on the stock exchange, in which there are a number of shareholders, equivalent to the members of a union who have decided to pursue a common goal, and they delegate certain powers to a board of directors and to the management, to operate the organization I am describing. The difference, with a union, is simply in the details. The goals and the roles within a company are obviously different, but the basic principles are the same, and they are largely adhered to and accepted. I assume they are also largely adhered to and accepted by all members of this House.

● (2920)

We can look at this from another perspective. My late father, whom I talked about yesterday, was a member of a senior citizens' club. There too, this is an organization with a democratic structure that is composed of its members and delegates certain powers. I remember very well how my father would give us reports at home about internal disputes, disagreements that happened. It is a very healthy sign that an organization is operating democratically when among all the members, people can say that they do not agree with how things are working and they would prefer them to work differently. Unanimity would actually be unhealthy. At its worst, it would be a sign of dictatorship.

We hear in the House that out of several tens of thousands of people, some union members are apparently complaining about the present situation and are almost calling for back to work legislation. I am sure that is so, but I hope someone will be able to produce concrete evidence of it rather than telling us things anonymously and secretly.

I feel I can say that because I have been a member of several democratic organizations. I have held various positions; I was treasurer, chair and secretary. For two years I was chairman of the parents' committee of the Commission scolaire de la Capitale. Somewhat like in the House, sometimes I heard outrageous statements and exaggerations, but I understood that in an emotional debate where the stakes are high and people have different opinions and different interests, sometimes things get out of hand. However, this absolutely does not discredit the union model, whose democratic functioning has been amply demonstrated. No one, absolutely no one, has been able to show the House a shred of evidence that a union structure is not a functional one or does not respect those principles just as well as a large corporation trading on the stock market, or a seniors' organization.

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The fact that unionized postal workers gave their negotiating team a mandate to sit down with management in no way constitutes a problem, and it is totally incomprehensible that this government is so obstinately pursuing its efforts to introduce back-to-work legislation. All the more so since there is another principle that is very important to our freedom and to Canadian society, and that is freedom of association. In this debate we are holding right now in the House, these stakes are important for our society, as the decision that will be taken in the House is going to have an impact on our collective future. Indeed, if we deprive unionized postal workers of the right to negotiate, what is the next step? Are we going to deny them the right to associate freely, to defend their interests and to defend the need to deliver collective services?

In summary, it is very important that this bill not be passed, in order, at the very least, to allow our society to maintain forever the right to freedom of association and the right to negotiate. That is fundamental.

• (2925)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to again engage in this debate with the members of the opposition.

It is interesting that the NDP keeps making the case that this is unheard of, that we are breaking new ground. In fact the history of Canada Post indicates that sometimes the government has had to get involved when the parties have not been able to agree.

It is always a last resort. There have been eight months of negotiations. There was more than three months of work with a conciliator and more than a month with a mediator, and they have not been able to come to an agreement.

The last time this happened, in 1997, the then-Liberal government did bring a bill that set in place the wage rates moving forward. This bill has followed that structure. That is what we have done.

We want to bring stability. There are raises and there are protections for the workers. There is an opportunity for them to put forward their position to a mediator who will then select the offer from Canada Post or the workers, one or the other. That is what the government has put in place.

What we want is stability. We want the mail to flow. We do not want more rotating strikes. We do not want more harm to our community. We want to stand up for all 33 million Canadians, including those at Canada Post.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do not want to approve of or comment on the past actions of the Liberal government. If the Conservative government chooses to learn a lesson there, that is their business, but I believe that we need to get back to the bargaining table. I would urge the government to stop pointing a gun at the union's head.

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): I am focusing on solutions.

Recently there have been challenges for organized labour in Canada, with Air Canada, Canada Post. In Greece, there have been demonstrations against cutbacks. In Spain, government officials are meeting to discuss labour reforms.

I am wondering what role the hon. member thinks globalization has to play in the challenges that unions face today and what actions the government might take to address this issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question.

There is an opportunity to be had here and bridges to be built. Various countries around the world have very different practices. Union coverage and membership rates vary greatly. It would be very interesting to take the time to study it, to see what works best and to consequently make a proposal in partnership with the union members themselves.

• (2930)

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is recognized that workers have the right to negotiate their labour contracts. Canada's courts have also recognized the workers' right to join with other workers to ensure that their rights and labour contracts are respected.

If draconian measures are imposed on the workers, what will the consequences be when these people want to ensure that their right to negotiate better working conditions is respected?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member.

There will be consequences. It is a question of taking away their right to speak freely, to make demands, to hold talks and to truly join forces for a common goal. We cannot back down on this if we want to keep our society from irreparable harm.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that all members in the House are tired at this point, but it is our duty to be here to speak on behalf of our constituents regardless of our opinion.

As this is my first moment in the House to be giving a brief speech, I want to thank the constituents of Edmonton—Strathcona for re-electing me and for having the confidence in me to represent their interests in the House.

As have all of my colleagues in the House, I too have received quite a few emails, and some letters too. I do not know if those came by passenger pigeon; I thought those went via the way of the dodo.

As members on both sides of the House have said, our constituents are deeply concerned that they are not receiving their pension cheques, their old age security cheques, their provincial welfare cheques, disability assistance cheques and so forth. We all share that concern.

And we all share the concerns of the various non-governmental organizations that our communities depend on. They depend on government cheques for grants and donations and the campaigns they run in order to gather funding.

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I am gratified by some of my constituents who have raised concerns about the impact of the strike on their businesses but nonetheless they have congratulated me on my re-election. They respect my determination and principles, wish me luck and tell me to keep up the great work.

Those are the kinds of constituents I have in Edmonton—Strathcona. They understand that we deal with difficult issues. They understand that there are pushes and pulls between employers, employees and unions. There are those who are not necessarily for unions and would like to strike the unions down.

One of the things that has troubled me in this debate is the suggestion by members on the other side of the House that somehow we are doing something importune by continuing this debate into the wee hours. Let us remember that it is the government that is trying to force this legislation through in a rushed manner. We were forced to resort to mechanisms to represent our constituents and those who are going to be impacted by this repressive legislation.

I too share, with my colleagues from Jonquière—Alma and Scarborough—Rouge River, the concern about the suggestion that we on this side of the House only care about people who work in unions. There is a bit of hypocrisy there. There have been complaints that my fellow caucus members are not speaking to the subject of the legislation. At the same time they accuse us of only representing the interests of union workers. They cannot have it both ways.

As some members have reminded the House, we are talking about legislation that is going to affect the rights and privileges of union members, particularly union members who are postal workers. Therefore it is logical that if members are speaking to the bill then that is what they would address.

In no way does that mean that our members, or any member in the House, do not care about people who work in any place of employment, whether they are sole proprietors, lawyers in a law firm, surgeons or dentists, working in a corner grocery store or a large corporation, or they are miners or farmers. Surely all Canadians have rights and privileges, and we have the responsibility to protect those rights and privileges.

I would remind the House that we are discussing a particular piece of legislation that the government has tabled in the House. By the way, it was at the last minute and just before we were about to adjourn.

I am also deeply troubled by the suggestion that we are either for seniors or for private entrepreneurs, or we are for union workers. Surely our responsibility as elected members is to represent every Canadian equally and to make sure their rights and interests are protected.

I heard a lot of discussion in the House about protecting the rights of various members who run businesses themselves, but I have not heard a lot about the people who are working for those businesses and whether provisions are in place to protect the rights and interests of those workers.

• (2935)

As a number of members on my side of the House have mentioned, it is through the organized labour movement that we

have the right to practise what some members in this House call family values.

What are family values? Surely it is the right for people to have time off from employment to spend with their children, with elderly parents, to visit them in their retirement homes, to travel across the country and visit cousins.

That is what these workers are fighting for: the right to have extended time off. It is my understanding that what is being proposed is to limit the time off from work. That does not sound like family values to me.

We have heard in the House over the past week about the reports of rising family debt. Yet, the proposal in the government legislation is to reduce the salary levels below even what the employer was offering. The result down the line is that we will have even more family debt. Surely every Canadian should have the right to a livable wage.

If we do not ensure that the employers are providing a livable wage, somewhere down the line the taxpayers will have to supplement that. That is why we fight for a livable wage. People prefer to work hard and earn that livable wage. They do not want to have to turn to one order of government or another to supplement them, or to turn to a food bank.

We have heard the discussions by some hon. members that even some of our veterans, who have served valiantly overseas in defending the freedoms of our country or other countries, are now having to turn to food banks. We need to make sure that all workers, our armed forces, RCMP, police officers, postal workers, nurses, have a livable wage.

It troubles me very deeply. I am getting the sense that some employees should have rights and that some employees do not deserve those rights.

I want to give hon. members a concrete example of where unions have stood up for the kinds of workers that the government has been promoting: temporary foreign workers. In the province I come from there were tens of thousands of temporary foreign workers brought in. Who was looking after their interests? It was the unions that stood up and came to the forefront. They offered free legal assistance to these workers where the governments had dropped the ball.

Both orders of government dropped the ball on that. Who was looking after the interests of workers who were working for private businesses and big corporations? The government was not there for them; it was the unions that stepped up to the plate.

The unions had no interest in protecting foreign workers who could potentially replace their own members' employment, but they fought for proper inspections to ensure the rights of the temporary foreign workers were being respected. That is the value of the unions.

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I have never been a member of a union. I have not done union work or labour work in my practice. That does not mean that I do not respect the work of my colleagues. I have great respect for my colleagues who have done this work. It is tough, hard, arduous work to be at those negotiation tables. It is a very valuable role to play, whether one is on the management side or the employee side. I think we should respect the advances that have been made in this country.

I have had the honour and privilege of working overseas in countries where we trade, and these rights and privileges do not exist. These are the kinds of countries where we are exporting products like asbestos. Daily I would go to my work and I would see the workers in bare feet going to construction sites. They were not provided with boots. They had no helmets, no proper clothing, no proper way to wash and no union protections. In fact in most cases, if they tried to unionize, they would be beaten.

We are very fortunate in this country. We are very fortunate that a lot of those who work in the unions have freely been offering their assistance to other nations to make sure they have the same rights and opportunities.

Why is that important? It is very important to an operation, whether it is a mine, a petrochemical industry or an agricultural operation, to have proper working conditions and health and safety. An organization has to maintain a healthy workforce in order to deliver its product.

• (2940)

We should be honouring these workers who are willing to stand up against a major employer. It is not easy to stand up to against a major employer.

I have to say that I find—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The member may know, despite some signals, that she has run out of time.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is not a union member but I appreciate her candour in what she said.

We have heard from a lot of union members and union leaders here tonight. We have heard from the member for Hamilton Centre, who was a union leader of the Canadian Auto Workers. We have heard from the member for Vancouver East, who was a hospital employees' union worker and leader. We have heard from the member for Vancouver Kingsway, who was a trade union representative.

We have heard from several union leaders. We will also hear from another union member because I have been a member of a union for 20 years as a professional educator. We have heard a lot about the democracy of the union and how members get together and vote and choose legislation. I want to challenge some of that. Many people who are members of unions are forced to join the union. To be a professional teacher in the public school system, I had to become a member of a union.

If unions are so democratic, why do they feel the need to force people to join? Who is standing up for the rights of the workers who do not want to join a union but are obliged to do so to work in their profession?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. A number of speakers here are worried that the agenda is much larger than the legislation may suggest. In reply, I would have to say that this may well be evidence of that.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can stand and say that I am a union member because I negotiated collective bargaining agreements for the doctors, so I understand all about this. We were emergency workers so we could not go on strike. We had a difficult time negotiating. I understand the need to have a fair process but I have a suggestion.

We Liberals have been getting up and asking certain questions about coming to solutions, and it is not because we mind the time. I am a doctor. Staying up for 48 hours is not a big deal for me. This is something I have done all my life. I am not worried about the time spent here.

What I am concerned about is that I do not know where we are going. I would like some resolution. For instance, we, as Liberals, would like to support this process. We believe the government's bill is draconian and we agree with the NDP on what they need, but we do not want to hear all the spinning and the rhetoric. We would like to find a solution and we have solutions. I would like to see us get this done.

• (2945)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I have to repeat what many before me have said. We have put forward the solution, which is to end the lockout.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative members of Parliament are saying that some people did not vote to join a union, that they were forced to join. Could the member explain the difference between that and the present situation in the House of Commons where the Conservatives have a majority with only 40% of public support and plans to pass a bill that 60% of Canadians do not want?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is the ongoing dilemma, which is why we are here until the wee hours of the morning. Our responsibility is to oppose the government when we think that it is proposing legislation that goes against the interests of the broader public.

The big issue here is what the public interest is. Is the public interest to protect an employer against the employees? Is it to protect some people who are discouraged at not receiving their mail? Is it the right to a fair wage? What is the public interest? Surely we have a responsibility to think of all people in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I spent the whole night wondering what I am doing here. Yes, there is Bill C-6, but what is really keeping us here is an ideological barrier, and this barrier is not created only by this side, by a fanatical group of unionists. Personally, I have never been part of a union. Unions defend perfectly legitimate rights. I do not understand why we are discussing this.

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When a very sincere young woman stated her point of view with some emotion, I saw some of the members opposite laughing. To me, this is serious. If this were really a serious issue for them, they would not be laughing. If they want to make people laugh, they are already off to a good start. Look at what they did when things were not working at Canada Post: they closed the doors. If the statistics are not good, they eliminate the survey. It is raining in Saskatchewan, so they fire the weatherman. That is the type of logic we are seeing.

I am from Quebec and I should be at home celebrating Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, but I believe in one thing. The reason why I ran for a federal party is that I believed that it was possible to do something positive with the rest of Canada. I told myself that, in this great country, there were certainly a sufficient number of people who were interested in doing something positive. However, what I am finding out from seeing the members opposite turning around and talking to each other, is that they are ignoring the members on this side of the House. If they do not want to listen to me, then they should listen to Laurence Cannon, who was the only Conservative member who had anything intelligent to say the night of the most recent election. He realized that his party had become a regional party. If the Conservatives do not know what a regional party is, they need only look in the corner of the other side of the House and they will see two members of regional parties.

There is an expression that says, "He who laughs last laughs best." They can continue to laugh for four years but things may not seem as funny to them then.

• (2950)

[English]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about honouring the process. We have been honouring the process for eight months. We have been trying to get a resolution, encouraging a resolution, offering conciliation and mediation services, but we also on this side of the House believe in honouring all Canadians.

We have a strong mandate to protect Canada's fragile economy by continuing forward with our recovery plan that was voted for by all regions of Canada on May 2.

Canada Post estimates that it is losing \$25 million per day during this work stoppage. Since opposition members are not okay with bringing workers back to work through legislation, should we assume then that they are okay with taxpayers covering the cost of the losses of this crown corporation for an undetermined amount of time?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin: There is unanimity in this place about the seriousness of the interruption in postal services. We are all suffering because of it. We are waiting for important mail from our constituents, personal bills, and so forth. Some people are waiting for cheques that they need to survive. Everyone agrees that we must find a solution. However, we must agree to reflect on and listen to viewpoints that are different from our own. It is in this way that we will move forward and find solutions.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague why tensions have been rising at the bargaining table. Does he think it is globalization, pension shortfalls or the sluggish economy that have put pressure on employers to cut costs? I wonder whether he thinks these factors will cause lasting problems for unions and, if so, what might be done. I am trying to focus on solutions now and in the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin: Mr. Speaker, we should not reintroduce globalization into this matter.

What is happening is that the government is taking rather radical action that will have very serious repercussions. It must be doing this for a reason, but obviously it will not tell us why. However, it will make excuses. Excuses are made to justify one's actions, whereas reasons are kept hidden until the end. That is the difference.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague if he believes that these measures against Canada Post workers are part of a broader agenda, an agenda leading to privatization, an agenda that could affect not just Canada Post, but also essential services and other crown corporations in our country?

Mr. Marc-André Morin: Mr. Speaker, I believe that some parts of Canada are very right-leaning.

I advise my friends opposite to monitor the situation. Perhaps one day their party may be called the Wildrose Alliance of Conservatives, or something like that.

• (2955)

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if you might indulge me for one moment, this is my first time rising to speak on a debate, so I would like to thank the good members of my riding of Burnaby—Douglas for electing me to this place. I would also like to thank my family, who supported me all the way through the election, as well as my lovely wife Jeanette, who has been by my side right through and still may be watching me on CPAC from B.C.

I would also, if I could, beg your indulgence for one more moment. My brother-in-law is very ill, and my thoughts are with him tonight. So if I am a little rattled, I am thinking about him.

I found this debate over the course of last night and this morning fascinating. I am not from a union family. I have been a short time in a union. However, to hear the passion that has been spoken on both sides of the House I think is a credit to the House. It is fantastic that we can come to a place like this, that we can express our opinions and debate each other, most of the time in a civil way. I think the decorum that has come to this House is really something we should all be proud of, and I hope we can keep it up, even though we are dog-tired.

As I said, I am not from a union family at all. In fact, my father is a management consultant. He has worked for very large companies, such as IBM, Westinghouse, and a lot of others. My own experience in life has been through private and public sector work.

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One thing that is of great concern to me is what events like this do to the morale of large companies, of large organizations. I am very concerned that the tug, the pull, the struggle between the workers and the management is going to cause long-term damage to a very important Canadian institution, whatever the outcome. I hope that comes into the conversation at some point, the long-term impacts this will have.

I am not from a union family. I am not in the private sector. I am in the public sector, a university professor. What I do, essentially, is public policy analysis. That is my thing. So I feel a little over my head when I hear all the terms and phrases, conditions and ideas that are being used here. However, I have learned a lot, thanks to the contributions from both sides of the House.

What I am trying to figure out is what the problem is here. In public policy analysis, what we do is try to identify a problem first, work through a number of options, come up with viable solutions, and then try to implement those solutions.

From what I can see here, the problem that is facing the government, and indeed the whole House, is the problem that workers have been locked out from Canada Post.

This has been a gradual escalation. There have been tensions between the workers and the management. This has gone on for some time. There were rotating strikes. From what I can understand, there was not a full strike. Then the management decided to lock out the workers.

There has been some dispute in the House as to whether it has been a strike or whether it has been a lockout. So just to make sure of my facts, I decided to go through the various news sources to figure out whether it is a strike or a lockout.

I started with my favourite source, which is the *National Post* business section. It does say, indeed, that this is a lockout, that the employer has indeed locked out the employees.

I went to the business section of *The Globe and Mail*, and it indeed says it is a lockout as well.

I went to the CTV News website. It says it is a lockout.

I went to CBC News, both radio and television. They are saying it is a lockout.

So from what I can understand, the problem that is facing the government is that a crown corporation, which is at arm's length from the government, has locked out its employees.

I was struggling for a while. I thought maybe it was a strike and maybe the government is portraying the facts as they should be. I thought maybe this is a strike and this is the problem why the government is moving so quickly to force this measure through the House. But indeed it is not a strike. It is a lockout. I think this side of the House has tried to make that point time and time again. I think it is time we should recognize that this is what we are facing here, and that is indeed the core of the problem that is facing both the government and us here on this side of the House.

● (3000)

What we are debating here this morning is Bill C-6, an act to provide for the resumption of postal services, restoring mail delivery. There is a lockout at Canada Post, and the government has decided to force the workers back to work. That is the government's policy solution.

I have been puzzling through the discussions that have been going on in this House. I have been puzzling through the explanations as to why this is occurring, the effects this is having, and trying to decide whether indeed this is the best solution.

In public policy, there are essentially nine instruments that any government can use, or perhaps a combination of these instruments, in any kind of policy situation. They can be put in any kind of order, but how I like to organize them is in order of coercion. I like to organize them in a sense of how much muscle the government has to use to get its will through.

The first thing that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

I realize, members, that there may be a changing of the guard happening at the moment, but there is an awful lot of noise in the chamber. I wonder if we could let the member for Burnaby—Douglas continue with his remarks.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In public policy we have essentially nine instruments that any government can use to solve any policy problem. Sometimes a combination of the instruments is used. I will just walk through these, because it is really what the government should be considering as it goes through any policy problem, including this one.

The first instrument that the other side of the House would probably favour in most circumstances is a market solution. It is the least coercive solution, where the government is hands-off and lets the parties solve things.

The second has a little bit more coercion. It is something called the symbolic gesture. The government might strike a commission to look into the situation, and the commission might make a report that is non-binding. The government is making some kind of expenditure, but it is not binding in any kind of way.

The third is exhortation, or asking people to do things publicly. The government could have asked the two sides to come together and make a solution for the good of Canada. Again, it is expending money, but it is not actually doing anything forceful at this point.

The two next ones would be tax expenditure. The government could kind of give people a break on taxes. I do not think that is applicable in this situation. You could do public spending: you might be able to supplement one of the sides to make up for the problems they are having.

Another instrument might be regulation. Again, that is a non-forceful way of regulating how the two bodies would talk together.

Another solution might be taxation.

Government Orders

Public ownership would be to totally reabsorb Canada Post back into the government.

The last one, of course, is a state of emergency. A state of emergency is perhaps the most draconian thing a government can do. What they can do is basically force parties back to the table in this situation.

What is strange to me is that a government that professes to be non-coercive and professes to say that market solutions are the way forward in most situations in fact has gone to the other end of the scale and used the most coercive measure possible to try to end this lockout.

I am quite puzzled by that. I do not understand why this has been the policy instrument the government has chosen to use in this situation. Perhaps it would have been better to leave the parties to work these things out on their own. Not forcing them back to work would definitely be preferable to the current Bill C-6 that is before us.

In closing, I have enjoyed the debate. I look forward to future debate on this. It is a great pleasure to stand and speak in this House.

Thank you very much.

• (3005)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do have to make a couple of observations.

The member talked about the nine ways in which these kinds of things can be solved. I will not list them all, but it seems to me that the government has utilized about eight out of nine. The only one that we have not used is a commission. Maybe their answer to everything is a royal commission.

The member talked about solving it quickly. Well, it seems to me that we have been doing this for at least eight months. So I am not sure what his definition of quickly is either.

The member talked about what events like this do to the morale of companies, large and small, or people. What I would suggest it does is it undermines the confidence of companies, it undermines the confidence of business in Canada. It seems to me that in the current situation we are facing, with the economic recovery and so on, what we need most of all is confidence.

I would like to ask my honourable colleague to address the impact of what is going on right now on the confidence of companies, big and small, the confidence of Canadians to know that government, or somebody, is standing up for their future in solving these kinds of things, using eight out of nine of the instruments that the member mentioned. When does this end? We need to move forward. We need to get on with this, because it is having an impact on companies, large and small, and Canadians of all stripes.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

There is another thing that has been puzzling me through the debate that is related to the question. Canada Post is a crown corporation. It is supposed to be at arm's length from the government, yet there is this kind of grey area. We are not sure

when the government is involved in running Canada Post and when it is not involved.

We have heard that the government has been trying for eight months to strike a settlement to try to get the two parties together. We have not heard much detail on how that has been done.

With regard to the morale of the corporation, Canadians are going to be worried that the government is so quick to move to draconian measures. There would be much more confidence and better morale in Canada Post and in other organizations, in their own organizations where people are working, if the government were not so quick to go to this measure. It might be necessary if this dragged out for years and years, but it seems too quick at this point.

I would suggest another measure.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the member's speech. As a professor, he knows all of these issues very well with regard to solutions. In fact, I am sure he knows what I am going to refer to. It is a book I had to read when I was going to do negotiations. It is a Harvard tome called *Getting to Yes*, which talks about a win-win situation.

I am glad the hon. member talked about solutions, because what I wanted to say is we know that the postal workers want to go back to work if we stop the lockout. Let them go back to work, let them negotiate for a limited period of time with a timeline and then go to mediation or arbitration. What the bill will do is not allow that to happen, because it is going to set complete limits on any arbitrator trying to come up with some way to facilitate an agreement. That is what should stop.

We should make sure that they take away the piece that talks about future collective bargaining agreements for this particular group. If we did that, and if we could go to these Liberal amendments on the table, the government would then have to show that it means what it says and that it really wants a solution and is prepared to bend a bit and to come to a win-win situation.

What does the member think of that?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: I thank the hon. member for the question. I enjoy being with her in the House here.

My point is that the government has gone to this too quickly. There is still time for negotiation, and it was indeed the crown corporation that locked out the workers. The government does owe it to the workers and the managers of Canada Post to try to work this out. Forcing people back to work this quickly sends a bad signal. We talk about market signals all the time. This is a bad signal to other companies and to other crown corporations that this is going to be the answer to every labour problem: that we will not work through various solutions, we will go right to the hammer.

That is unfortunate, because it does not leave anything in reserve. If you use the hammer all the time, nobody ever sees the feather.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk a little about what is really going on here, about this totally trumped-up lockout. It's not just happenstance that the postal union is the target of such a massive attack. You have to know the history. In the history of this country, postal services, either as a department or as a crown corporation, have always been subject to political authority. No one will make me believe that the director of the Canada Post Corporation imposed a lockout without first getting permission from the Prime Minister's Office. The Prime Minister reacted favourably to this lockout. Then the Prime Minister introduced a special bill, saying that there was a lockout and that he had to act. But if he had not agreed, there would have been no lockout.

This union, which has been in existence since 1911, is exemplary on any number of levels: democratically, socially, and as an institution. When it was part of the public service, it professionalized the public service and made it non-partisan. The members of this union have always delivered quality service. The Canadian postal services have always provided the services expected of them.

Over time, this union negotiated some important improvements, such as salary increases and job security. Then it obtained a pension fund. The first pension funds were perhaps not extraordinary, but at a certain point the union obtained a defined benefit pension plan. It made sure that this defined benefit plan was indexed and that it included survivor benefits. The union even obtained the acceptance of same-sex survivor benefits. As institutions go, the union has a good pension plan. And that is the problem. This issue is at the heart of all of the collective agreement negotiations. Salaries are not the issue, as they have already been settled. The union signed a salary agreement with management. The problem is not compensation, nor is it the normative provisions, as they too have already been agreed upon.

The problem is management's desire to reconsider the pension system. That is nothing new; it is the same problem as at Air Canada. It is no accident that in both cases there was speedy intervention by the government. In the case of Air Canada, the pension fund deficit is \$2.1 billion. If the private entrepreneur that owns Air Canada, which is in fact a speculative venture, is able to reduce that to \$500 million, it will have gained a \$1.5 billion asset in one fell swoop, with the help of the politicians in this government. That is the problem.

In the case of the postal union, what can it be accused of? Wanting to defend a system that guarantees its retirees that they will not be reduced to poverty? Essentially, they are having a gun held to their head and being asked to agree to be poor when they reach the age of 65. No, they do not agree to that. That is why they have used pressure tactics, to which the Prime Minister responded with a lockout.

If someone here tries to make Canadians believe that the Prime Minister did not authorize the president of a crown corporation to impose a lockout that was going to damage the Canadian economy, I think they have not read the same Constitution as I have. I also think they do not know their Prime Minister. On this side of the House, we know perfectly well that he and he alone makes the important

decisions. That is the problem. The Conservatives have got to the point of attacking the largest and oldest Canadian union.

• (3010)

If they succeed, they are going to be able to get their hands on private pension funds. All union funds will become private funds. For the next 35 years alone, that represents \$1 trillion in Canada. That is the problem: greed. The people on the side opposite are defending greed. We are not going to allow something as essential to the social and economic life of this country as pension funds to disappear. We will not agree to turn a blind eye to the fact that two or three generations of Canadians will be condemned to poverty when they reach retirement age.

I will also point out to my colleagues that at present, in spite of the economic exploits the Conservatives boast of, the poverty rate in Canada has been rising for five years. That is nothing to brag about.

The people on the side opposite are preparing for another Walkerton. People will remember that little Ontario municipality. The government had assigned the water testing to its friends in private enterprise, who supposedly did everything better and more cheaply. They walked off with the cash and left a mess. If they had only left a mess for the government, no one would have complained, but the problem was that people died because of it. The Conservatives are making exactly the same mistake all over again. This is the same mistake the Americans made not so long ago: giving the public's money to the private sector. What a great bargain: commissions and bonuses. The devil is in the house and they are the ones who let him in.

• (3015)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to start by offering my sincere congratulations to the workers at the Toyota plant in my riding of Cambridge and North Dumfries. The Toyota auto-worker plant has been named the number one automotive plant in the world.

Speaking of the automotive industry, I would like to remind the member it was this Conservative government that put forward an agreement, a package, that saved 52,000 auto worker jobs in Ontario alone. We did not just do it for auto workers, but for the forestry workers, miners, students and seniors. Why? It is because as a government, we are responsible for all Canadians, not just one sector, like the socialist party fighting for the unions.

It is no surprise that the socialist party has been for the unions, but what about the students in the member's riding? What about the seniors who are not getting their cheques? What about the small businesses that will suffer if the members do not agree to this legislation and take the locks off that door now?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, not only do I know these people, but I can say that the cheques they are receiving do not cover their rent, let alone their groceries. And that is the government's fault because it ignored our budget proposals. A word to the wise.

Government Orders

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague if the government's current attitude reminds him of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. He decided to lock out all of the air traffic controllers in the United States because they were using pressure tactics.

Since the Conservatives have gotten their majority—which was not that long ago, just since May 2—we have come to recognize their ways. We had our suspicions. We were worried. And now it has become reality. We saw it with Air Canada, and now we are seeing it with Canada Post. Special legislation was quickly put in place. It did not take long. We have our suspicions, and I would like to ask the hon. member if he thinks, as I do, that with Canada Post, it was a prepared script, which included the threat of special legislation immediately after the lockout. And the special legislation imposes employer-friendly conditions on the workers. It is scandalous.

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, since the country is run by the Prime Minister of Canada, not the head of a crown corporation, it is clear that the 55,000 Canada Post employees were ambushed in an attack that was planned and directed by the Prime Minister's Office.

Unfortunately for them, the more we talk about it, the sooner people will understand that it makes no sense that the Prime Minister imposed a lockout and then brought in special legislation with the excuse that there was a lockout.

• (3020)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, this is not a point of debate, but the hon. member has made several insinuations about the Prime Minister. Because I am the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, I know what he is saying is absolutely incorrect. However, if he has any evidence, he should table it. Otherwise, he should withdraw those remarks and apologize to the Right Hon. Prime Minister of this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member for Timmins—James Bay is rising on the same point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I see my colleagues over there are probably tired and grumpy after staying up all night. I think they are starting to be a little delusional. I think they just need to calm down and engage in some respectful debate and stop interrupting. It was a very interesting speech, and I find that what I am hearing from across the way is starting to sound rather delusional. I would say, have a little cup of Ovaltine and everything will be fine.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I think we have heard a couple of interventions on this. In all honesty, we need to get on with debate. Members should know that while the point speaks to the substance of the comments, the substance of the comments are part of debate.

I would say that members should recall that they should address their comments to the Chair when they are in the midst of directing their remarks or comments. That is always a good idea.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was very clear last night, when the labour minister was speaking in

terms of the Conservatives' little narrative they are trying to set up and their attack on unions and the NDP for defending the rights of people to have pensions, that the labour minister said it was obvious the NDP had a direct line to labour leaders.

I would think that any labour minister with any sense of responsibility would also have a direct line to labour leaders, because if she did she would not have stood up in this House and given us this drivel about how the Conservatives were not taking sides and how they wanted to get people back to work. If she had a direct line to the labour leaders, she would have known that the lockout was engineered, that the workers are ready to go back to work and will be delivering the pension cheques.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why he thinks the labour minister has no direct line to labour union leaders and so has no idea of what is actually happening in this debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, she is not in contact with the union representatives because she is in contact only with management. She is not doing her job. It is clear that the postal workers have been ambushed.

If anyone here thinks that the Prime Minister of Canada was not informed that there was going to be a lockout, they are about as broad-minded as a skinhead and they are not too bright either.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would first like to take this opportunity to greet the people of my riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel. Many of them are celebrating Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day today. I will not be with them and I would like to express my great disappointment that the Prime Minister refused the leader of the official opposition's proposal to suspend the sitting of the House for today. We therefore cannot celebrate with our constituents.

That being said, I rise today in this House to do my duty and carry out the mandate that was given to me when I was elected. My constituents gave me the mandate of defending workers. It is a question of principle. Workers and the public should not be punished for Canada Post's bad faith.

Forgive me, but I am starting to feel a little bit tired since I have been here since yesterday morning. I listened carefully to what was said during the debate last night. I am concerned about the fact that the hon. members are not listening to each other.

I would like to speak a little bit about the effect that these events will have on our communities.

The union we are discussing this morning is a responsible union, one which took moderate job action so as to accelerate the negotiations without stopping mail delivery. It is the employer, Canada Post, a crown corporation under the government's responsibility, that decided to reduce and then stop mail delivery entirely by locking out all of its employees. We have debated this a great deal and I think that that is clear as can be.

Government Orders

It is unreasonable for the government to impose wages that are lower than those in the previous proposals, to make workers pay for the employer's bad faith and to try to turn the Canadian people against postal workers.

Even though the people of my riding, Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, want to get their mail, they understand the difference between a lockout and a strike. The people in my riding understand very well that the postal workers want to distribute the mail as quickly as possible. However, they cannot agree to sacrifice their pensions, their health, their job security and the working conditions of the newer workers.

Small businesses in Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel know that in order to be able to depend on quality service from Canada Post, its workers have to feel they are valued.

All of the workers in my riding support this, because they know that small communities cannot be sustained when members of the community cannot support themselves.

We are talking here—tonight, this morning, and over the weekend if necessary—about giving people the means to defend themselves. This is a matter of respect for workers and the dignity of workers.

I would point out that it is thanks to the workers who were in the vanguard that parental leave, paid for by employers, was won. I think this is something extremely important, since it represents equality. It was the trade union movement that gave us this. These women and men, these workers, simply want to be able to preserve their standing in our society and not become second-class workers.

The work done by postal employees is extremely important to all Canadians and Quebecers, but it is obviously not valued by this government.

I hope that Canada Post will return to the bargaining table to negotiate a fair and equitable agreement.

• (3025)

I will be here day and night, if need be, to stand up for the right of all Canadians to collectively bargain the right of everyone to a job that enables them to support their family and their community, so that all Canadians are able to retire with security and dignity.

• (3030)

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for getting up and making that speech. It is good for her to stand and talk in the House of Commons. It is a right and privilege that we all have.

When I was first a member I had to remember who put me here. I had to remember that it was the constituents who were my priority. I wonder if the member would tell her union bosses that they are fired. She no longer represents her union bosses. Now she represents her constituents. My constituents, just like her constituents, would be telling them to get back to work.

When will she tell her union bosses that they are fired and that she works for her constituents?

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I think the point my colleagues and I have been trying to make tonight is that we have to value our workers. Our communities need every member of the community to be able to live in dignity. It is upsetting to me that the members on the other side have not quite realized that this is not about specific groups of Canadians but about our communities as a whole.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her thoughtful comments.

Like many others, I have not been part of a union. In fact, in my previous life I negotiated many collective agreements on behalf of management. While we always approached those negotiations with an attitude of a win-win for both sides, we realized that after negotiations, we still had to maintain good relations. We had to have faith in one another. We had to build morale on both sides, for the employer and the employee.

Last night I received a letter from a CUPW member, George, who asked me to see if there was any possible way he could get back to work right away, have the doors unlocked and resume the mail for all people, for businesses and residents who deserved to receive it.

I wonder if the member could speak about the merit of letting everybody go back to work, resuming their former positions, and going through a normal mediation and arbitration process rather than going through the terms imposed by this legislation.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I think the workers just want to go back to work with a fair negotiated agreement.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech in the House of Commons this morning. I think it is important we recognize, as she has, that what is happening right now is connected to the issue of community. There is no doubt that Canadian postal workers are very much a part of the community, as is the case, for example, in Windsor West, in Sandwich Towne.

I hear some heckling in the background, but I will ignore that for the moment, just as that member has often been ignored in the House of Commons.

However, I think it is important we recognize that community is very much a part of the postal services.

In my riding there was a threat with regards to closing the postal outlet in Sandwich Towne. We stopped that closing, the first one to be stopped across Canada, because it affected the businesses, residents, seniors, students and so forth.

I would ask the member to expand upon that connection to community. It is very important, because it is not just about the individual workers here but about the best service at the end of the day. This is a very important postal service that is recognized and renowned worldwide.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I agree that communities are interconnected networks of people, and a standard for everybody should be maintained such that the community can function well.

At this point, I think we will probably be elaborating more over the weekend, but I am a bit too tired to keep going right now.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I have risen in this House, but it is the first time I have made a speech. First, I would like to thank the voters of Chambly—Borduas for electing me to this position. Speaking of them, I also want to point out that like all my colleagues from Quebec, I will unfortunately not be able to take part in activities marking our national holiday in Quebec with my constituents. I do wish them a wonderful holiday, however. I want them to know that I am very disappointed not to be there.

What is happening is worthwhile, though, because it has given me an opportunity, on this national holiday, to put things in perspective. I would like to take a step back for a moment. I assure you that what I have to say is relevant and relates to the bill we have before us.

One of the activities I was going to take part in today was a performance put on by students at Osias-Leduc secondary school, entitled *Je me souviens*. All Quebecers—and many Canadians—know that the motto *Je me souviens* appears on our licence plates in Quebec. But those words mean much more.

For one, they remind us to think about important historic events, such as the asbestos strike in 1949, which I think is relevant to this situation. I am not bringing this up to upset the member for Winnipeg Centre. The town is called Asbestos. We will not talk about the asbestos issue. One all-nighter is enough. Perhaps another time.

In all seriousness, I want to talk about the asbestos strike because, at that time, there was a serious issue in the labour dispute. It had to do with the language of work. People had no say. At that time, they literally had no say because management and workers did not speak the same language. Now, 60 years later, we find ourselves in the same situation: the workers have no say.

Responsibility for the lockout does not lie with Canada Post. It lies with the government, which wants to force a return to work and impose previously determined conditions that have been set out in the bill we are debating. I find it very problematic and very disappointing that, after 60 years, we are still in a similar situation, even though the circumstances have changed.

I would also like to tell a story about a woman in my riding who is a teacher. Last night, the Minister of Labour spoke about the 45,000 Canada Post workers, who, it seems, are less important than the rest of the Canadian public. However, we must not forget the big picture. My constituent was right to bring this up. She and her colleagues are constantly fighting for their fair share. Yes, I know what the members on the other side are thinking. They are going to give me a lesson. They are going to tell me that education is under provincial jurisdiction. I know that.

I am bringing up this example because the government needs to lead by example and show people that they can have a say, that they have a role to play in society. Be it through a union or some other means, they all have a right to their fair share in society.

This teacher, when she spoke to me about this, told me that she was worried that this bill would pass. Why? Because from that point forward she would be living in a society in which she did not even

know whether she would be able to fight for her rights. She did not even know whether she could defend her right to have an acceptable collective agreement, get her pension, and so on.

This is all very relevant for me as a young person. With all due respect to our seniors, it is not only them we are thinking about and whom we have to think about when it comes to pensions. We must also think about young people. As young people, we do not even know if we will have pensions. Without unions or organizations that allow us to have a forum in which to speak, we cannot guarantee the security of these things, the security of pension plans.

That being said, this teacher certainly took notice of what the 308 members of this House wanted. Yes, we want the mail to be delivered again.

● (3035)

However, she said it very clearly. We can spend the whole night, as we have done, taking out our BlackBerry's and saying that we have received an email from some person or another saying that the workers should go back to work or that they should not and that we are doing the right thing. However, the fact remains that the letter carriers, Canada Post employees, were delivering the mail. It was management that decided to declare a lockout, not the workers. People, including those from Quebec, know this. It strikes at the very core of the community values we hold in Quebec.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity, with all due respect to the people in the rest of the country, to note that today is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. It is indeed important to remember. We need to be able to say "*Je me souviens*", I remember this important event and the fact that, 60 years later, we are still fighting for the same thing. That being said, this is why we must oppose Bill C-6.

● (3040)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to this debate and others with some interest. At some point, people need to be legislated back to work. This legislation provides how that might be done and gives some guidelines to the arbiter. One of those guidelines is to ensure the short and long-term economic viability of Canada Post. What does the member have against that principle. Does Canada Post not have to be viable if it wants to protect its workers?

It also talks about maintaining the health and safety of its workers, and that is pretty important, and ensures the sustainability of its pension plan. In order for workers to benefit from a pension plan, does it not have to be sustainable?

Would the member not agree with me those guiding principles are reasonable?

At some point, people must come to a place where someone other than the parties bring the matter to a resolution. There are third parties involved, Canadians, who are suffering economically and need to have this brought to a conclusion. It is costing them a significant number of dollars, and that is right across the country.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the problem with this way of thinking is, as I mentioned, that we can no longer hear the workers' voice in all of this. Are the workers not also Canadians who are negatively affected by certain circumstances, as the member opposite said? Yes, we understand the importance of the economy, but workers are also part of the economy.

I would like to say—as we have said throughout the night and will continue to say this weekend—that things were going well at Canada Post until management decided to lock out the employees. There is no reason to prevent workers from expressing themselves and having a voice at the bargaining table.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was born in Asbestos. An entire generation of workers have talked to me about the conflict that took place under a government that was in power in a period that we call the great darkness in Quebec. We will see how history will depict the government opposite.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague from Chambly—Borduas what will be the social cost of a collective agreement that is not negotiated, a bogus agreement. Once again, the gap between rich and poor is growing and is greater than ever before.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am happy to have the opportunity to reply to a question from a colleague who is from the area I was referring to.

In fact, that event I referred to does for some mark the beginning of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. To answer the question, if this bill is passed, if we silence workers in this way, we will be losing ground and going back to that era known as the great darkness.

As I mentioned in my speech, this is very important because it is going to create a precedent. The time to act is now. We have four years to go and in my opinion, this is not a very good message to send at the beginning of a mandate.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member had beautiful speech in the House, especially when he says that it is his first speech. He was very thoughtful. The sense of history he brings to the debate today is very important.

He mentioned that postal workers had no voice. That is a very pertinent comment because they have been locked out. They want to do nothing more than get back to the bargaining table.

It was very surprising to us last night to hear the minister talk about the strike. She did not seem to know the difference. Could the member comment on what a lockout is and what took place?

• (3045)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, the answer is quite simple, but it is crucial to this debate.

The rotating strikes the workers were holding allowed them to serve Canadians anyway and to perform their duties, even in a less-than-perfect way. However, when there is a lockout, there are two things to consider. Firstly, people are deprived of service. The other factor, which is even more important, is that management makes this

decision and workers pay the price, without being able to make their voices heard, voices that my colleague and I deem to be important, but that are being jeopardized by this debate.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the government announced its intention to introduce a bill to force the unionized employees of Canada Post to go back to work, it quite simply sounded the death knell for the bargaining process.

Obviously, once an employer is assured that it will win its showdown without even making the effort to bargain, it has no further reason to go back to the table. An employer that is given assurance that it will be backed up by the full legislative force of the government has no further reason to listen to the employees' demands, to bargain and to compromise, and to recognize the need to go forward with an open, honest and constructive dialogue.

Since the government announced its intention to force the workers to give up their most fundamental rights, bargaining has simply come to a halt. The government is thus subverting an entire tradition of dialogue, dialogue that is sometimes passionate, sometimes difficult and often agonizing, but that is always carried out with the ultimate goal of improving working conditions and enabling businesses to develop.

Let us be clear: employees do not want to harm their company's profits. They never intend to jeopardize development and interfere in the pursuit of business opportunities that will increase revenues and, yes, produce higher profits.

No Canada Post employee is questioning the fundamental objectives that are shared by any business: success, growth, profit and investment. The employees unquestionably have that success at heart. Their demands are in no way egotistical or naive. On the contrary, they want to put their experience to work. We are talking here about an organization that is head and shoulders above all its counterparts in the world. Canada Post has adapted its management methods to the reality of an enormous land mass and a widely dispersed population, a land that presents unique challenges for a delivery company. That is how Canada Post has distinguished itself from the competition, by finding ways to extend its network everywhere within Canada, while not only continuing to be profitable, but maximizing its profits.

Canada Post is a company with an enviable business model and sets the standard for many countries worldwide whose networks are not as complex and capable of absorbing such large volumes for delivery.

That is why the government's attempts to compare Canada Post to other delivery networks elsewhere in the world amount to such a weak argument. Canada Post should not be comparing itself to anyone else. Rather, the competition should be showing how it would be capable of doing the job that is done so admirably by Canada Post.

If we look closely at the operating methods referred to by Canada Post managers and the Conservative government to justify their actions, what we really see is that very few of those businesses stand up to the comparison.

Government Orders

Canada Post is a pillar of the Canadian economy, not because it compares favourably with the competition, but because the services and expertise that have been developed by Canada Post employees over decades are unique in the world.

Recently, the new president and CEO of Canada Post, Deepak Chopra, recognized the opportunities for expanding services at Canada Post. He compared Canada Post's potential to that of other countries in the world, in particular New Zealand, which has developed new services and thus increased its profitability.

Mr. Chopra could have taken that opportunity to point out that Canada Post is exceptional when its performance is compared with New Zealand specifically. We are talking about a country with a population of 3.5 million, one-tenth the population of Canada; a country with an area of 270,000 km², or one-thirty-seventh the size of Canada, with its 10 million km². If we consider population density, we can also compare New Zealand, which has 15 inhabitants per square kilometre, with Canada, which has 3.3 inhabitants per square kilometre.

I am pointing out these simple facts to remind people that when Canada Post executives compare Canadian service to service in other countries, they must keep in mind the outstanding performance of employees in the field, which is such that the public sees no difference in service delivery despite completely different geographic and demographic situations.

Does the government thank the Canada Post workers for their outstanding contribution to the provision of our national service? Absolutely not. Rather, it resorts to disinformation by insinuating that more needs to be done with less in order to catch up with the competition.

• (3050)

But what competition? It is not up to Canada Post employees to compare themselves to the examples the Conservative government uses. No, the Conservative government should instead be humble and express its gratitude for our uniquely successful mail distribution service.

And who is behind that success? The employees of Canada Post. Canada Post has always favoured a strategy based on the competence and talent of its employees, a strategy that rests on human resources.

How else can Canada Post proceed if it is to provide service across the vast Canadian territory? How can it achieve that without having absolute confidence in every one of the workers who contribute to the success of Canada Post? The success of Canada Post is indeed based on that confidence, the result of a long tradition of cooperation, collaboration, and yes, negotiation. The absolutely unique historical success of Canada Post rests on the confidence it has in its mail carriers. They are far more than simple employees; they are in fact partners. These mail carriers are area managers, distribution route managers, client service specialists, performance optimizers, performance engineers. Letter carriers are dependable, independent, consistent and punctual. These are all criteria that our modern economy values highly.

And what does the Conservative government do? What approach has it adopted even though it has only been in power for a scant few

weeks? Without hesitation, it has chosen to totally sabotage a whole history of loyalty-building and mutual understanding, of support by the business for its employees, in the form of decent salaries, stable benefits and renewed confidence following negotiations. The Conservative government is attacking the relationship of trust that allows Canada Post to depend on employees who manage their distribution routes in the most remote parts of our country.

Now let us discuss the moment the government chose to impose its legislation. The Conservative government thought it would destabilize the opposition by introducing an extraordinary measure. But we have news for the government. The government's strategy, aimed at forcing a quick vote by extending the parliamentary session and preventing Quebec members from being with their families and constituents during Quebec's national holiday, is going to backfire.

The Conservative government is forgetting, or ignoring, that the absence of their New Democrat MPs will not go unnoticed by Quebecers. These very Quebecers are the ones who revolutionized the Canadian government by electing a record number of young people, women, members of visible minorities, and progressives from all walks of life. They are the ones who hoped for and caused the most extraordinary wave of change that has been seen in Canada for a number of years.

Does the Conservative government actually believe that the NDP members' absence from the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day festivities will go unnoticed? No. The absence of their members of Parliament will disappoint Quebecers, as will the Conservative government's attitude of contempt for Canada Post employees.

What is even worse is that this absence will draw the attention of the entire population of Quebec to what is happening here in the House. When they ask, "Where are our elected officials when we have been waiting since their historic election to celebrate their entry onto the Quebec political scene?", we will respond that we are standing steadfast in the position to which they elected us.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I salute the hon. member opposite for presenting her comments with great dramatic flair. I salute her energy, but I now want to go to the content of the message.

This is becoming less about Canada Post and its workers and more about the members opposite, who are now holding Canadians to ransom. That is exactly what is happening. They are holding Canadian businesses and the public to ransom.

I had a note the other day from Scouter Tim. It is from London, Ontario, the 10th largest city in Canada. He said that he was having a jamboree, but he could not get the crests that his scouts used for trading because members opposite were blocking the legislation. Canadians now have that same sense. It is no longer Canada Post and its workers; it is members opposite who are saying that they are unable to deliver.

What does the member opposite she say to Canadians—

Government Orders

• (3055)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. While listening to the debate through night, I noticed the members were always calling on these emails they had received from various constituents.

I find it shocking that Scouter Tim would have said days ago that the members of the other party were holding up the debate. Would the member table the email from Scouter Tim so we could see what it actually says?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member will know that members are not obliged to table documents in this particular manner. If the member has a question, he can certainly rise on questions and comments.

The hon. member for London West.

Mr. Ed Holder: Mr. Speaker, let me just read that, because I think that is a fair comment. He wrote, "I'm a scout leader with the 68th London scouts group. We have a group of scouts that will be attending a jamboree in B.C. this July 9th through 16th. One of the big events for scouts is the trading of crests. Unfortunately, the crests that have been designed and made specifically for this jamboree are being held up in a Canada Post depot. The youth have saved money through fundraising in order to purchase the crests and now there's a good chance that they will attend this once in a lifetime event and not have the crests they were going to trade."

Members opposite should know that after all is said and done, there is a lot more said than done, and that is very disappointing.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member took the time to read it.

I certainly support the scout movement. However, it is clear that scouter Tim did not blame the members opposite. The member did, and I would ask that he withdraw his statement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. That is a matter of debate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Speaker, to answer the hon. member's question, it is up to Canada Post—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Langley is rising on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, just days ago we had a promise from members opposite that decorum would be returned to this House. As my colleague was trying to answer questions, there was a great degree of heckling from the other side. That is not what was promised, so we need the return of decorum in this House.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the member from the Conservative Party might have noticed, as we all did, that the version read before did not correspond to the version he actually received. That is what we call something not adjacent to the truth. We were just trying to get to the part of the email he said he was quoting, but unfortunately it is not in the email. He was making it up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have received sufficient interventions on this point. These are points of debate and I

would encourage members to use their time during questions and comments to put questions to previous speakers.

The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Speaker, to answer the hon. member's question, I am saying that it is up to Canada Post and the government to respond to customers who are being held hostage. It is not up to the workers who continued to do their work while they were on strike. The question was not clear. It is Canada Post and the government that must take responsibility for the fact that the crown corporation is not operating at the moment.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I see that the calendar on the table says June 23. That should be corrected since today is June 24. Last night, few francophone members spoke but some will this morning. I will speak in French from start to finish. I would appreciate it if questions were asked in French given that this is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

We remain optimistic about the resolution of the dispute but, as the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord said earlier, both parties must demonstrate goodwill. When both parties are present, they must frankly discuss the problem and resolve it.

For several weeks and a few days, the government has been wanting to violate the fundamental rights of Canadian workers, not just those who are unionized but also those who are not. The working class's battle to have its rights respected is not something new. Unfortunately, with this Conservative government, it is an ongoing battle.

The government is quick to attack fundamental rights such as the right of association and freedom of expression, which are guaranteed by section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as, by extension, the right to peacefully negotiate working conditions in accordance with the fundamental principle of labour relations—industrial peace. We wonder how far the government will go. All night long, the Conservatives have been nasty, arrogant and sarcastic and have shown a total lack of respect for human rights. That is what this is all about.

Freedom of association is the freedom to combine together for the pursuit of a common purpose. This fundamental freedom, along with freedom of opinion and expression, come within the realm of civil and political human rights, which find affirmation in the Constitution. The government must respect this right and can only infringe it by a rule of law, within limits that are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. These are not my words, but those of Justice Bastarache, in *Dunmore v. Ontario*.

It is mind-boggling. I have been awake for 24 hours. Furthermore, I am somewhat intimidated by the quality of the interventions by all these people around me. This is my first speech. I would like to say hello to the members of my fans club who, I am sure, are watching me at 7 a.m. on CPAC.

Government Orders

Yesterday, I listened to the hon. member for Beauce try to give us a crash course in economics and quote such outdated and utopian theorists that you would think we were back in the 19th century. I get the impression that his colleague, the labour minister, attended the same university, because she wants to take us straight back to the 18th century when it comes to labour relations. It might be time for the members opposite to come up to speed by studying more pragmatic theorists given that modern civilization has evolved. Extreme capitalism is dead. That is what started the economic crisis. They are going backwards.

When a bill is introduced to dictate working conditions that are less favourable than those previously negotiated, and without acknowledging this fact and claiming the contrary, it makes us wonder where the government has been these past few weeks. Is there a pilot on board? That is how I would summarize the past few days.

We are moving towards an abyss, the suffering of the working class. The gap between the ruling class and the working class is widening once again. What will happen? Which services will be privatized in the coming weeks and months? What is this government's hidden agenda? Will it be honest with us?

• (3100)

Through no fault of their own, postal workers are often seen as spoiled public servants. I would like to challenge a government member to do the work of the letter carriers, day after day. Perhaps then they would understand the frustration of these workers, who do not deserve what is being imposed on them.

Yesterday, while listening to the leader of the official opposition, I said to myself that it was a great speech by a great democrat. I am proud to be a member of this party, which defends the interests of all Canadians. Is there anyone opposite who will rise and say that today they wish to stand up for the working class or the middle class and all the interests of Canadians?

I am a little nervous, and I will end on that note. Thank you for listening. This is what this is all about.

• (3105)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to remind the hon. member that there are two official languages in Canada and we can ask questions and give our answers in whichever of the languages we are most comfortable with. I listened intently to every word the member said. I realize he is tired, but we are quite refreshed on this side.

There were no solutions raised. There was no talk about how to solve the problem. We can continue this debate for four or five days. After today, I will be back on Monday. We can keep right on going and still be here on July 1. What are the solutions? We can stand here and talk about ideology all we want, but what are the solutions to the problem we are having, on behalf of the 33 million Canadians, including the 55,000 postal workers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, it is quite simple. The solution is at the bargaining table. Let us remove the locks and make the parties sit down with one another.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to tell me what he thinks of the fact that the government wants the workers to return to work when there is a lockout. Does he think that it would make more sense to have the employer allow the workers to work?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, as we have said repeatedly during the night, the workers are ready to go back to work. It is that simple. They are ready to negotiate an agreement peacefully, as equals.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I am not mistaken, my colleague from Compton—Stanstead has experience in labour law. That is what I believe I understood in my chats with him since this session began.

When he took a look at the bill, he saw that the government was imposing salaries on postal workers that were in fact less generous than the previous Canada Post Corporation offers had been. By imposing such a salary reduction—another measure in the bill that is unfair to workers—will the government not create a conflict when people go back to work and create an absolutely poisonous job atmosphere until the expiry of the collective agreement?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for his question.

All this is going to do is poison working conditions and relations. Moreover, the imposition of an “orphan clause” will make things even worse by creating two salary scales. This provision was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada in a judgment involving the Sherbrooke municipal police force and the City of Sherbrooke, which had created a second salary scale. This is no way to settle the conflict and bring about labour peace.

• (3110)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member indicates that the parties should get back to the negotiating table, but they have been at the negotiating table since October of 2010.

Conciliators and others have helped the mediators, but at some point there needs to be a solution, as was suggested in one of the faxes I received. It said: “Personally, I believe in the right of union members to negotiate and strike under unfair labour practices. However, when negotiations drag on to the point they threaten the livelihood of Canadians or the good health of Canadians, then we need a government that will legislate and provide a solution.”

What about Canadians? He is looking at one party or the other, but there are more parties involved than just the two at the table. If they cannot resolve their differences, there must be a means by which that can happen. This is that means and he should get behind it and support it.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, people have to start by showing goodwill at the negotiating table. That is the essential principle on which any good negotiation rests. It may take 6, 8 or 18 months. The letter carriers guaranteed that they would provide services during negotiations in good faith between the two parties.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before beginning my remarks, I have to say that I have been sitting in this House for more than five years and that I am extremely proud of my new colleagues. I congratulate them.

I have kept abreast of the Canada Post situation for a long time. I have learned a lot by speaking to workers, to the union and to representatives of management. This is what I have learned. Under its mandate, Canada Post must make a profit each year. We have learned that, in 2009 I believe, the profit was \$281 million. But that is not all. The corporation must also give part of that income to the federal government. In other words, Canada Post is a way for the government to make money, to get a guaranteed income. To make this profit possible, management wants the crown corporation to become more efficient. And to do so, it must make cuts.

[*English*]

I have noticed this in my communities. We forget this when we are talking in this debate today, but draconian measures were instituted by the former CEO of Canada Post, Moya Greene.

In my letter to her on February 9, 2010, I outlined how the restructuring of, for example, the Trail and Castlegar post offices was creating staffing problems, with such things as part-time employees with years of seniority receiving fewer hours than casual term employees, and two fully-trained wicket clerks being transferred to a night shift position in another community. Our Castlegar post office is now one wicket clerk short, which means more lineups, and one nighttime position has been eliminated.

All of this of course decreases the service to the community.

I also understood, in talking with representatives of CUPW and others, that prior to her coming to Canada Post, there were relatively good labour relations and the work climate was better. So I believe the background to this conflict is a climate that has been fostered by this crown corporation and that is not conducive to good labour relations.

My constituency assistant, Laurel Walton, yesterday spoke to a member of CUPW on the picket line. This person was wondering if this legislation included benefits that were ripped away on June 2, such as sick leave and medical and extended health care.

I know that the employer arbitrarily reduced hours for full-time clerks and letter carriers without consultation with the union. They are asking if their regular hours are going to be restored, if the minimums in the collective agreement are going to be restored, and if five-day delivery will be restored. These are questions that are being asked by CUPW workers on the picket lines.

I am proud to report that my local retired teachers association in Grand Forks is rallying at the picket line to support postal workers. In fact, now more than ever, it is time to get support for all those who value fairness and justice. It is simply unacceptable for the federal

government to legislate workers back to work, to offer less in wages than the employer, and in fact to lock out the workers.

Canadians must understand that this is just a start. As part of its cutting and slashing, Canada Post has cut back hours and positions in my province in approximately 72 rural British Columbia communities. One time, a postal worker contacted me almost in tears. She was working seven part-time hours a week and this was cut back to three hours. She was just making ends meet and working to support her disabled husband in the process. This kind of policy is hurting rural communities especially.

Prior to writing my letter to the CEO of Canada Post, I consulted with the president of CUPW in Trail. He mentioned to me that he and his colleagues were willing, before the discussions started in regard to this lockout, to sit down with Canada Post to work out a solution. They had some creative ideas about how the corporation could sell to new customers and increase revenue at the local level. In fact, I was told that relations deteriorated when the new CEO took over.

Subsequent to my letter to the CEO, I communicated with her successor. I mentioned to him in my letter of December 17 that certain staffing positions are not being filled upon retirement. This has placed additional stress on those workers, as well the public they serve.

The pattern is there. It is clear. Canada Post is embarking on a streamlining of its operations by going as far as it can go on the backs of the workers.

• (3115)

[*Translation*]

After the Canadian Union of Postal Workers started a series of rotating strikes, it offered to end them if Canada Post would agree to keep the previous agreement in effect while negotiations continued. But the corporation refused.

We are being asked a number of questions about what is happening and what is being done. My answer is that Canada Post imposed the lockout. The workers wanted to keep working during the negotiations. So this is not a strike by the workers, it is a lockout imposed by management. The government is now imposing a contract that is not a fair collective agreement. It is not appropriate for the government to intervene and to impose a contract on the workers.

We still remain optimistic that the dispute can be settled, but goodwill has to be shown on both sides. The government must stop interfering in the process. The management of Canada Post and the government have discussed nothing. They imposed a lockout right away and introduced a bill. It is wrong to say that the government did not make the decision. They both did.

[*English*]

In a communiqué by Dennis Lemelin, the president of CUPW, he said that the government's heavy-handed intervention will damage labour relations for years to come. As I said earlier on, there had been good relations until we started these kinds of draconian measures.

Government Orders

The last time the federal government imposed back to work legislation, in 1997, it included a provision to ensure that the mediator/arbitrator consider the importance of good labour-management relations. The current legislation contains no such provision.

I would like to quote from my response to constituents who are concerned about this lockout. What we are seeing in this current lockout is a snapshot of things to come. There is a concentrated effort by the current federal government and others to take away the rights and benefits that Canadian workers have fought for over the years. This will eventually affect all of us, especially in our rural communities. Fewer jobs with less pay means that less money will trickle down to our small businesses. I believe, as former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich said so well, that a strong economy needs a strong middle class.

If our postal workers are subjected to these cuts, loss of wages, benefits and pensions in other sectors will surely follow. There are no two ways about it. Local economies depend on well-paid jobs. Fewer jobs and less pay will mean that less money will trickle down to our small businesses.

Let us support our postal workers. Let us ensure that the government tells Canada Post to take the lockout away so they can continue negotiating and come to a reasonable solution for all.

● (3120)

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome all of our viewers who are tuning in. This may seem a little unique to people who are tuning in, but at the House of Commons this is still actually Thursday, even though in the rest of the world it is Friday, which will explain to some of the viewers why many of the patriotic members, all members around here, are not yet wearing red. It is “wear red for the troops” Friday, and I know that many hon. members will be putting on red ties and so forth later on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am astounded that on the *fête nationale* the member would say we should be wearing red for the troops on Friday. We all respect our troops, but he does not even take a moment to recognize that this is the *fête nationale* and for the Quebec—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. This is a point of debate. I would remind hon. members that these points of order do indeed take time away from legitimate questions and comments that members may have for the previous speaker.

The hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I do wish everyone a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. I was just putting in a small, friendly preamble to give my colleague a moment to catch his breath.

My understanding of the legislation, while I'll admit that I may not have read it in the detail that my hon. colleague has, is that it fundamentally comes down to a few basic things. What has been agreed to by the various parties will be part of the agreement. There are very small, modest changes in the wages they have agreed to,

which, frankly, after a week's worth of a strike would not be much different, and then there is final settlement arbitration, which can go in favour of either management or the union.

Does not my hon. colleague think and understand that with final offer arbitration being put on the table there is a potential for both the union and management to lose their best positions and thus a certain degree of incentive for them to get to a reasonable compromise?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I would like to thank my colleague for his preamble to let me get my thoughts in order.

I would like to quote from the CUPW bulletin of June 5. In it they say that what management is not saying is that they are demanding an end to sick leave for all employees and the imposition of a short-term disability plan that provides inadequate coverage for short-term illnesses and that threatens medical privacy. It says that they have been attempting to reduce service in rural areas and that they have not responded to the union's proposal to extend door-to-door delivery service to seniors and persons with mobility restrictions. They have rejected proposals to follow the example of other postal administrations and diversify into financial and banking services, and they are demanding a starting wage that is 22% less than the current starting rate.

These are not conditions, so how can they be accepted when in negotiations?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am noticing something about the government opposite.

In negotiations—I do not know whether the hon. member can comment on this—my union experience always leads me to say that negotiations go on year in, year out. That is what we call communicating with the employer to make sure that possibilities always exist. And it costs absolutely nothing. This government seems to be saying that it had to impose a lockout because of the lengthy negotiations.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comment.

The odd thing is that negotiations were under way and they were supposed to continue. The union was saying that it would continue to deliver the mail during negotiations. But then, all of a sudden, a lockout was imposed. In my view, that does not reflect a willingness to try to solve the problem. Both sides must be willing to do so.

● (3125)

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me also wish all Quebecers and francophones a happy national holiday. I would especially like to extend my wishes for a happy national holiday to my constituents in Hull—Aylmer.

The current Conservative government is using all available means to restrict and destroy the right to collective bargaining. This government is in support of an employer locking out its employees, and finds it acceptable. This government is basically refusing to recognize the right to collective bargaining, a right that these workers and workers in Canada and even abroad have fought hard for.

Government Orders

Over the past 100 years, workers have demanded rights, such as reasonable working hours, health and safety laws that protect them, maternity and paternity leave, and decent pensions. That was only accomplished through sacrifices and struggles.

Yesterday, the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tried to teach us an Economics 101 course, but today, I would like to take the opportunity that we trade unionists finally have to talk about the battles that unions have fought and the gains they have won from employers and from successive governments. I think especially of the battles waged by the women in trade unions. The result is that, today, we in the NDP have 42 women members, and I am very proud of that.

In the world of labour, these rights, such as the right to a pension, are very important to us. They are rights that this employer and this government want to scoff at, such as the right to present demands, the right to negotiate, the right to decent wages and the right to work in the language of one's choice.

At this point, I would like to provide some examples of the battles waged by the men, and certainly by the women, who have worked for Canada Post. I will be going back some way, because I believe it is very important for us as trade unionists to do so when we talk about the union movement, about where we came from, and about the way in which we have won those rights that the current government, the government of Canada, and the employer want to treat with contempt.

Let us go back to 1880, when a royal commission recommended hiring women into the public service because they would be happy with low wages. That is a long way from equal pay for work of equal value. In 1884, the postal service had more women as third-class clerks than any other department.

In 1918, the wives of strikers were in the front lines of a major demonstration in the streets of Toronto, a demonstration organized in their support by several other unions.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, many female postal workers were hired. Those women worked part-time or as casuals, once more for a pittance.

In 1955 came the abolition of the ban on married women, who had previously been denied work in the public service.

In 1981, CUPW, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, went on strike for paid maternity leave, and won.

In 1986, the Organization of Rural Route Mail Couriers was established. Most of its members were women.

In 2000, the Organization of Rural Route Mail Couriers mobilized to improve conditions for those women workers.

In 2004, finally, rural route and suburban mail carriers won a collective agreement. As a result, finally, a host of women workers obtained access to pensions, employee benefits and other protections.

It is important to talk about this to show all the gains that have been made by women and workers in the federal public service and

the postal service. This is what we have won and that is what the government wants to take away from us.

I would also like to talk about another example where workers have fought some battles. Let us remember back to May 15, 1919, in Winnipeg, a day that some people refer to as "Bloody Saturday".

● (3130)

That day is remembered by those of us who did the honourable thing by taking part in the battle for the rights of wealth producers. It is remembered by the sons and daughters of those participants whose stories they heard at family evening gatherings. But today, family gatherings are no longer what they used to be.

Closer to us, here in Buckingham, there is a monument erected in memory of the workers killed in a labour dispute at the beginning of the 1900s. Those two examples show the courage of the workers who fought for the right to collective bargaining. And the current government and Canada Post are trying to destroy these very fundamental rights. Postal workers have made a significant contribution to the improvement of the living and working conditions of society as a whole. I would like to thank them on behalf of all Canadians.

As a woman who has been active in these movements, I am very proud of having trained in trade unionism and made a career for myself. I am equally proud to be able to share this story with hon. members and to share the pride that they too must feel from fighting together to benefit members of parliament, women and society as a whole. If it had not been for trade unions, we would not be here today, and women would not be as far ahead as they are today. Many women of my generation well remember the time when paid maternity leave did not exist. The term "pay equity" was unheard of.

Let us also not forget the public sector myths that Canada Post is trying to spread. Canada Post is supposed to be a drain on public funds. In fact, the public postal service and its workers cost the public treasury nothing.

In the last 15 years, Canada Post has earned profits of \$1.7 billion and has contributed \$1.2 billion to the federal government in dividends and taxes. Yet they are now trying to tell us that there are problems, that public services are too much, and that they have to be privatized or destroyed.

They talk about low participation and low productivity in the public service and in Canada Post. On the contrary, Canada Post is very productive. Unlike a great number of companies, it has seen strong growth in productivity in the last two years. It is important to note, for example, that productivity in processing transactional mail has increased by 6.7%.

I would also like to mention something that postal workers once did that has been forgotten over the years. In large cities, postal workers played a very significant role in the community. When delivering mail to the door, they often noticed when elderly people had not picked up their mail for five or six days. They then called the police or people in the community who found out whether those people were all right. This value, this need, this action, which was so important in a community, has been lost. Now we often see elderly people left on their own. We have heard of situations where elderly people have been found in the community after several days.

Government Orders

Once again, I deplore the attitude of the government and the employer that have colluded and agreed to a lockout, refusing the right to collective bargaining that is fair and equitable to all workers. This means that, in the future, these same workers and society as a whole will be losing their rights and losing ground.

I hope they will go back to the negotiating table and the government will listen to reason.

[*English*]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the media is reporting that 70% of Canadians are in support of the back-to-work legislation because of the difficulties it is causing a lot of Canadians, especially in rural Canada, where there has been a huge impact, even though they are not on strike.

For many people who count of day-to-day mail service, it actually has not been good for quite a while, I must say.

I guess I should backtrack and say that this was an election issue for me in Saskatoon. Briarwood is an area that should be quite well served. It is an urban area. Briarwood residents were only receiving mail three days a week, so they do not really notice the interruption and are not quite as upset about the service that has been suspended.

There have to be two sides to this story. I wonder if the member has had people asking about supporting the legislation the government has put forward.

• (3135)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, like a number of hon. members, I have been hearing that, since 1991, the Conservative government and the Liberal government in office at the time have denied the rights of workers and have overused back-to-work legislation to prevent workers from having the right to fair and equitable collective bargaining.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have been sitting here listening to speeches, I have been struck by this being a metaphor for an ideological warfare. It seems to be two-by-fours at two sword lengths between the warring parties. How else could we explain a government putting forward legislation that it knows will be toxic to the unions, putting forward legislation that is actually less than the employer provided for in the collective process thus far, and simultaneously, a party and a union being unable to come to grips with the reality that the demand for their services has actually declined over time and in fact is looking for a place to continue to exist?

I have heard a lot of rhetoric from both sides. I have not heard a great deal of solution. I anticipate this ideological warfare will go on for quite a number of hours, if not days. I would be interested in the hon. member's solution to how this matter gets back to some bargaining.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments and questions about solutions. We have said it many times and I repeat it: Go back to the table. Let the process of collective bargaining go on. That is what we are asking for.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct this question to my colleague who just spoke.

Concerning the maternity leave benefits that were put in place by this union in 1981, how has that impacted Canadian society in general, and what is the good that has come from that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

Yes, the right of women to stay in the labour market, the right to work, had a significant impact. As I mentioned, women in my generation had to leave the workforce when they were pregnant. Today, women finally have the fundamental right to work, to have children and to raise a family. As a result, they receive salaries and benefits, and thereby can also contribute to the economy of their regions and of their communities, which is very important for everyone.

[*English*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in opposition to Bill C-6.

I would like to take us back to what we are talking about here in terms of our postal service.

A country with as vast a geographic scale as Canada obviously needs excellent communication. From the very earliest days of our country, we have placed a real priority on our mail service. The first paid mail delivery in Canada was back in 1693, hundreds of years ago. We have had a federal mail service since Confederation, since 1867.

It is logical, with Canada's vast land mass, that we have efficient, punctual and affordable mail service that works for all Canadians. It would be easy to design a mail service that works in the major urban centres and leaves behind the huge number of Canadians who live across this vast geography. What we have with Canada Post is a service that works for Canadians, whether they live in Inuvik, Vancouver Island, St. John's, Toronto or Montreal. That is the principle on which Canada Post was founded. This system, even to this day, works incredibly well.

Every single business day Canada Post handles 40 million pieces of mail. As a Canadian, I can send a letter to anywhere in this vast country for the princely sum of 59¢. That is a pretty good bargain. In countries such as Germany and Austria, which have a much smaller geography and have perhaps privatized their postal service, it costs 77¢ and 88¢ respectively to send a letter across much shorter geographic distances than we have in Canada.

Our postal service is not just something we should sneeze at. It was built into the fabric of this country. It was designed to help Canadians communicate with each other. It was designed to bring our country together across this vast geography. Of course it has a personal and an economic role but it also has a nation-building role.

Government Orders

Our postal service is a success story. We have a modern, efficient postal service, which is making a profit for Canadians. This money gets ploughed back into our coffers to the tune of \$281 million a year. It is actually a money-maker for Canadians. It is a system that works quite well for us.

What we are seeing in this latest round of negotiations is a bit of a public relations war. Of course there are Canadians who are upset since Canada Post has locked out and shut the doors on its workforce. I am getting emails from small businesses in my constituency that want the mail service to resume, and I agree with them. We should have our mail service resume. This would be easily achieved if the government and Canada Post took the locks off the doors of our post offices right across this country and allowed postal workers to get back to work and resume sorting and delivering the mail right across Canada. Would that not be a good thing to have happen?

I have had constituents, including small businesses, tell me they are hearing that the bill the government has put forward would actually impose terms and conditions on Canada Post workers that are worse than the terms and conditions Canada Post is negotiating at the bargaining table. It would roll back the clock on their working conditions and on their pay and benefits.

● (3140)

Those same people, not all but some, have said they just want the parties to go back to the table and keep negotiating, not send them back saying they have to accept even worse terms and conditions than Canada Post was willing to pay at the bargaining table. How ridiculous is that?

What is the role of the government in deciding what the terms and conditions are going to be that would undercut even what the employer was willing to pay? I do not think that is what Canadians want to sign up for. That is not about getting the mail going. That is about imposing a labour relations regime in this country and rolling back the basic rights of Canadians, not just at Canada Post.

Let us think about it. That is telling employers across this country that they can get a better deal through the government and that they do not have to bargain with the union. They can get a better deal by going to the government and, rather than the government using the fine tools of labour relations to do the difficult work of negotiating a collective agreement or fostering the negotiation of a collective agreement between employers and employees, the government will take a sledgehammer and impose terms and conditions that will give employers a much better deal than they would ever have to fairly negotiate at the bargaining table.

What would that mean? It would mean that young people would be hired for lower wages than people have been hired in the past, almost 20% less than new hires were getting paid at Canada Post. It would mean lower wage rates, poorer benefits and the loss of the ability to get a pension. I do not think Canadians want this kind of intergenerational betrayal to be imposed by their government on working people in this country. They want a fair, efficient, functional postal service that will serve them, their communities and their businesses. What they do not want is this sledgehammer approach that rolls back the clock and betrays young people and their job opportunities for the future.

What do we say to our children and grandchildren about their job prospects? What do we say when they ask if they are going to have security throughout their working lives and in their retirement years? What kind of betrayal is that? What message is the government sending?

New Democrats do not think the sledgehammer approach is the way to go. We think the difficult work of rolling up sleeves, communicating effectively with both sides and fostering a negotiated settlement is the way to go, but Canadians do not have to wait until that is achieved. The government and Canada Post could take the locks off our postal system today, open the doors, allow postal workers to return to work, get the mail moving and then get back to negotiating a fair collective agreement.

Canadians understand clearly that this is not a strike that we are seeing. This is a lockout by the employer, clearly with the approval of the government. Canadians want it to end but they want it to end fairly. They do not want it to end by betraying young people and future generations or the service that has had such an important nation-building role in our country.

● (3145)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member provided very thoughtful comments. One of the very positive parts of this debate is the enormous amount of labour history we are learning about, what it is that affects working people in this country and the role unions have played in fighting for better working conditions, hours of work, health and safety and better wages that lifts everybody up in this country. That has been a very interesting part of this debate.

I know the member has many decades of service in the labour movement and has been part of negotiations. One thing that is very interesting for us to hear, which the member for Hull—Aylmer also talked about, is the impact of women and the changes that have taken place, whether it is on pay equity, parental leave or equal pay for work of equal value. These are very important wins by unions and the labour movement.

I wonder if the member could relate that to the situation we are now facing, of these workers being locked out. All they want is to go back to the table and get a fair deal for their members and for the rights of all workers in this country. How does that relate to equality for women in this country?

● (3150)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is an employer in the federal jurisdiction and a crown corporation. It is an employer where today we will see large numbers of women employed. At Canada Post it is probably around 50-50, if I am not mistaken. We will see provisions around maternity and parental leave that were pioneered at Canada Post.

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However, I dare say Canada Post did not just wake up one morning and ask what they could do for working women. It was because the workers got together, through the legitimate voice of their union, to organize and to press for gains like better maternity benefits and better opportunities for women, including pay equity.

Therefore, all Canadian women owe a real debt of gratitude to CUPW and the women who work at Canada Post.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the member, who worked so long with her former union boss, Ken Lewenza, has no faith in the union's ability to win final offer selection.

This is actually a fair situation if we look at it from the workers' perspective. They get a guaranteed pay increase for four years when others do not. They get to go back under the current agreement, which is exactly what they have been asking for anyway. They get an improved pension trajectory, which is mandatory in terms of the final offer. They are going to have to get an improved pension solvency.

All matters that have previously been settled are not going to be reopened. They are settled. In terms of the outstanding issues, what remains is that the union gets to put forward its offer and the company gets to put forward its offer.

Is the member saying that she has no confidence in the union's ability to put forward a competitive bid that will be in the interest of workers and actually win the final offer selection?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that in the member's previous life as an auto worker it was the union that bargained the excellent wages, benefits, and working conditions that allowed him and his family to prosper in the community of Windsor.

I have enormous faith in the ability of the union to negotiate a fair settlement. Final offer selection is a bit of a sledgehammer approach. It would be much better if there were a mediated arbitration. That would allow both sides to negotiate and tailor a solution instead of the winner-take-all approach that the government is favouring.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to take this opportunity to correct my colleague on the other side of the House, the Minister of State for Science and Technology. He mentioned that his riding had received good financial assistance from the federal government to help the automotive industry. I am very happy for his constituents. However, he said that through the same package, the government had provided strong support for the forestry industry. I worked in the forestry industry for a very long time and honestly, this government did nothing. During the economic crisis, it provided assistance in the form of \$10 billion in loan guarantees to the automotive industry—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. Minister of State for Science and Technology on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of State for Science and Technology, I know exactly what I said. The member was not here, so I can forgive him for misquoting me. I will give the

member the opportunity to stand up and apologize for again misleading Canadians. That is not what I said.

I said that this government has helped the automotive sector, as well as the forestry sector, as well as mining, as well as seniors and students. We did that because as the government we are responsible for all Canadians in all sectors and not, unlike the socialist party, just the unions.

● (3155)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): On the same point of order, the hon. opposition House leader.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, I just want to make sure that when this happens it does not affect the time of the members of the loyal opposition who are speaking. That was obviously not a point of order. It was a point of debate.

The member was also signalling that in his opinion someone was absent from the House. That is another breach of the regulations governing our debates. I would have hoped that this would have been pointed out to the member. I ask that particular attention be paid to that type of intervention. It was definitely not a point of order. It breached another rule of the House.

As the parliamentary House leader of the official opposition, I ask for confirmation that this type of intervention does not negatively affect the time allotted to the members of the opposition for speaking.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate the advice offered to the chair from the hon. members of the chamber.

I would encourage all members to refrain from using points of order as opportunities to engage in debate and to take away from speakers. I have just come back to the chair. It is actually morning to me rather than late night. I do not know what has happened to this point. In this case, the clock has been stopped during this process. This will not infringe on the time allocated to the member speaking.

I appreciate that many members have strong views on this subject. I would appreciate the cooperation of all hon. members. I hope they will show their colleagues the respect they are due.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

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Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I said because there may have been an interpretation problem. I was acknowledging that the federal government provided assistance to the automotive industry in the form of \$10 billion in loan guarantees. That said, it is unacceptable to say that the government helped the forestry industry, which is larger than the automotive sector in terms of percentage of GDP, when it received only \$170 million to help it out of the crisis. I simply wanted to correct what my colleague opposite had said.

I also want to say that I am proud to represent the people of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. Like many of my colleagues, I want to express my regrets that I am not there with my constituents today to celebrate Quebec's national holiday.

I would like to say to the various members who have made speeches, and particularly the members on the government side, that my goal is to represent all of my constituents, both the postal workers and those who use postal services.

My colleagues know that this is my first term as an MP. Some of them have been here longer, but it seems that my colleagues are having some trouble properly responding to the correspondence they are receiving from their constituents. So I would like to help them out. If they have a pencil and a sheet of paper, they can take some notes.

To the people who are writing to them to say that they are having difficulty, that their small business will not survive if service does not resume or that they are waiting for services, various goods, medications and so on, they can say that there is currently a conflict at Canada Post and that the employees responded to that conflict with a rotating strike in light of what they felt were unacceptable offers from Canada Post. That rotating strike allowed Canadians to receive their mail, their parcels, and so on.

The Minister of Labour said that she would not step in to put an end to the rotating strike since service was not being interrupted, but that if service was interrupted, she would seriously consider the possibility of passing special legislation. So Canada Post locked out the employees.

Given that the government has a weak majority that it obtained through less than 40% of voters and less than 20% of voters in Quebec, it has the power to impose a special bill that interferes with the principle of collective bargaining. But, as government MPs, my colleagues support this process. The government had several options actually. It could have passed a special bill to renew the collective agreement, which would have been acceptable to the union and the employees, and which would have let Canadians receive their mail. Unfortunately, the government decided not to take that route.

The government could have passed a special bill that would have ended the lockout without affecting the union's right to rotating strikes and the right to strike, which would have made mail delivery possible. Unfortunately, the government decided not to take that route.

So the government decided to impose special legislation that forces employees to return to work under unfavourable conditions.

The government says it is surprised that the employees do not approve of the conditions that are contrary to their interests, even though that government decision is delaying mail delivery.

This is what my colleagues could say to their constituents to explain the current situation.

In my opinion, this government—my colleagues do not have to write this in their letter—is definitely the most polarizing government I have seen in the history of Canada. Right now, it is dividing the country into good guys and bad guys, as it has done for the past five years, and as we know it will continue to do. Right now, the bad guys are the unionized workers whom it has decided to treat as second-class citizens.

What is happening here now is by no means an isolated event. We are not staying here until who knows when in order to deal with an isolated incident at Canada Post. A message is being sent to Canadian employers for the coming years and especially for the next four years, under this government. It is basically telling CEOs and board of directors chairs that they can negotiate in bad faith and drag their feet for seven, eight or nine months and impose a lockout.

• (3200)

Then the government will simply legislate and impose strict conditions on employees, conditions that favour employers. We just saw this with Air Canada. That is what the government was about to do. Now the same thing is happening with Canada Post. What will be next? Via Rail, Bell, Bombardier or any other company this government considers too important to our economy to be allowed to negotiate freely and to determine its own future.

[*English*]

In other words, the message being sent out right now to employers in this country is that if they manufacture a crisis, the government will bail them out. That is exactly what is happening here.

[*Translation*]

I would like to take the rest of my time to discuss two specific reasons that, to me, explain why there is currently a labour dispute. The employer is imposing two clauses that are absolutely unacceptable to the union, the entire union movement, and to people in the lower middle class. With clauses like that, we can understand why people resort to using pressure tactics such as rotating strikes.

One of the clauses is called an “orphan clause”. The most inequitable and unfair measure that there could ever be in the world of labour relations is an “orphan clause”. I am not sure if there is a way to translate that expression. Essentially, with an orphan clause, young employees joining the workforce who do the same work as employees already on the job will earn a lower salary than their colleagues. How can a union that represents all its members tell some members they are worth less than others who are doing the same work? Does anyone really think the union can accept that? Can someone not explain to Canada Post, which is a crown corporation—and therefore controlled by the government—this basic principle of labour relations, namely that members cannot receive different salaries for the same work?

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The other clause has to do with pensions. As some hon. members have already talked about this, I will not talk about it at length. Employees, who know they will have income security when they retire at age 60 or 65, are being asked to go from a defined benefit package, where they know what benefit amount to expect, to a defined contribution plan, where they can hope there is no economic crisis when they are set to retire. Otherwise, they might end up having to work another five, six or seven years.

Again, the principle is unacceptable and we can understand the union's position. We are asking Canada Post to be more conciliatory. We are asking the federal government not to send workers back to work under unfavourable conditions and to consider other options such as ending the lockout.

• (3205)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are some ironies in the current debate. Right now the NDP is perpetuating an effort to delay an end to a corporate lockout. Apparently, its members wish to have the workers of Canada Post continue to be locked out and have Canadians denied service. I know they have an affection for work stoppages.

When we hit 11 a.m. this morning, this back to work legislation will have been delayed longer than any of the other 32 times such legislation has been tabled in Canadian history.

Is it really the case that the members opposite are so committed to the New Democratic Party that they will do everything possible to deny Canadians postal delivery and everything possible procedurally to keep the Canadian economy from having the benefit of the postal service it depends on so strongly?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: I would like to thank the member for his question. When I began my speech, I said I was sincerely sorry and offered my apologies to my constituents in Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques that I could not be with them because we are here debating this issue. This is a fundamental issue that is going to set the direction that labour relations will take now and for the next four years.

The government members are well aware that they could settle this issue very quickly. They can change the special legislation; I offer them that option. This is not an option that has been only half discussed here. They can introduce another special bill and end the lockout. They can make sure that the employees retain their right to hold rotating strikes. Tomorrow morning, Saturday, I am sure the postal workers would be happy to work that day to make up for the losses. Beginning on Monday at the latest, people will start getting their mail again. It is up to the government to make the effort to end this debate by introducing a bill that is fair to everyone, which will mean that Canadians and Quebecers will get their mail.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, frankly, this debate strikes me as a dialogue of the deaf. We have the hard right ideologues in the government jamming the union with legislation that it cannot possibly accept, and we have

hard left ideologues in the NDP who cannot quite come to grips with the actual decline in the need for postal service, as evidenced over a number of years.

Simultaneously, Canadians are looking at this discussion here in the chamber and shaking their heads. If my office is any indication, frankly, they do not care. I am not getting a whole lot of push-back other than from the identifiable hard right or hard left.

I suggest to hon. members that they have a chat between themselves, because Canadians are otherwise just going to let them talk and talk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I did not really hear a question.

At the moment, it is very easy to put the situation in a left and right context, but that is not the issue. As I said in my speech, the fact is that we have a polarizing government right now that had other options than introducing a special bill, one with unfavourable terms, that requires an arbitrator to abide by strict conditions, something that did not exist in previous legislation. It had a choice.

As I said, if it absolutely wanted to use a special bill to end the bargaining process, it could have put a halt to the lockout and still allowed the employees to retain their right to strike, which they were using to hold a rotating strike, and this would have meant that people would get mail service. It could also have arranged, in a special bill, for the present collective agreement to continue for one or two years, and this could have let that people get their mail.

There are options here, but this government is refusing to consider them. In all honesty, if the people they represent were to write to them, what they should reply is this: the government has made a choice, and the choice is to pit management against the union, and that creates disputes like this one. It is not a matter of left or right; it is a matter of justice and fairness.

• (3210)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to add my voice to the growing concern over the government's heavy-handed and draconian legislation.

Essentially, the government has declared war on working people in Canada. Within hours of Air Canada's workers going on strike, the government advised that it was bringing in back to work legislation. Within hours of Canada Post locking out its workers, the government advised that it was bringing in back to work legislation. There was no attempt to reason or to meet with the sides in this dispute; they just brought in the sledgehammer.

Workers in Canada should look out, because this government has decided that it is appropriate that the standard of living of ordinary workers in Canada continues to slide backwards relative to inflation. They have decided it is okay for pensions to be clawed back. They have decided that it is okay for young workers to be paid less for doing the same job.

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The government's intention is clear. It is attacking in the holy name of profit and ideology the very standards of living that working people have struggled to reach over the past fifty-plus years. This legislation attacks working families by making them take a lesser wage increase, \$40 million less in fact. It attacks pensioners and retirees by demanding that the agreement not touch the solvency ratio. It attacks working conditions by demanding that the arbitrator look at the imaginary market place of postal companies for comparisons of working conditions. There is no comparator, but the arbitrator is forced to do that.

This legislation also attacks young workers by signalling to them very clearly that they should expect less than their senior colleagues in working conditions, wages, pensions and everything else. That is not the message this party wants to convey to the people of Canada. We want to convey a message that Canadians should continue to expect to do better every year, that our standard of living should continue to grow, that our ability to purchase our homes and food should continue to grow and not slip backwards.

The solvency ratio part of the legislation really bothers me, because the government has advised that it is concerned about the cost of a mediated or arbitrated system. Yet in order to determine the solvency ratio of the offers to be sent to the arbitrator, they will have to spend millions of dollars to have actuarial evaluations of a \$14 billion pension plan done on each offer and then on the final selected package. That is an incredible waste of money.

The government only mentions the solvency ratio and not the going-concern ratio. What does that mean? A solvency ratio shows what will happen if a pension plan is wound up. If Canada Post ceases to exist, how much money will be owed to the pensioners? That is all they talk about. Does that signal a hidden agenda to privatize Canada Post? I say this because the government did not talk about the going-concern ratio, which Canada Post itself is not worried about. Canada Post states that:

Since the going-concern deficit is small, it is anticipated that this can be eliminated quickly—

That is Canada Post itself saying that. The deficit in fact is 1%.

I think this points to a government intention to perhaps contract out the postal service in the near future, and we should be very concerned about that.

I also want to point out to the members opposite that I have a long history in the labour movement in Canada. I remember what started me on this quest in the labour movement, the 1975 legislation by a certain Prime Minister who had promised not to do so, but who limited wages across Canada. That legislation in 1975 was called wage and price controls, and it was introduced by a Prime Minister this party does not really like, Mr. Pierre Trudeau. Today, the government smells an awful lot like that Prime Minister, because the government is introducing legislation to limit wages. It is awful.

Then again in 1982, he brought in some more wage controls. Again, this legislation seems to have the air of the beginning of wage controls in this country.

• (3215)

That prime minister lasted only a couple of years before he was kicked out of office. The government should pay attention.

If this is about restraint, if that is what this is about, that the workers of Canada Post are being told they must exercise restraint, why is the restraint not being practised at the senior levels of Canada Post? Why is the Canada Post CEO continuing to get wage increases and bonus increases that far outstrip the rate of inflation? That is a clear message to the people of Canada that the government actually cares more about the CEOs and their wages than it does about ordinary working Canadians and their wages, working conditions, and ability to get by.

The other thing that bothers me about the government's comments is its complaint that bargaining took too long and that is why they had to step in. In fact, I have bargained collective agreements that took 22 months to negotiate, and that is because the issues were so complex and so detailed that it took that long to actually figure a way out of the morass without a strike or a lockout. That is part of what happens in Canada when things are complicated. We take a long time to discuss them; we take a long time to deal with it.

The minister also claims that she did everything possible—everything possible—under the legislation to prevent this dispute. That is not true. The legislation still contains a provision for a conciliation commissioner, which was not used by this minister. A conciliation commissioner has the power to issue a public report, and while the commissioner is deliberating, there is no possibility of a strike or lockout. That was not done here. The minister did not do everything she could.

Let us also talk about the other effects of this legislation on the rest of the people of Canada and the signals it is sending to other governments in this country.

My son-in-law is a police officer and his job is declared to be an essential service, and he does not have the right to strike. In return for that denial of his right to strike, he has an understanding that is put in place by the province that his wages, benefits, and working conditions, if they cannot be negotiated, will all be sent to a third party for determination—not some of his benefits, not everything but pensions, not everything but wages because we are going to define the wages over here.

Recently the police officers in the city of Toronto, with an arbitrated settlement, reached an 11.5% wage increase over four years. That is an appropriate wage increase. They accepted it. That is what was determined by a third party.

However, here the government has decided to instruct the third party that they are not to give more than 7.25%. That is more than 4% less than an arbitrated settlement in Canada. I believe that a lot of those police officers may have voted for this party. But if this government introduces this kind of legislation, it will signal to other legislatures across the country that it is okay to limit wage increases in arbitrated settlements, it is okay to limit benefit increases in arbitrated settlements, and it is okay to touch pensions in arbitrated settlements. That will be a very sorry day for the rest of Canada.

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I just want to say one other thing. In a Canada Post press release right after talks broke off on June 22, the company announced:

Canada Post must now find ways to deal with the financial damage caused by the work disruption.

That is a self-inflicted wound. They did it to themselves, and now they are worried about the damage?

• (3220)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question on the last point, the self-inflicted wound.

There are two financial costs here. Of course, one is happening now; \$25 million a day is the estimate. The other was caused by the rotating strikes. After eight months of negotiations there were rotating strikes caused by the members, which caused an interruption in service and a loss of stability to consumers of what Canada Post offers. This is something the NDP just does not get about business.

People start to outsource their needs. Canada Post starts to lose business. That was about \$100 million. That was not caused by Canada Post. That was caused by the rotating strikes. So after eight months of free negotiations and rotating strikes, which caused a lockout, there is significant financial damage.

Here is my question. If the member is not willing to get the workers back to work, he obviously must be willing to have the taxpayers in his riding take up these additional and exorbitant costs, in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Why is the member not willing to get these workers back to work and let them negotiate the way they want? Why is the member so willing to allow his constituents to pay those high taxes?

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, we are actually willing to have these workers go back to work. In fact, yesterday we said unlock the doors, they will be back, the fiscal damage will stop, and they can negotiate a collective agreement, freely and without worry of legislation.

This legislation signals to employers that they do not have to negotiate because the government will jump in and rescue their bacon the instant they lock people out.

There is no ongoing labour relations peace here. This union has had 20 labour disputes in the last 46 years and a lot of them have been legislated back to work.

Why does the government continue to do that? Why does the government continue to signal to this employer and the union that they do not really have to bargain because something bad will happen to them at the end of the day?

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the hon. member talk about the immense amount of knowledge he has in labour relations. On the one hand, of course, we have the hard hand of Bill C-6, which is a hammer, with legislation full of clauses that will clearly tie the hands of any arbitrator or mediator.

Given the fact that the official opposition had an opportunity to move an amendment last night, with the member's great knowledge and the knowledge of some of the others on his NDP team, why were the amendments not put forward in more of a conciliatory way,

actually trying to find solutions and laying those solutions on the table, rather than simply deferring things for six months and letting them work it out? Why were some of those amendments not mapped out so that we could find solutions, rather than a continual debate between the extreme right and the extreme left that could go on for days?

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, my leader signalled last night that we were in fact willing to negotiate a peaceful resolution to this dispute with this government. As far as I know, there has been no response from this government.

• (3225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard some disturbing comments from the other side of the House and also from the second opposition party, but I can understand their frustrations.

With respect to the special legislation and arbitration, what does my colleague trust? Does he trust the partisan interests of the government or the free judgment of the arbitrator?

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, we do not know who the arbitrator is, but assuming that it is a good arbitrator, I would certainly trust the judgment of a third-party arbitrator, as did the police services in Toronto in the last few months.

However, the arbitrator's hands are being tied in terms of wages, in terms of working conditions, and in terms of this unknown solvency ratio that the entire collective agreement cannot have the effect of increasing or decreasing. So his hands are completely tied.

I do not have any doubt that it will be almost impossible for him to find anything other than what Canada Post presents in this particular way of conducting an arbitration.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number one issue during the 2011 federal election campaign in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl was pensions. It was the number one issue for seniors. It was the number one issue for working people.

For seniors, their concern was how to get by on a fixed income. Seniors asked me not to forget them when I went to Ottawa. I have not. I will not.

There is a lot of talk in Newfoundland and Labrador these days about fog, and not just the type that creeps in off the North Atlantic and shrouds the outports and cities, but F-O-G, the acronym for food, oil, and gas. The cost of necessities like food, oil, and gas continues to rise as fixed incomes remain just that, fixed.

Seniors struggle with the question of how to pay for the rising cost of living while on fixed incomes like pensions. I could not count the number of seniors I visited in their homes and apartments over the course of the election who came to their doors in hats, mitts, and winter coats. They dressed that way in the middle of the afternoon in their own homes because they could not afford to turn on the heat. They asked me not to forget them. I will not.

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Seniors were not the only ones concerned about pensions. We heard the concern from young people, working couples, who spoke to me at their doors about how they are supposed to prepare for their retirement when they can barely get by in the prime of their working lives. They can just manage to pay the bills. In some cases, they cannot.

We heard the concern from middle-aged firemen who questioned how they could afford to retire on modest pensions, given the clawback on the Canada Pension Plan.

I can tell you this. The fog in Newfoundland and Labrador, the fog in Canada, is getting thicker.

One of the central issues in the dispute between the 48,000 locked out postal workers and Canada Post is pensions. As the New Democrat labour critic said in the House of Commons on Thursday, the pension plan is in danger. As the NDP opposition leader said so eloquently on Thursday, Canada Post wants to create a two-tier wage and benefit package. New workers who join the federal crown corporation would have to work an extra five years to qualify for a pension—five years.

Paul Moist, national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, says:

...proposals to institute two-tier wages and benefits for new Canada Post employees [is] unwarranted and unfair to young Canadians, who are already facing unemployment rates.

They are extremely high as it is.

Here is a direct quote from Paul Moist:

There are no such things as two-tier rent or mortgages: young and new workers don't get a discount on utility or grocery bills. "It's outrageous to say young workers don't deserve the same wages and benefits for doing the same work."

Young people have a hard enough time as it is paying off student loans and incredibly high credit card interest rates, which this Conservative government, as we know, will not do anything about.

If the Conservative government will attack the pensions of 48,000 workers at Canada Post, who will it attack next? Whose pension plan will it go after? We know whose side the Conservative government is on. Canada Post made a net profit of \$281 million in 2009 alone. Who will directly benefit from the five extra years that new Canada Post employees will have to work? Not the workers, I can tell you that.

The labour minister stood on the floor of the House of Commons on Thursday and spoke about the damage to the Canadian economy for the Canada Post strike, which she was corrected on—it is not a strike; it is a lockout. The use of the word “strike”, as the opposition leader pointed out, to use his words, “is a brazen example of propaganda”.

The labour minister said the damage to the economy from the lockout could be significant. What about the damage to pensions? Would the minister describe that as significant? Whose pension will be next?

The labour minister says Canadians cannot go on without postal service.

● (3230)

I can say this with authority, the authority of the hundreds of pensioners and working people I spoke to during the campaign in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Canadians cannot go on without pensions. Let me ask again, whose pension will be next?

Is the ultimate goal of the Conservative government to weaken the voice of workers? Is that part of the strategy? Is that the new Conservative action plan? Is the true goal, as the opposition leader said, to make profit while taking advantage of workers? As has been said before, it is a race to the bottom, except for those on the top.

The Conservative government's back to work legislation gives the employer, Canada Post, the advantage in the labour dispute. The legislation will force employees back to work for less money than Canada Post last offered. Whose side is the Conservative government on? Not the workers of Canada Post, that is obvious.

During the federal election, the MP for St. John's and I met the workers of the Canada Post headquarters in St. John's early one morning. By early, I mean 6 a.m. We shook hands in the parking lot as the workers arrived for their shifts, and it was bitter cold. The workers mentioned how they may be headed toward job action, and as New Democrat candidates we vowed to be there for them.

When I was back in my riding two weeks ago, I visited the workers again outside the Kenmount Road station. They had set up an information line and served lemonade. It was still cold, but the lemonade was good. The workers were generally young. They were fired up. They were concerned about benefits and what they had to lose. They have a lot to lose.

There was a story Thursday in the news back home about how a Newfoundland Supreme Court judge issued an injunction against locked out Canada Post workers in eastern Newfoundland. Canada Post had complained that workers in St. John's and Mount Pearl were blocking access to the post offices, using vehicles, picnic tables, pallets and what Justice Robert Hall described as vigorous picket lines.

The injunction prohibits workers from blocking access to people walking by and calls for any barricades on picket lines to be removed by Thursday night. I am sure they were. The workers of Canada Post are good, law-abiding citizens, but can we blame the workers for being vigorous in their attempt to secure their future? Can we blame them? Again, if this is allowed to happen to the 48,000 workers of Canada Post, who will be next? Let me ask again so it will sink in, who will be next?

The Conservative government keeps talking about how Canada led the world in weathering the recession, but the Conservative government also talks about how cuts are on the horizon, billions of dollars in cuts. Who will pay for the savings? The working poor? The young? The old? Pensioners?

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When it comes to pensions, six out of ten Canadians rely solely on CPP or QPP, other government assistance or some savings, modest savings, I might add. I got that statistic from the *Globe and Mail*. Here is a quote from the *Globe and Mail*:

Pension experts estimate that about 30 per cent of the population will be poorer in retirement, sometimes significantly, and the share grows every year.

Here is another quote from John Gordon, president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada:

The agenda of this government is to take on unions and do away with free collective bargaining. This is what this is about,

I can tell hon. members what the New Democrats are about. They are about working Canadians. We are about Canadian families. The labour minister made a snarky remark Thursday in this chamber about how labour unions have a hotline to the New Democrats. When Canadians call the New Democrats about issues that are critical to them, issues that are critical to families, issues that are critical to their future, Canadians can call the New Democrats. We do not put them on hold for big business. We do not put them on hold for anyone. We answer the call.

• (3235)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the member's speech I made some notes. I listened quite carefully. He talked about attacking pensions and used a phrase, "the pension plan is in danger". I would make the argument that of course the biggest danger to the Canada Post pension plan is the NDP platform. The NDP platform, we might remember, proposed raising corporate taxes. Under this government, they would be 15% next year, but the NDP proposes 19.5% so that is 4.5 points difference, representing a 30% increase in corporate taxes.

The NDP talks a lot about banks and oil companies somehow being in opposition to the notion of successful pensions. I pointed out earlier in this debate that the largest equity holdings in the Canada Post pension fund, starting at the top, are listed as: Toronto-Dominion Bank, Royal Bank of Canada, Bank of Nova Scotia, Suncor Energy, Canadian Natural Resources; and I could go on. Out of the top 25 holdings, 15 of them are banks and oil companies.

My question for the member is, how can the member justify a massive 30% tax hike on the pensions of Canadian workers?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, for me it is all about cutting to the chase and getting to the point. What has been proposed here is a two-tier pension plan: one pension plan for existing workers of Canada Post, and another pension for new employees, a pension plan that is not as good. A two-tier pension plan is not good enough.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is another illustration of a dialogue of the deaf. We have heard from the hard left in this particular instance.

Clearly, the government has a supervisory jurisdiction with respect to the economy. Whether it is left or right, NDP or Liberal, whatever the level of government it has a supervisory jurisdiction. The rationale for this particular piece of legislation was that the labour dispute was impacting on the economy. I thought that was a rather thin rationalization for the imposition of legislation, particularly at this stage of the negotiations.

Simultaneously, the union and the NDP have yet to come to grips with the notion that Canada Post's role in our economy has

significantly declined and therefore there has to be some adjustment to the cost of running Canada Post. Meanwhile, Canadians are saying nothing. Canadians are not really engaged in this debate and it is a bit of a slugfest between the left and the right as they talk and talk to each other, or contrary to each other. Meanwhile, Canadians are finding other alternatives to the actual service that is needed here.

Ironically, the filibuster by the NDP is actually contributing to the decline for the need of the services.

• (3240)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned how this is about an adjustment to the cost of running Canada Post. Let me repeat something from my speech. Perhaps the hon. member was not listening.

In 2009, Canada Post made a net profit of \$281 million and the hon. member talks about an adjustment to the cost of running Canada Post. This is about drawing a line in the sand. If the Conservatives go after the pension plan of Canada Post employees, let me repeat a question I posed several times in my speech: Who is next?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you may find that I am a bit dishevelled and my eyes are a bit red. I think all of my colleagues here feel the same way as we debate this bill and fight tooth and nail to give workers a voice.

I listened carefully to my colleagues. They spoke very passionately about their experience with the union movement. Since I became a part of this official opposition team, I have seen that in unity, there is strength. The experience they have shared since we entered the House of Commons has taught me a lot about the qualities of solidarity and the collective rights of workers.

I thank you for giving me time to speak to Bill C-6 in this House and to add my voice to the eloquent voices of my colleagues in the official opposition.

I think that the debate on this bill is very important. I was inspired by our leader, the Leader of the Opposition, who addressed the House last night. He spoke about the history of the NDP movement and about the values that NDP members have always defended. I think that this is a debate on the values that we want to defend in this House, but also that we want to defend on the hustings across the country—the values of sharing, social justice and freedom.

There is increasing talk about economic recession; we are told the economy is doing poorly, that the greater interests of the economy are in jeopardy. And for the sake of the economy, the government is going to undermine the right of workers to negotiate a decent contract, not only for themselves, but also for future generations.

I believe the debate we are having in this House is a debate not only for the short term, but also for the long term. What will we provide for future generations?

I have been sitting in the House of Commons for barely a month now and the present government has already set the stage. First, it introduced a bill to force Air Canada employees back to work. I do not believe the timeline of that file called for that bill, when the bargaining process had just gotten under way.

As for Canada Post, the timeline has already been elaborated on, but let me remind you that somewhat controversial action is being taken. On June 8, Canada Post announced that it was cancelling mail delivery on Tuesdays and Thursdays, whereas we know all Canadians are entitled to delivery service five days a week. Canada Post was already starting to cut service to which Canadians are entitled, that is to say mail delivery five days a week.

On June 14, Canada Post ordered a national lockout; in other words, it shut out employees and prevented them from doing the work that makes it possible to deliver the mail five days a week. Now postal employees are being deprived of their bargaining right and their right to work, while Canadians are being deprived of their mail.

As a number of you previously noted, this work stoppage, this lockout, means that a number of our constituents and we ourselves are being deprived of mail delivery, in particular the delivery of cheques, as was mentioned: pension cheques and all other cheques. As was also said, seniors are often the hardest hit; they may not be used to using the Internet or simply cannot afford it.

• (3245)

Once again, my colleagues who live in rural regions have rightly noted that some places in those regions do not have Internet service and that most people are more confident about receiving their cheques through the mail than via the Internet. And yet Canada Post workers had taken steps for cheques to be distributed to the public, but have been unable to make delivery since the lockout. The people affected by this situation are thus in a tenuous financial situation because they still have to pay their bills and rent and buy groceries.

As the members here have also mentioned, the same is also true of small and medium-sized enterprises that rely on Canada Post's services to place and ship orders. I believe the present government is setting a dangerous precedent by interfering with the legitimate right of workers to negotiate with their employer. This government's priority, which has been clearly and expressly stated, is the greater interests of the economy.

I rise to speak about the best interests of people, of Canadians, of workers. It is should be remembered that the economy is not an end but rather a means to an end, which helps us organize our society and promote a fair division of our country's wealth. We must have income security, security for the future, security for retirees, and for our youth as they enter the labour market, so that they too have access to benefits, pensions and programs including disability insurance, and insurance in case of injury or other misfortune.

I do not understand why this government, which talks about standing up for the best interests of the economy would, alongside Canada Post, lock out workers. The government's own actions have jeopardized the best interests of the economy that it cares so much about.

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I do not believe that this government interference in a legitimate bargaining process is consistent with the role assigned to us. This legislation is going to favour the employer at the expense of employees, who will be deprived of the opportunity to negotiate. Moreover, the government has taken it upon itself to diminish wage conditions previously proposed by the employer. The vested rights of postal workers are at stake here: retirement plans, disability insurance programs, working conditions and wage conditions.

Canada is recognized for its quality of life and social values, which make it possible for all Canadians to access programs and benefits that are the envy of many a country. This helped Canada weather the economic turmoil of recent years. This government's actions are, in our opinion, a "Walmarting" of employment and lead to low wages, job insecurity, and a chipping away of benefits. This government's actions bring us yet another step closer to the US model.

• (3250)

Can we not learn from Americans by not repeating their mistakes? Our Canadian society is based on a system where inequalities are less profound than in the United States where there are glaring disparities including huge gaps between the rich and the poor. As a Canadian and Quebecker, I want to stand up for the values of a fair and just society. I want to stand up for the rights of workers, the right to negotiate to improve conditions, so that each and every one of us may benefit.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliament of Canada does not just represent people who have pension plans, people who are members of unions. We represent all Canadians.

I am hearing from my constituents as well. When Paula Fletcher, who is one of our last remaining pork producers in Renfrew county calls, I know that there is something really amiss. She emailed me a couple of weeks ago, asking:

What is this ridiculous news I heard this morning that the Government is thinking of legislating the Air Canada workers back to work? And yet they let the Canada Post workers go on strike and shut down the entire country's mail service. Do they not realize that a postal strike negatively affects business? Flying mostly affects people rich enough to travel—though I know some travel for business, most do not. We can certainly see the priority of the Harper Government. I thought Mr. Harper was concerned with the economic recovery of Canada. If companies can't get—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Timmins-James Bay is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am not sure if she does not understand, or maybe she made a mistake, maybe she is tired, maybe she is trying to slip in the name of the Prime Minister, but I think that she should go back a few steps and remind herself that she cannot use the name of the Prime Minister, nor his government, nor what he is doing, by referring to him personally.

Government Orders

I think it is only fair that we follow the decorum in this House and the long-standing rules that have been established in the Westminster system of Parliament.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Timmins-James Bay is quite correct that members cannot use the names of other members. I appreciate that it happens from time to time, inadvertently. So I will go back for a quick question from the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I meant to say “Prime Minister”.

She asked: “If companies can't get supplies or can't ship product, they will go out of business. Air travel is, for most, a luxury. Postal service is a necessity.”

This is an everyday Canadian. I am calling upon the member opposite to stop holding Canada hostage and let our postal service resume by allowing the legislation to go forward.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would like to emphasize as I begin my point of order that points of order do not come off the five-minute question and comment period, so I would like to have the clock stopped at all times.

I would like to ask the hon. member to withdraw her comments that we are holding Canadians hostage. I think this is beneath the tone of debate that we should have in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has risen on a second point of order. Maybe I will take this opportunity to clarify for all members in the House a couple of issues: one has to do with points of order; the second has to do with the clock and whether it continues or stops when a point of order has been raised. This second issue has come up a couple of times in the last half hour.

I would like to remind all hon. members that at any point during proceedings, with the exception of question period, members have the right to stand and raise points of order. This is an important right that all members have, and I think we would all agree that the Speaker needs to respect that right and immediately go to that person.

As all hon. members will know, there are times when a point of order is obviously legitimate, when an issue is raised that clearly needs to be addressed. As an example of a legitimate point of order, I will not use the one just raised by the member for Timmins—James Bay. I will use the one raised a couple of minutes ago regarding the use of a member's name in the House. It has been my experience that the use of another member's name is usually inadvertent and not deliberate. Nevertheless, this needs to be addressed. Therefore, that point of order is dealt with by the Chair.

It is also often the case that members will rise using the process of a point of order to stop debate for something that the Chair determines is not a legitimate point of order. In this case, I appreciate that the member for Timmins—James Bay has recently provided us with an example of this type of point of order in his second intervention. The Chair is also required to deal with whether something is debate rather than a procedural issue or a point of order.

This brings us to the second point, which is the question of the clock and whether, when a point of order is raised, the clock continues or not. I would point out to all hon. members that it is the Chair who decides how long speeches are and that the clock is a guideline to the Chair. But at the end of the day it is actually the person in the chair who determines when it is the end of someone's speech and whether something can be added or not.

The general practice is that, if the point of order raised is legitimate, made quickly, and pertains to the business before the House, the clock does not stop and the time continues. If, however, in the view of the Chair, the point of order is being raised in an attempt to slow things down, to take away from the presentation, or to deprive another member of the opportunity to raise a point of order, the Chair has the right to add that time.

For example, when a member is making a 10-minute speech and a member from another party raises a point of order and carries on at length on what does not seem to be a legitimate point of order, the member is not punished and time is added to the member's speech. Conversely, if a member of the same party as the person making the presentation uses the same approach, often the clock is not stopped. I am sure all hon. members will agree that the Chair has an incentive not to encourage mischief but to respect the right of members to use the point of order process when it is appropriate. Members, however, must not abuse this process in an attempt to reduce or increase the speaking time of a colleague.

This is the process that is used. In the last 15 minutes, there have been examples of all these situations. Please let me assure everyone that all chair occupants do their best to do this job fairly. The Chair is charged with making sure that the rights of all hon. members are respected, and that those who have an allotted amount of time to make a presentation are not punished by having their time reduced by the actions of others, particularly when it is determined that this is the entire purpose of the point of order.

● (3255)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I feel I should put it on the record that I have incredible respect for your judgment. You have given us a very judicious and wise response. Certainly members of our caucus will take note of that and ensure that any of the points of order we raise will be in the interest of debate and will not be any sort of mischief.

I do respect the Chair and what is happening in this House is an important debate. I want to apologize if I was too enthusiastic earlier.

● (3300)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair respects that intervention from the hon. member and thanks him for having made several examples clear to this House of what we can and cannot do.

I also note the clock has been stopped in this case. I am going to ask that it be started again. We will continue with questions and comments.

It has been pointed out that the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard did not have an opportunity to respond to the question posed by the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

She reminded me of something I forgot to mention in my speech, that is, that decent working conditions lead employees to stay where they are because they are content. It is not necessarily only in the public sector where this happens. This also happens in private companies that provide their employees with good working conditions and I find this encouraging.

Canada Post workers simply want to see this continue. They want good working conditions that do not deteriorate. When people have that, they tend to stay put. Other kinds of businesses have higher turnover rates because of instability or because the working conditions are not very good. As my colleague mentioned, this is quite common and I think it is very important to have good working conditions in order to ensure continuity.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I received an email last night from a constituent in Guelph. His name is George. He is a CUPW member. He delivers the mail and he is anxious to get back to delivering the mail.

George suggested that the post office simply unlock the doors and let everybody get back to work. They would continue to work. They would continue to negotiate in good faith and would go through the normal mediation and arbitration process. He figures that within 24 hours people would have their mail again.

I'm wondering what the member would say to that suggestion, as opposed to the draconian measures that are found in the bill put forward by the government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

That is what we have been defending all along. At present, we have a government that wants to impose its own conditions on a legitimate bargaining process.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, anytime I have spoken in the House over the past seven years, I have usually been able to say that I am pleased to take part in the debate on a particular bill. Today, however, June 24, my pleasure is considerably lessened because I am quite sad that I cannot be in my constituency right now.

In less than an hour from now, I was supposed to take part in an activity, a mass, with some people and then, as in the past, I would have continued celebrating with my constituents until the wee hours of the morning. Basically, I usually celebrate Quebec's nation holiday as a Quebecker, and not just as a member of Parliament. We are always members of Parliament, even when we go grocery shopping.

It saddens me to be here, especially since my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour tried to seek unanimous consent to interrupt the debate today and resume it again later.

The issue here is not playing the government's game by passing the bill and returning to our ridings to be on vacation for three months, as the media likes to say. Every MP is going to take some vacation, but they will continue to work during the summer period, to receive constituents in their office and take part in all the summer festivities in their riding. In any event, we are here for one reason. We were elected to work, to legislate. There is a bill before us and it is our responsibility to address the matter.

The government's Bill C-6 is an affront to democracy. Everyone has the right to fair and equitable working conditions. The summary of the bill is quite clear as to the government's intention to use a sledgehammer to impose conditions on the postal workers. The summary of the bill states:

This enactment provides for the resumption and continuation of postal services and imposes a final offer selection process to resolve matters remaining in dispute between the parties.

On reading the bill we see that an arbitrator, no matter how competent—it will not be his fault if he has to rule on the working conditions—will have no choice but to side with the conditions imposed by the employer. As far as I am concerned, it is not a matter of taking sides. I have always said we must side with the negotiation process, the possibility for both parties to reach an agreement. The government has not seen it that way from the very start.

I just got a reaction from the Conservative members when I said that Ronald Reagan had acted no differently in the 1980s by straight out dismissing air traffic controllers who had used pressure tactics to get fair working conditions. I even heard someone yell that it worked at least. Perhaps it worked, perhaps it is a right-wing way to impose rules, to be in control of a situation. But when it comes to a social environment, I do not think that this is the right attitude for a responsible government to take. The postal workers will go back to work and, if the conditions set out in the bill are imposed on them until the end of that collective agreement, so until 2015, the environment in the postal offices will be terrible.

At the post office in Victoriaville, during the conflict when the rotating strikes had begun, scabs arrived. The police had to step in because a scuffle broke out. Fortunately, nothing too serious happened.

The same thing happened in Sherbrooke, and some people tried to do the job of the postal workers. There are rules that need to be followed in those cases. That does not mean that all work is prohibited, but the work of postal workers must not be done by scabs.

We must also understand that there were negotiations during this conflict. We were told that the Canada Post Corporation was not too inclined to negotiate because the sword of Damocles, in the form of a special bill, was being held over the heads of employees. All we had to do was wait. When the rotating strikes began, there was some inconvenience to Canadians.

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● (3305)

However, there was no major disruption since the unions had decided against a general strike. Rotating strikes were a way of getting their point across by inconveniencing certain categories of people in a particular sector for a specific period, with a different sector being affected a day or so later. This meant that those affected by the initial round of rotating strikes were no longer inconvenienced. Despite this, the employer reacted immediately by locking out workers, causing great inconvenience.

So, when I hear the government say that this is hurting the economy, it is important to consider what exactly occurred. The threat of special legislation caused Canada Post to lock out workers because it knew that the legislation would force employees to agree to conditions that were undoubtedly unacceptable to them. The buck therefore stops with the government. The threat of special legislation was looming and precipitated the lockout by Canada Post. Of course, all the employer had to do was wait for the infamous special legislation, for conditions to be set by an arbitrator, and then simply wash its hands of the matter, with no need to negotiate.

It was the government's responsibility to ensure that a proper mediation process was in place and certainly not to specify in the special legislation that it would be left up to an arbitrator to choose between the two offers. It was like pouring salt on a wound when the decision was made to include in the special legislation lower wages than previously offered by Canada Post. And then there were the "orphan clauses". In short, the government went to great lengths to ensure that Canada Post would have the upper hand in the "bargaining process".

The Conservative government is largely responsible for the economic consequences it has spoken of today. Considering the government's approach and its legislation, Bill C-6, it is no surprise to read of "Conservative arrogance", the title of a *Le Soleil* editorial. Allow me to quote Brigitte Breton, the author of this article:

By introducing Bill C-6, the Conservatives have demonstrated that the public interest is by no means the only thing motivating them. The opportunity to show people who is in charge in Ottawa is too good to miss. That much was made abundantly clear by the inclusion in the bill of inferior wage conditions to those offered by Canada Post.

That summarizes what I have just said. We saw the same thing with Air Canada, when the government immediately said that it would introduce special legislation. They had not even started to use specific pressure tactics, there were no particular hardships, and right away, the government wanted to put a stop to it. It said that people would return to work, regardless of how, regardless of the work climate that would ensue. I think this is important, because all of that has an affect on the service being provided to the public.

I believe that workers at Air Canada, as well as Canada Post, like all workers in the public sector or semi-public sector, whether they are unionized or non-unionized, always want to work as hard as they can to provide the best possible service. However, when they return to work, their tails between their legs, because someone has imposed working conditions that go against what we have always stood for, conditions that the employer had subjected them to and that jeopardized their pension plans, this means that, whether we want it or not, services to the public could be affected because there will be a

poor work climate. Obviously, I am once again directly blaming the government for this.

To sum up, the Bloc Québécois will obviously continue to oppose this bill, which is nothing more than the Conservative government trying to impose its own views.

● (3310)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his speech. We worked together for quite some time on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and I always appreciate his comments. I know he works very hard on behalf of farmers, not only in Quebec, but across Canada, including on the Canadian Wheat Board. I would like to thank him.

One thing that is not being talked about here, which I would like to point out again, is that Canada Post made \$281 million in profits in 2009 and it must give part of its profits to the government.

Would it not make more sense to allow Canada Post to keep its profits so it can resolve these issues and improve things for its employees, while still earning profits? Is that not robbery? Is the government not stealing that money from the Canada Post workers?

● (3315)

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague and I would like to return his compliments. I really enjoyed working with him on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food these past few years. I have always said that this member is unlike any other member, because he has always been able to set all partisanship aside. Thus, I consider him a friend and I would have liked to continue working with him on that committee, but as a member of a party that is not recognized in this House, I can only sit at the table and have no right to speak. Perhaps those rules need to be changed, but that is not the subject of the current debate.

I agree with him completely, especially considering the statistics he mentioned. The same year, 2009, Canada Post Corporation took in over \$7 billion in revenues. That is a lot of money. I agree completely with his suggestion. As for wage cuts, every Canada Post employee will lose \$875 because of the provisions of this bill.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for his speech.

What message is the government sending to young people with this special legislation? We know from the provisions of the bill that the salary for new employees will be much lower.

What message is the government sending to all young people who are looking for a good, stable job and who want to start a family?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question.

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It is a very bad message that is being sent. It is a message that tells young new workers that we consider them to be second-class employees. They are coming into a situation where a collective agreement has been negotiated—or imposed, if the special legislation is being applied—and we are saying that they have the same job, the same workload and the same skills, but that they are at a lower class. That is the message.

We should not be surprised when it comes to the Conservative government. We have always said we needed to fear this and we have always feared that this government would gain a majority. Since Parliament resumed on May 2, we have been faced with work conflicts that were not even conflicts yet, but conflicts in their early stages, with Air Canada and Canada Post. But you are now seeing the imposition of special legislation, it is the gag order, it is censorship, it is a blow, when we could have favoured mediation, real negotiation. This is what we do and what we should be doing in a fair democratic society.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to participate in the debate this morning. It is an important debate for a number of different reasons, not only with regard to a crown corporation but also with regard to where we move as a country and the type of atmosphere in our country.

There is no doubt we are seeing a more hostile atmosphere with regard to workers. That atmosphere has been transitioning a number of different jurisdictions in North America and it is no longer outside of our border. That is rather unfortunate because it counters what Canadians expect and want.

Canada Post is a successful crown corporation. It has also been successful in creating a dynamic country. Canada stretches from the most remote areas to populace areas along the border, where 80% of Canadians live. Through Canada Post, small, rural areas receive tremendous service that connects them to bigger areas. People like that environment. They like the coast to coast to coast connection. They like the diversity.

Canada Post is part of our infrastructure, just like our railroad system. It goes back to the founding of our country. Communication is important in our country's vast geographical area. It sometimes defies the logic of history with regard to conflict, growing communities and so forth. Our communities have been able to grow in a very healthy environment for the most part. We have had our bad moments, but we have also had our strengths. Canada Post has been a part of that.

Communication is the art of moving forward. As a result of what the government has done, there is no communication right now. Canada Post has locked its workers out of their jobs and the government has given their employer a mandate to push them down. The government has denied the workers that element of communication, and that is sad.

No matter what comes out of this situation over the next few hours or days, the fact is people will have to go back to work. Most Canadians want to go to work every day, but not enough of them have the opportunity to go to a job they like. The men and women who work in my local post office and serve my community like to go

to work. It is not always pleasant. There are always issues, but these people want to be part of a system that Canadians respect.

Our system has been tremendously successful. Canada Post pays its millions of dollars in profits back to the government. At the same time, it has some of the lowest rates and the best service. There are problems here and there, but there is accountability. Private systems around the world have higher costs, less service and less accountability.

Canadian taxpayers own this crown corporation. They have a vested interest in it, and I am not talking about the trucks or the physical structures. I am talking about the people, our fellow Canadian citizens, who deliver the mail and look out for their community when they go door to door every day.

I cannot tell the House the number of times I have heard from citizens about a post office worker who has noted something in the community. Our postal workers are the eyes and ears of our communities. They go beyond their job. They help out people in trouble, because they feel it is their duty. They take pride in the uniform they wear.

One of the things that is really important to acknowledge in this debate and one that I find tremendously offensive is the whole notion of two-tier wages. The two-tier wages being proposed reduce the wages for new employees by 18%. It is really equal work for less pay.

There used to be times when that was acceptable. Employers were allowed to discriminate based on the colour of one's skin or because the individual was a female or of ethnicity. We stopped that in our country because it was unfair. It does not matter what one looks like or who that person is. If he or she does the same work, then that individual should be entitled to the same wages, benefits and everything else. That is a founding principle of social justice that needs to be looked at here. An 18% reduction in wages is a slap in the face, not only to the new workers who will be hired by Canada Post but also to what we are trying to do.

As a young father, I want my kids to go to post-secondary school. I want them to graduate. I want them to find a job. Why would I want them to get 18% less at Canada Post or another crown corporation just because they are young and new? Canada Post wants to take advantage of that. It will have a higher turnover rate. That is what happens in these environments. They have higher turnover rates and less pensions to pay out in the future.

● (3320)

We are asking for that. The government is setting up a system and leading it through the public sector to tell the private sector that two-tier waging is okay. What is very important about this is we will pay for it anyway. Those new people will wait another five years to get a pension. Even if they put up with the two-tier wages, even if they stay there, they will have to wait an additional five years for a pension.

Government Orders

What will happen when they exit Canada Post? They will rely more upon the public sector again, the taxpayers. Instead of having a planned system in place that we can afford and manage and that allows employees to contribute back to the Canadian economy, employees will be shortchanged. They will have less benefits. They will have less money. I see it on the streets every day. I have canvassed so many times over the last number of years during so many different elections. Every time I go out, I get more worried because I see people struggling to provide education for their kids. They are borrowing more. At the same time, they cannot provide food or pay their bills the way they used to. They do not feel they are moving forward.

We see so many community organizations that are growing. They are having to pick up the slack.

The two-tier wage issue is interesting. When the Conservatives came back to power, they did not have any MPs or senators on a two-tier wage plan. They did not ask them to wait another five years for their pensions. They did not take an 18% pay cut because they believed in it. They are not leading by example.

The minister and the government are saying to a crown corporation that it is okay to lock people out of their jobs, that it is okay to put the rest of Canada on hold. Those workers have invested value in the place they work. The government is going to set the example that it is possible to have a two-tier system with less pensions.

Why do the Conservatives not do this for themselves? It is in their legislation. They are supporting a Canada Post contract with wage differences. Why do they not lead by example then, if that is what they believe in?

I believe in equal pay for equal service. I believe it is time to stop burdening our youth. Students across Canada owe around \$16 billion right now for federal loans alone.

This is the benefit that we will get out of this. The taxpayers will save a little of money out of this. We will send some new people to work with less money. They have higher debt. The average debt load per person is around \$20,000 after two years of post-secondary education. On top of that, they pay interest at a premium above the borrowing rate. Those students are trying to enter the economy. They are coming out later in life. They are going to have their children later in life. They are going to have less pensionable years.

In this situation the government is helping legislate a system that is unsustainable. It is unsustainable as it is, but it is also a poor example. We do not want to tell businesses and other employers that reducing wages is a solution. The government did this for the auto sector. With regard to the recent recession, it was the mismanagement and the greed which caused the collapse in the U.S. and in Canada, with the stockholders and the different money-laundering, yet they never paid for any of it. In fact, they got bonuses. As a solution, they cut the salaries and pensions of auto workers, but that was not the problem. The problem was mismanagement, bad spending and lack of accountability.

I have seen the face of Canada Post and the deception. It tried to close the postal office in Sandwich Towne. The actual document was leaked to me. Canada Post's business case included money for a full-

time manager for the area from Windsor to London. It put the entire salary in there to build the case that it was not sustainable. Because we had the information leaked to us, we were able to prove that and stop it from closing down the postal office. It wanted to close it down for ideology reasons.

This is about the ideology to reduce wages and pensions because, for whatever reason, it has come to be seen as a legacy cost. Wages and pensions are not a cost. They are a net benefit to this community. They are a net benefit to our country and that is what we should work for. We can afford them because we have the money.

• (3325)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member's characterization of this matter as an ideological debate. When there is a right-wing party and a left-wing party in a chamber such as this, the result is ideological debate and the consequence is stalemate.

Clearly the government is trying to jam the union. If workers' rights are to be suspended, an alternative must be put in place. That is manifestly fair.

Clearly the NDP has said this process is not manifestly fair. It is the same with our party, but now we have an ideological slanging match between hard right and hard left.

What is interesting to me, and I would be interested in the hon. member's comments, is the near indifference of Canadians to this ideological slanging match. During the course of this debate I have received precisely one email in my office, and no visits whatsoever. That person was particularly unsympathetic to both sides.

I would be interested in the hon. member's comments with respect to this ideological slanging match.

• (3330)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to respond to ideology.

We are calling for proper process. The Conservatives' ideology is what is doing this. We are calling for the proper process to go through arbitration. We are calling for the law that has been normal practice to unfold here. That is what we are calling for.

If the issue is about indifference, that is the difference between the hon. member and me. I remember the days when the member would call for larger corporate tax cuts. Now the policy in his party has changed. It is quite different. There is a phone book of *Hansards* in which the hon. member's party called for large corporate tax reductions.

At some point in time when it comes to my party and where I stand, sometimes it may feel as though there is indifference there, but values of social justice drive us. We know the truth with regard to what is going to happen here. We are going to stand with those who sometimes do not have somebody by their side.

That is how we got health care in this country. That is how we got pensions. That is how we have a difference between our parties. It is because we will care for and stand with those who sometimes are alone.

Government Orders

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can see that my colleague sees all the social groups as complementary. The opposite is the government, which sees all social groups as a potential way to manipulate and turn them one against the other.

I would like to hear my colleague talk a little more about how this bill is again pushing that way of seeing society by the government.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague's question is very germane to what is happening here in terms of the Canada we are potentially moving towards.

The government is quite clear. By using this example, the government is setting the table for the private sector to use these divisive tactics in its negotiations.

Living on the doorstep of the United States, I have witnessed what has been taking place there with their overall ideology for a number of years. We have seen this happen in the United States, and it is not working. They are not becoming more productive. They are not becoming more effective.

That is why I stand here today to appeal to Canadians who are watching this debate. The workers are locked out. They are good workers. They want to work for a crown corporation that returns a benefit to them and their families. All they are asking for is the simple benefits they have enjoyed in the past and their right to be able to raise their families with dignity and integrity.

What is happening is an attempt to use the lockout to divide Canadian public opinion. People are taking the position that the workers are on strike. They are not; they are locked out. They want to go to work. They are fighting for the best service they can deliver for people in this country. That is what it is about.

If my neighbour or the person bringing my letters to the box every day is young or new, why should that person be paid 20% less? Why should that person have a smaller pension than anyone else? They are doing the same job.

It is only right. It is as simple as thinking of social justice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my speech by pointing out that it is now — not technically — but actually June 24, which is Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. I would like to congratulate all my constituents on this Quebec national holiday. Unfortunately, I cannot be with them today. I would very much liked to have been able to be there. Our leader attempted to negotiate an arrangement with the Prime Minister that would have allowed Quebec MPs to return to their ridings to celebrate such an important holiday with their constituents. Unfortunately, the response from the Prime Minister was a firm no. We can see the true face of the Conservatives today. There is a total lack of respect for Quebec and its people. I will now move on to something else.

The NDP is here to defend the rights of workers. On June 3, letter carriers and all Canada Post employees began rotating strikes to put a little pressure on management. This rotating strike was perfectly legal and allowed the mail to reach its destination within a very reasonable time period.

They are fighting for better and safer working conditions. Not many people know it, but I am a chiropractor. Not long ago, I had a patient, a woman letter carrier. I cannot go into details, but as the months went by, I was truly able to see that the work of letter carriers is very demanding physically, particularly once I saw how her return to work went. It showed me just how demanding her job was.

These people wanted to work. In any event, my patient truly wanted to return to work to earn her pay, to be sure, but also to help her community, even though her working environment was unsafe. Winter means ice and icy patches, and they have to do their job even when there are snowstorms. In the summer, when the heat can be oppressive, they have to carry all their mail over their shoulder. This creates a great deal of musculoskeletal pain — that's just a bit of chiropractor jargon. In short, these people work very hard. They deserve to be treated with dignity, particularly when they ask to have included in their collective agreement a safer working environment.

These workers also want, through their labour action, to say no to the cuts that management is trying to force upon them. These attacks affect 48,000 workers and their families. That represents many people in Canada. They make the economy run, whether in Canada, Quebec, or Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. That is why the NDP is going to stand up as long as it takes to defend the rights of workers and families.

Their union opted for highly responsible rotating strikes. This showed respect for the people who wanted to receive their mail. They received it in a timely manner. It also showed respect for their workers, to enable them to put a little pressure on the government.

On the other hand, Canada Post decided to lock them out. That is why we are here today. As a result of this lockout, the mail has definitely stopped reaching people's mailboxes. That was a smart move by Canada Post. We have seen over the past few days and will continue to see over the coming days just how this decision has placed Canada and its people in a very complex situation.

The union also proposed to Canada Post that it end the lockout to allow people to continue working and negotiating at the same time. However, for some strange reason, Canada Post refused. The crown corporation has really shot itself in the foot. The Canada Post team has decided to keep up a hard line approach, not unlike the one the Conservative government is trying to impose on the postal workers.

● (3335)

It is important to remember one thing: the media often talks about a postal strike, but this is not a strike; it is a lockout. The main problem lies with the employer, Canada Post. The employees have the right to negotiate their collective agreement in good faith with their employer. It is a right that has been earned over time. The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer provided a very interesting history of the union movement in Canada.

Government Orders

However, this is not a negotiation in good faith. The government is trying to impose a contract on the workers, but it is not the government's role to do so. The bill clearly sides with the employer. It is irresponsible of the government to act in this way. We even see that the bill encroaches on the Canada Post employees' freedom to negotiate. As a result, the two parties in this situation cannot honestly negotiate with one another. What is more, the government is proposing lower salaries than the ones Canada Post was offering a few days ago during the negotiations. What is happening right now truly makes no sense.

In fact, I wonder why the government insisted on offering so little to the workers, even less than Canada Post management wanted to offer their employees. Personally, I think this is a conflict of interest. Just consider where Canada Post's profits end up. This is a corporation that generates millions of dollars every year. Who owns Canada Post? The Government of Canada does. At the end of the day, cutting payroll expenses at Canada Post will boost profits. Where will the profits go? They will go into the government's coffers. What will the government do with this surplus money? During the election campaign, there was talk of investing \$35 billion in purchasing fighter jets and there was talk of megaprisons. I do not think it is ethical to cut employees' salaries and benefits to invest more in the Conservative government's ideological program. That is my view as an NDP MP.

What message is the government sending with its approach? It is implying that, if a contract is unfair, it is not a big deal; if employees do not agree with their employer, it is not a big deal—the government will take action, it will impose a framework that will put them at a disadvantage and it will cut everyone's wages. Recently, with the orphan clause, it has been said that there would be a second generation of employees, often young people, who will not have the same benefits as employees with more experience.

I think it is a bit hypocritical of the Conservative government whose ideal is to reduce the size of the government; now that it is in power, it is meddling a lot in the labour relations between employees and their employer.

Since I do not have much time left, I will briefly point out that Canadians have fought over many years and decades to be where they are today, to have decent salaries and benefits. Not all Canadians are privileged to have these benefits. We should not be lowering our standards in Canada. Our society is going through economic recovery. In our society, everyone should be elevated, not cut back and brought down to minimum wage. Like the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, I do not want to see the postal service privatized and I do not want to have to go to Wal-Mart to get my mail.

• (3340)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I welcome my colleague, another chiropractor, to the House. Perhaps we could work on straightening this thing out by aligning both parties so we can come to some resolution.

In the big picture of things, this is what the government is trying to do. We have looked at the disagreement between the two parties

and we have seen two parties that cannot come to an agreement. We have seen rotating strikes, which has cost Canadians over \$100 million. There has been a lockout. Obviously these two sides cannot come to together.

What would the member do with the rest of the workers in Canada? The calls I am getting in my office are from seniors and people on disability who require their cheques, and small businesses that are relying on cheques going back and forth consistently in order to pay their bills. Small business is now responsible for the employment of most Canadians.

We are trying to end this now as quickly as possible, get everybody back to work and have a reasonable solution. Unfortunately, the NDP want to keep us here. I should be in Oshawa today for 11 o'clock. We are celebrating Saint Jean Baptiste Day too. I find it very disrespectful.

We need to work together and help continue this recovery. What would the member say to those—

• (3345)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with the Conservative member, who is also of the same profession as I am. We in the NDP also want workers to get back to work as quickly as possible. The workers and their union are calling for an end to the lockout, and rightly so, so they can resume work and start delivering the mail again every day, and so they can negotiate their collective agreement at their own pace.

My colleague wants the postal workers to return to work and so do we. The NDP does not believe however that a collective agreement should be imposed that penalizes them and that is not as generous as what Canada Post had already offered.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his remarks today.

I would also like to wish a wonderful Fête nationale to all my colleagues from Quebec who are present. Like them, I would have liked to be in my riding today to celebrate with those dear to me.

I would like to ask a question about the “orphan clause” in the bill. One of the concerns raised by constituents in my vast riding relates to young people and the message we should be sending them. My fellow citizens of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou are very proud to see so many young people and women in our party. I would like to ask my colleague's opinion as to the message the government is sending in this regard.

Mr. Dany Morin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the NDP for his question.

As a young person of the age of 25, I am fortunate to be in a job where I am my own boss. At least I was before I became a full-time MP. Many young people have difficulty finding work as we are coming out of an economic recession.

Government Orders

Young people who are looking for work would love to find a job with decent wages and good working conditions so they can start a family and stay in their home region, whether that is Abitibi or Lac-Saint-Jean.

Yet with the focus on cutting wages and benefits, there will be a generation of young people with little job security or who do not make enough money to make a proper start in life. This is not the right message that the Conservatives are sending.

[For continuation of proceedings see part C]

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, June 23, 2011
(Part C)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 23, 2011

[Continuation of proceedings from part B]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (3350)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would have preferred to make my first speech in the House under more positive circumstances, but the government chose otherwise.

As the saying goes, it helps to sleep on it. But in my case, sleeping on it has raised some questions. I was anxious to return to the House to share my concerns. I must admit that after the election, I was worried about our country's progressive values. I was worried that we take a step backwards with the social gains that Canadian society worked brilliantly at great cost to earn over the course of our history.

I never thought that the Conservative government could threaten the structures of Canada's economic success themselves. I must admit that I was surprised about that. I see that this is the reality today, and I wonder why and what the government's goal is.

The public must understand that the Conservative government is trying to create a precedent. The Conservative government never hid its intentions. The Minister of Labour recently reiterated that the government's priority was to support economic growth, and that it would intervene in any labour dispute that could jeopardize that.

Any labour dispute? What does that mean? It is now very clear that the government will jump in indiscriminately. It is one thing to support development, to support businesses that create jobs, but it is an entirely different thing to systematically attack workers.

The New Democratic Party is in an interesting position, since we must remind the Conservative government of some fundamental principles of our economy. Simple principles. In our economy, the workers are also consumers. They are customers who use their incomes to keep the economy rolling.

One concept is fundamental to our economy: offer better wages to employees and they will buy more cars; offer better wages to employees and they will buy houses, consumer goods and services. But if you lower wages and cut employee benefits, you are attacking the very foundation of the modern economy.

The Conservative government is proposing a single formula: support economic development by reducing the purchasing power of workers. The government is adding insult to injury by simulta-

neously suggesting that Canadians reduce their debt levels. Workers who have supported Canada's economic growth for years, by going into debt of over 140% of their income, are now forced to accept that the government is making their debt level even worse by decreasing their disposable income. In what economic dream world is the government living?

The Conservative government is getting all worked up about the economic impact of the delays in mail delivery. It is condemning the temporary pressure tactics used by the workers, who are trying to preserve their purchasing power. And what does it do to resolve this temporary problem? It permanently reduces the income available to workers to support economic growth. What are we to take from this lack of logic? Do we just accept the excuse that the government continues to repeat, that its intervention is necessary to ensure economic development?

The answer is no. Instead, we need to unmask this government, which claims to be a champion of the economy but is flouting economic principles for ideological reasons. The Conservative government is interfering in the market economy and in the bargaining process between workers and their employer. Let the government suffer the consequences of its own lack of rigour.

If the NDP has to remind the government, citizens and especially the Minister of Labour that the Canadian economy is based on principles that have made us member of the G20 and an economic success worldwide, they can count on us. We will not allow the Conservatives to attack our economic prosperity. We will not allow the Conservatives to reduce the purchasing power of Canadians and further increase their level of debt. But above all, if the government insists on systematically interfering in negotiations between workers and employers, the NDP will systematically stand up to protect the Canadian economy and the principles that have made it so strong.

Now let us talk about the sense of urgency we see in the government. Not only has it rushed into this matter, not only has it gotten involved in a process that is none of its business, but it is also trying to force the adoption of a bill that will create a precedent that the government intends to systematically repeat, according to the very words of the Minister of Labour.

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What is the urgency the government is referring to? Let us be clear. It was never the intention of Canada Post employees to undermine Canada's economic stability. This accusation on the part of the Conservative government, this bugaboo that it has been unleashing on the House for several days now, is not convincing anyone. Canada Post workers are much more sensitive to the importance of the service they provide than the Conservatives are letting on. The government is forgetting that Canada Post's clients are the neighbours, family members, colleagues and friends of the crown corporations's employees. Accusing them of taking Canadians hostage is absurd.

Under an agreement reached before the dispute, Canada Post workers had already committed to delivering government cheques, such as welfare, old age security and family support payments. According to the union, nearly 9,000 members would have helped sort and deliver over 2 million cheques a month. But the lockout changed everything. That excessive measure is what interrupted mail service to Canadians. The scolding emails only started coming in after the lockout was imposed, the same emails that the government is now citing to justify its bill. I hope the government will keep those emails as a reminder of the harmful effects of its precipitous action. We will also send them all the emails from citizens who are disappointed by this government's actions.

Lastly, I would like to send greetings to all of my friends and constituents in the riding of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert who were expecting me today for our national holiday celebrations. Since moving to Quebec, I have come to enjoy this beautiful celebration. The national holiday has allowed me not only to celebrate the history of my new home province, but also to develop a sense of belonging. How I would have liked to be among my constituents to thank them for the incredible welcome they have extended to me. I would have liked to show my profound gratitude for the honour they have bestowed upon me by voting for change in Ottawa. I will simply have to put it off to another time.

In the meantime, I am here to do the job entrusted to me. I will remain here to represent the interests of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. And, if need be, I will stay here with my colleagues until Canada Day.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to touch on the sort of revenge factor that the member has built into at least her strategy, if not the entire party's.

I have been talking with constituents this morning. The great Kenora riding covers 326,760 square kilometres. There is no road access to 25 communities. The mail lies at the heart and soul and the ebb and flow of a lot of the business activity and social economic activity. We have an opportunity here to put these folks back to work which is what my constituents are overwhelmingly asking for. They are saying put back to work legislation in place so that we can get our regional economy and Canada's economy back on track.

I know the angles that the NDP is working here. Its members are saying that we could have had rotating strikes, or some sort of hybrid response, so that not too many things would be affected. But at the end of the day, seniors are not getting certain important pieces of mail. First Nations communities are not getting essential pieces of mail. Small businesses are suffering.

My question is quite simple. Does the member not believe at this point that putting an end to this by using back to work legislation is the most effective way for us to move forward?

● (3400)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from the other side for his question.

First, I would like to say that the situation has gotten worse since the lockout. The rotating strikes did not disrupt mail distribution for seniors and for all members of society. I want to point out that this happened when Canada Post locked out its employees. There is no point trying to blame the workers. The workers are proud of what they do. The workers are prepared to return to work if we unlock the doors at Canada Post.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I sincerely thank the member for her speech. It was very informative. At the same time, it seems as though it addressed a number of points I have been hearing since this morning, that NDP members are just talking for the sake of talking, that we just want to stall the debate and prevent people from doing all kinds of things, when that is not the case.

There are fundamental principles at stake. I will not allow our colleagues from the other side or from the second opposition party imply that our right to speak means nothing in this wonderful chamber. I was pleased to hear the member refer to that, because, even if we would have rather had the day off like everyone else, I think that the best interests of Canadians are at stake. When I say "Canadians," that includes workers and other people.

I would like the member to answer a question that we often hear from the other side about the fact that the union did not transmit the employer's offers, even though the union received its mandate from the employees at the start of negotiations and it is not obligated to return—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must interrupt the hon. member to give her colleague the chance to answer.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

I think Canada Post has been posturing since the beginning so the government would introduce this bill that we have been debating since yesterday. Canada Post had started making offers to the union but now the Conservative government is interfering and coming between the employer and its employees

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

First of all, as a Quebecker, let me begin by wishing all Quebeckers a wonderful Fête nationale.

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Unfortunately we cannot join in the celebrations today. This is distressing for me. It is very important to me to be a Quebecker and a Canadian. So the Fête nationale is extremely important to me. To all my fellow citizens of Alfred-Pellan, to all my family and friends, and to all of Quebec, happy Saint-Jean!

A whole generation of new workers entering the labour market will be affected by the bill the Conservative government has introduced. Why? First of all because young people are the next ones who will enter the labour market and who will become the next postal workers at Canada Post.

Allow me to point out just a few features of the bill we are debating. First of all, wages will be lower for the next workers hired. They will make \$875.50 less over four years than what was planned.

As for their pensions, the new employees will have to wait five years longer than others to be eligible for their pension.

That is not to mention the dangerous working conditions that Canada Post workers could face.

Because this bill affects the next generation of workers, I thought it very useful for all members of the House of Commons to hear what young people had to say on this subject. So I asked them, through various social media, what they thought about this subject, the lockout at Canada Post and the bill the government is bringing to the table.

Today, I want to give them a voice. I will let you hear what they had to say about this subject.

To start with, the first person, Daniel Carette, a young father, 26 years old, says that bargaining should proceed in the usual way, there should be no government intervention, and in addition, important government cheques are sent by mail in any event. So he suggests that the employees be allowed to bargain their agreement in peace. He adds that he is not very keen on unions, but he is on side with what was won in the old agreement, and it should not be eliminated from the new agreements, particularly when the employer is not having problems.

Philippe Long writes that he thinks the lockout is pointless, and that for the managers who are criticizing the employees because of their rotating strike to impose a general lockout and paralyze the country is no better.

A master's student at Laval University in Quebec City, Caroline Roy-Blais, wrote that Canada Post employees had decided not to take the public hostage, by organizing rotating strikes and continuing to deliver government cheques and other papers. She adds that the employers decided to impose a lockout so the government would get involved in the bargaining and compel the employees to "agree to" dangerous working conditions and lower wages for people hired in future.

She also says that she is against government intervention. First, she writes that although the government says it is a fan of the free market and is not interventionist, it is unabashedly intervening in the dispute. Second, she asks why two classes of employees are being created. Equal pay for equal work, she writes. Third, she says that employees' right of free association in a union is important, and employees should not be prevented from organizing to get better

working conditions, based on the entrepreneurial right to make money.

She also adds that we must not forget that the "orphan clause" is intended to give higher wages to postal workers who are already employed, but freezes wages for future employees. She suggests that this means that if someone is hired after the agreement is signed, they would not be entitled to the same wage for the same work! She concludes by saying that this is not fair at all.

● (3405)

Jean-François Paradis, a young father in the Montreal region, said that Canada Post was trying to impose a new distribution method that has tripled occupational injuries, which is not acceptable. This is a lockout. It is not a strike. There is no mail distribution because of Canada Post. If it goes on any longer, it is the fault of Canada Post, which was waiting for special legislation instead of negotiating.

I also received a short comment from Patrick Allard. He thinks this is a real shame.

This morning, another citizen, Eric Jacques, wrote to me. He said that Canada Post has been earning a profit every year for 16 years, yet managers say that they need to cut costs. Where is the logic there? Letter carriers were carrying out a rotating strike to maintain service, and the government said that it would not intervene as long as mail was being delivered. So Canada Post imposed a lockout, so that the government would take action and the corporation would not have to negotiate in good faith. If we truly want to improve the health of the economy, we need a plan with good wages, like those of mail carriers.

Those are just a few of the comments I received. That is what the next generation has to say about this labour dispute. These are engaged people who understand the problem. They do not understand what the Conservative government is trying to do.

I sincerely hope that the comments from these few Canadian citizens will be taken into consideration by members on the other side of the House, so that we can reach a better consensus for the sake of the workers.

● (3410)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech and I find some of it very misleading. She seems to want to portray the action the government is taking as unusual.

I would like to recount to her a bit of the recent history. In 1978, there was back to work legislation. In 1987, there was back to work legislation. In 1991, there was back to work legislation. In 1997, there was back to work legislation.

The reason is we have two parties that have a history of not settling. These are two opposite sides that have had over eight months to come up with some type of agreement. They have had numerous meetings with the minister. They have been given every opportunity to come up with an agreement.

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The real question that Canadians want answered is, how long is the NDP going to allow these two parties, together, to hold Canadians hostage?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

First of all, the NDP, like the workers, would be happy to see a return to work. It would be very simple to get workers back to work immediately, because all we have to do is unlock the doors. It is as simple as that.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her wonderful comments this morning. It has been so amazing to hear the very passionate speeches taking place about the principles that are at stake here and how people tackle these different principles. I notice that she spoke about the two tiers of salaries that were tabled by the employer and she also spoke about the next generation.

I wonder if the member could comment more about what a living wage or a decent wage is for a family. It seems unfair that the employer could tell employees because they are new and younger, they would therefore get less money. As someone who represents the younger generation, how does she feel about the fact that because a person is a new employee or is younger, he or she would get a lower wage?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very relevant question.

It is easy for me to imagine what it would be like for someone who went to work at Canada Post after the labour dispute and was subject to this two tier system. There are two people who do the exact same job, but do not have the same salary or benefits. Someone who was hired one month before me could retire five years earlier and would have more money in his pockets to support his family. That is completely unacceptable. We are doing exactly the same job. Equal pay for equal working conditions. That is all I have to say.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind my colleagues in the House that it was a certain member who said, in Montreal in 1997, “In terms of the unemployed of which we have over 1.5 million, don't feel particularly bad for these people”. Who said that? It was our present Prime Minister who quit his job as a member of this House because he felt he would better serve at the National Citizens Coalition where he ran the campaign to deunionize Canadian workforces.

We see the Conservatives today pretending they have the interests of the workers in hand. We have the old crocodile who has dressed himself as Little Bo Peep, and he has his bonnet pulled down over his snout to try to hide his true intention. However, if we pull the bonnet back, we will see the same dismissive attitude and the same arrogance against common working people on these benches today that we heard in 1997.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what she thinks about the Prime Minister's dismissive attitude towards working people.

● (3415)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan has roughly 40 seconds to answer that question.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, there is currently a real lack of respect for the workers, first with the lockout and now with this back-to-work legislation. It is absolutely unacceptable. There are other ways to handle this.

We truly advocate teamwork. We are prepared to negotiate with the government in order to come up with a better way to settle the current dispute at Canada Post.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like many of the MPs in the government, I too have been inundated, not with complaints, but with words of encouragement to continue our opposition to this interventionist bill.

Do the members opposite realize that their party is interventionist? The party that advocates individual and economic free enterprise at the expense of everything else is being interventionist, but not just anywhere. It is being interventionist for the sake of personal and political interests. The government is controlling workers, not companies. We are not naive. There have been other special bills like this before, but not when the Internet was in every home. Today, we can make payments by phone or by Internet. If anyone is left out, they can call their MP and people who can help them out. As others mentioned earlier, the most important cheques were being delivered. As I was saying, we are not naive. An agreement was reached between senior government officials and Canada Post to impose a lockout in order to introduce a special bill to reduce working conditions and force Canada Post employees back to work under lesser conditions.

I was listening to the radio this morning. Economists and sociologists were unanimous on this. I hope that certain people realize that their position is increasingly being challenged. The government can admit its mistake. We are prepared to work with the government to come up with a special bill that will suit all Canadians. The government would come under less criticism than if it continues on its current course. Once again, I am reaching out. I hope the government will listen to us and take our considerations and public opinion into account.

People back home fear that the current government's attitude will become more widespread and that the government will take away the fundamental rights of workers in Canada who contribute to the economy, which would not be viable if 75% of the population did not contribute to the tax base. I would like the minister to explain how she plans to deal with the potential loss of many high-quality jobs in our regions.

What do I tell the people in the various towns in my riding? They are fighting to keep their post office. The post offices are in part the heart of these villages. What do I tell people at Château Mont Ste-Anne who are currently locked out? Do I tell them to go back to minimum wage? What do I tell the AbitibiBowater retirees and workers who are worried about their pension funds? Do I tell them to go back to work until they are 70? They have paid into their pension all their life.

What do I tell the young workers in my riding and young Canadian workers? I myself am a young man. Do I tell them that they will have to work until the end of their days without security? Canadians have rights.

Is the government prepared to change its mind to suggest negotiation opportunities without flouting the workers' rights? Could this interventionist government work with us and listen to us to help Canadian workers? Could this interventionist government step back, reflect and admit its mistake?

• (3420)

I am reaching out. The entire NDP is reaching out. We can make other proposals for the good of the workers.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague said they are not naive on his side. After listening to his speech, I would put forward they are very naive. I would ask any member of the NDP who has run a business, met a payroll, and had to work with the postal service to run their business to stand up and let us know.

I am sitting next to my colleague, the newly elected member for Brampton. He runs a manufacturing business and needs cheques to come in before he can put cheques out to pay his employees. This is the type of small Canadian business that is being affected by this.

These two parties cannot make an agreement. They have to get this resolved. We are trying to get it resolved in the best way for both parties.

How long is the NDP going to allow these two parties to hold Canadians hostage? How long are they going to let that happen?

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, I do not think that he understood my message.

I have another proposal to make: remove the locks. That way, our colleague will have his cheque, and all the entrepreneurs will have their cheques and their papers.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member indicated the New Democrats are reaching out to the government. He is not the first one to make reference to the fact that they apparently have a series of amendments they would like to bring forward. I know the member is concerned about the postal workers and wants to see what it is they are referring to.

Can you explain to me why there is a need to hold back on sharing that information with members of the chamber? What is it the NDP are in fact looking at that could possibly assist us in trying to draw

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this thing to a conclusion in which we would find more people being able to have a discussion?

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague is well meaning in his question. What concerns me is if we are going to have fair bargaining, and we are attempting to bargain with the government, then we would be undermining our ability to build trust with the government by asking our members to reveal what those negotiations are.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe this is a question of debate.

I will ask the hon. member for Winnipeg North to complete his question very quickly.

• (3425)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, based on that point of order, I can assure the member that stood on the point of order that I likely have more confidence in the new member than I do in the member who has the experience.

Why not share with Canadians what it is the New Democrats are talking about so that we could actually have an engagement on that discussion? We might be able then to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I would like to give the hon. member time to respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that there are a great many possibilities. For example, we can keep the current collective agreement.

With the unanimous consent of the House, we can do what we want. If we decided together to amend the special bill with the unanimous consent of the House, we could leave in two hours, and it would be done.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to respond to the comment by the member on the opposite side.

I am a small-business person. I have three successful small businesses. They are all profitable. I understand small businesses. I am a lefty capitalist; I believe in profits, but I believe in sharing them equitably with the other people in our society.

Madam Speaker, thanks for this opportunity to speak to the government's legislation. The Conservative government is attempting to ram Bill C-6 through Parliament within hours of suspending the regular rules of the House, just as it did with the HST implementation bill.

Labour disputes happen in any modern market-based economy. They are a fact of life and a result of the competitive dichotomy set up between profit-centred companies and workers who push for living wages and safe working conditions. That is a normal situation for market-based economies, which you allegedly believe in.

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Normally, disputes work themselves out without a lot of government interference. I am surprised by the current government. Before the Conservatives were in office, and afterwards, they always talked about how they were all for smaller government and hands-off government that lets markets work things out for themselves. That is the claim.

Instead, though, we see a very interventionist government. This is a heavy-handed government that is now egregiously interfering in the collective bargaining process we have developed over many decades. For a party that claims a hands-off philosophy, this is the most meddlesome federal government in a very long time.

This is just another symptom of the fundamental changes happening within the Conservative Party. Conservatives in this government have wandered far from their roots. Their forefathers must be turning over in their graves.

Whatever happened to Conservative claims for small government? The first things they did after getting a phony majority was stack the Senate and appoint a huge ministry, one of the largest ministries in the history of Canada. There are more ministers, more limos for ministers, more perks, and more staff. All that was after they bulked up spending on the Prime Minister's Office. We have never had a PMO that is so large or that has spent so much.

The current government has always talked about fiscal responsibility, but its track record shows that it does not understand the concept. It is blowing billions on fighter jets, mega-prisons, and indiscriminate corporate tax handouts. It is opening military bases everywhere across the globe. In the process, it is racking up a record deficit, the largest deficit since Brian Mulroney.

Now it is interfering in labour market negotiations in a way that is nothing less than a violation of Canadians' Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If it does this now, where will it end? Will the government step in every time there is a dispute in the marketplace? Is it going to legislate every time two sides do not agree on something?

Let us be very clear. We have no postal service right now, because Canada Post shut down service completely. It locked its workers out.

I was disappointed to hear on the CBC this morning at 5 a.m., quoting the minister on that side, that this is a strike. There was no countervailing force on the news to indicate that it really is, as we know, a lockout, not a strike.

Let us start at the beginning. The workers had concerns about their contract. They went on rotating strikes a few weeks ago, on June 2, and there were some service slowdowns. Their attempts were measured, and they were responsible. It is true that it was not an ideal situation, but I did not hear any hue and cry from the people in my riding, including small businesses. Life went on during those rotating strikes.

After the workers started the rotating strikes, they even offered to end the strike action if the company would agree to keep the old contract in place during negotiations, but Canada Post refused. Then on June 15, Canada Post decided to lock everyone out and shut down Canada's mail service completely. That was irrational, and it was unreasonable. That is when I started to hear about it from my constituents. People rightly complained. Small businesses were

being affected. Canada Post management should have taken that into consideration before taking that irresponsible action.

● (3430)

However, instead of introducing legislation to end the lockout, to resume rotating service, and to get both sides back to the bargaining table, the government decided just a few days later to interfere with the right to collective bargaining and to impose a settlement below even what management had demanded. Therefore, Canada Post is being rewarded for shutting down the mail service that so many of our constituents rely on. This is a dangerous precedent, regardless of the particulars of this or any labour dispute.

Can any large corporation here in Canada, from now on, knowing the government's ideology, simply refuse to negotiate and then wait for the government to interfere and legislate people back to work? Will Canada Post be encouraged in the future to hold our postal service hostage anytime it does not feel like bargaining?

This is a dangerous path the Conservatives are leading the country down. It is one that would lead us to more entrenched positions, more, not less, labour unrest, and more, not less, interruption of the services Canadians rely on. What incentive will there be in the future for corporations to bargain in good faith or settle?

The government should not be in the business of imposing labour contracts for businesses and workers. That is not free or fair collective bargaining. That is not letting the process work. It is not letting the marketplace work. The Conservative government must stop interfering.

This is an extraordinary level of intervention for a government that says that it prefers to let the market sort things out. I am left wondering if this may have something to do with the government's desire to privatize Canada Post service and to reduce service to Canadians.

The government has been moving towards privatization for our postal service for a long time, and we know it. Canadians living in rural and remote areas, such as much of Thunder Bay—Superior North, will suffer most from this privatization. They are greatly impacted by these losses of service.

I have rural postal services in my own riding that are threatened. For example, the community of Dorion, in my riding, is about to lose its postal outlet this summer. This outlet is currently located in Canyon Country Service on Highway 11, and they are having to close permanently for circumstances beyond their control. However, Canada Post has found no local alternative. It has not let anyone know about any progress in finding one. This is not a good sign. It is one of our more worrisome examples of a worrisome Tory ideological obsession.

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Canada Post insists that it is still respecting its so-called policy of not shutting down rural services themselves, because they can throw up their hands and say that there is no alternative.

Despite a fat salary for the CEO and bonuses for its executives, Canada Post is profitable. It does not need to shut rural services any more than it needs to privatize or to walk away from the bargaining table in these labour negotiations. The company made \$281 million in profit last year. The CEO is making more than \$650,000 a year, and his salary is going up by a lot more than the rate of inflation and by a lot more than what the workers are requesting in these negotiations. Why take the desperate move to shut down all postal services across Canada?

I want to talk a little about the people who are impacted by the Canada Post lockout. As I said before, I am a small-business person. Of course, my business, like so many across the country, relies on post offices for service. Lots of businesses rely on that. Many send their payments by mail. The Canada Post lockout and shutdown of the service has negatively impacted them, and Canadians will carry the can for it, not the poor posties who want to do a good job for a reasonable rate of pay. This service is important to them. This is impacting the workers who want to work and have been locked out of their jobs in the same way Canadians have been locked out of their postal service.

I would like to read a quote:

Nobody knows how much the population of Canada still relies on the Post Office more than postal workers. We see the medication, the card\$ of \$upport to out-of-town students, the food being sent to the far north. We see the frustration of our co-workers when they see all that they have fought for over the years being stripped away in one fell swoop of a pen by [our] Communist [Prime Minister]. It's maddening and frankly quite sad that a government would invite this sort of turmoil and suppression on its own people.

● (3435)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to comment first and then ask a brief question.

I am glad that the member opposite talked about owning three successful businesses, which makes him management, in my view. I wonder how his customers would feel if every other day some people in his shops did not show up for work because they were on a rotating strike. How long would he put up with rotating strikes while his successful businesses suffered?

I have heard from the hon. member and other members that the Canadian people are going to suffer. What percentage of the 30-plus million Canadian public are supporting this government in making sure that Canada Post gets back to work? What number do they need before they understand that Canadians want this Parliament to work? They want us to move this legislation forward and get Canada Post back to the activity of serving all Canadians. Is it 70% or 80%? What number do they need to hear before they finally take action?

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard an implied question, and I heard a secondary question. I will answer the implied question first.

In my three businesses, if I had employees who went on rotating strikes against me, I would look in the mirror. I would assume responsibility for my mismanagement. I do not have those problems in my businesses. My businesses are run fairly, with fair benefits and

fair pay for my employees. They appreciate that, and therefore they are loyal, so I do not have those problems.

Look in the mirror.

The answer to the second question is that yes, 33 million Canadians want to have their postal service restored. Everyone on my side of the aisle wants to see those services restored. We know that it is up to 167 members of the House on that side, although we know that it is really up to one or two or three. Allegedly it is up to 167 members who can unlock those post offices tomorrow if they decide to do that.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Madam Speaker, we talk a lot about the services of Canada Post. The opposition talks a lot about the lack of services or the economic impact of this strike or this lockout.

I want to know from my colleague from Thunder Bay—Superior North what happened in the past with the lack of service and the reduction of services by Canada Post? I want to know the impact on rural communities and his constituency of Canada Post's decisions?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, we have serious problems in Thunder Bay—Superior North in many of our rural areas. My riding is 100,000 square kilometres. There are 31 communities and nine first nations communities. The communities are not getting mail delivery every day. There has been a backlog due to cutbacks of staff and the use of part-time supplementary workers when needed. Small mom and pop operations that service the communities have been regularly closing, and they are being replaced by more affluent service centres, often operating out of one of our Shoppers Drug Marts at less convenient locations that are not close to those people.

It has been very clear for a long time that service is going down. It is time for the government to not only settle this labour dispute but to go about making the investments and making the commitments to make sure that rural delivery is enhanced and restored.

● (3440)

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the member opposite ask the hon. New Democrat member how he would feel about people not showing up for work. I would remind the member opposite that the post office workers did show up for work. They were actually locked out.

I have a question for the New Democrat member. Would you, as a small-business owner, cut the guts out of your employees' pension plan?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, as I said before, we have a growing problem in this country as we emulate the United States Republican model. We have growing gaps in income. We have a loss of the middle class. We have people who are the working poor.

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I urge all members opposite to read *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, by Wilkinson and Pickett, to read real hard science on why the Scandinavian countries are way ahead of us in terms of happy, healthy societies that benefit all people and have a reasonable balance between big business, small business, and workers.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Madam Speaker, as all of my colleagues have said today, we are sitting in the House of Commons on Quebec's national holiday. I apologize to my constituents. This shows that the Conservatives care more about opposing the rights of workers than they do about respecting the national holiday of a nation of Canada. The Conservatives were the ones to accept the validity of the Quebec nation and now they are putting their anti-labour ideology ahead of respect for Quebecers.

On June 3, 2011, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers began a series of rotating strikes that demonstrated the workers' willingness to exert pressure, while still remaining in good faith and keeping the mail service running. The union offered to end the strikes if Canada Post would agree to reinstate the old contract during negotiations. But Canada Post refused.

On June 15, Canada Post, with the Conservative government's approval, decided to lock out its employees, force them into a work stoppage and shut down the mail service in order to allow the government to intervene.

As my hon. colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin was saying earlier, the government certainly must have approved the lockout. This allowed it to then introduce back-to-work legislation. Locking out the employees this way does not seem very fair to me in a collective bargaining situation. It shows the government's tendency to set restrictive parameters that prevent the parties from talking. Canada has laws to protect workers, but the Conservative Party seems to be telling the workers that it is going to take away their right to negotiate a collective agreement, impose conditions inferior to what Canada Post was offering and force arbitration. Will the arbitrator be neutral? We do not know. Will the arbitrator follow the government's lead and side with the employer?

Mail service continues to be essential to Canadians' lives and to our economy. In my riding, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and Dorval, people are angry because of this lockout, because their business depends on that service. But my constituents still realize that the dispute is much broader. They also realize that this is not a strike, it is a lockout. And they know that the dispute goes beyond what is happening at Canada Post; it is an unbelievable precedent.

The government is not just moving toward privatization, as several of my colleagues have pointed out. It wants to impose a climate of fear, to make workers who want to negotiate proper working conditions wary. The workers at Canada Post have been the victims of a huge machine that wants to violate the rights of workers everywhere in Canada. Before long, Canada will be doing what the state of Wisconsin did as recently as March 2011, when it passed a bill limiting the rights of public service unions and stripping government employees' unions of nearly all their collective

bargaining rights, with the exception of bargaining about wages. That is repression.

The letter carriers I have talked to in my riding say it is not even wages that upset them in this case. As my colleagues have pointed out, the pension plan is in danger, the "orphan clauses" are unacceptable, and management is imposing frustrating conditions in which employees are going to have to work. What upsets my constituents the most are the terms that affect occupational health and safety. I spoke with Michel St-Pierre, a letter carrier who has lived in my riding for several years. The postal workers are asking their employer for good working conditions in terms of safety, among other things.

At present, a letter carrier has to carry two bags, one on each side of the body, plus circulars. We all get millions of circulars in our mailboxes every day. So we can imagine the weight they have to carry. With the new special bill, they are being required to carry a third bag. Canada Post wants to force them to carry a bag in front that completely blocks their view of the ground. Well, that is intelligent. It is going to save money by making workers carry more bags, but workers' compensation is going to have to pay out a lot of money because workers will be injured and file complaints. In a case involving backache, it is very difficult to prove to the compensation board that it is attributable to the job. Canada Post is going to lose a lot of money because of those injuries.

And that is not all. The union stood by its position that every postal worker must have access to the same pension plan and be entitled to the same benefits. Should we agree to Canada Post's proposal to eliminate the option of early retirement for future employees, it will only be a matter of time before an attempt is made to tighten the eligibility criteria for early retirement for current employees. We remain optimistic about resolving the dispute, but there must be a show of goodwill on both sides.

• (3445)

The government has to stop interfering in the negotiations. Locking out employees and then forcing them back to work is certainly not a fair way of negotiating. I now have trouble believing that the two parties will be able to negotiate a fair contract.

For there to be a fair contract, the Conservatives need to put an end to their interventionist style of government and prevent a precedent from being set, which will be the case if this legislation passes.

It is true that the multinational courier companies regularly lobby to have Canada Post deregulated. These companies want the government to open up the letter mail market to competition so that they can increase their profits and market share.

Finally, some right-wing media outlets and economic institutes have called for the privatization and deregulation of Canada Post. However, almost everybody is opposed to this.

In 2008, the federal government commissioned a review of Canada Post Corporation and the report was published in 2009. This report is very clear. It appears that the public is no way favours the privatization or deregulation of Canada Post.

Furthermore, every major federal political party is officially opposed to privatizing the postal service, and most parties also reject deregulation.

I would also like to add that another one of my constituents contacted me this morning. She is a letter carrier and has been working for a very long time. She is currently having difficulty carrying all this weight. She told me that the new bags that are going to be imposed will mean that she will be required to carry more than 30 kilograms.

That is not all because, with that 30 kilograms, letter carriers currently have four hours to prepare their mail and four hours to deliver it. Now Canada Post wants to impose six continuous hours of delivery, six hours of walking the streets with three bags, plus flyers, to deliver the mail.

On top of that, with the new special legislation, they would be prohibited from collecting overtime. If my constituent finds it too heavy, if she has difficulty walking, if she has stairs to climb, if there is black ice in the winter and she has difficulty and takes half an hour longer, she cannot claim a half-hour of overtime. I think that is truly ridiculous.

We are asking the government to change this special legislation and let workers get back on the job so that small businesses can have their mail service. We need to let the parties discuss the collective agreement together so that these workers can determine what they need and they can ask for what they need for workplace health and safety, for the orphan clauses and for pensions and wages.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the NDP members' speeches, and it is so obvious, the lack of respect they have for small businesses and Canadians who are relying on the post office.

It is quite obvious to everybody who has followed this disagreement that these are two parties that have a history of not agreeing. As I said earlier, 1978, 1987, 1991, 1997—each of those times they required back-to-work legislation. That is what we are talking about here.

They have had since October to come up with an agreement. The minister has met with them numerous times. She has bent over backwards to try to come up with an agreement. This is an essential service for small businesses. They need the cheques to come in and they need the cheques to go out.

These two parties, not one side or the other but both of them, cannot come up with an agreement. Businesses are suffering. I am asking the members on the other side, how long will they allow that to occur?

• (3450)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from across the floor for his question.

It is certainly true that small businesses need postal services to resume as soon as possible. My husband has a retail business on eBay and everything has been shut down for two weeks because he

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cannot send any parcels. However, he understands that this is a lockout that the employer decided to impose on the employees. The employer locked the doors and prohibited them from delivering the mail.

In my riding, the employees even decided to continue the service. An elderly man wanted his pension cheque and could not get it because his street was under construction and letter carriers could not get to his house. He went to the Canada Post office and still has not been able to get his cheque.

We want the workers to be allowed to go back to work, but they must be allowed to discuss the conditions themselves with an impartial arbitrator who will listen to both sides.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member opposite spoke of two parties with a history of not agreeing, and it seems to me that what we need to do in this chamber is to move beyond disagreeing and make some progress. We have a problem because we have a bill that is unfair and a dangerous precedent and we have a firm opposition on this side. On the other hand, we have a majority on the other side. So how do we make progress?

I think the way we make progress is something that the leader of the opposition mentioned, which is to look at some amendments where we can meet in the middle somewhere. Unfortunately, we are standing here debating a hoist amendment, which is simply to get rid of the bill. It is not talking about where we can meet in the middle. I have great hopes, because I trust the leader of the opposition that maybe some helpful amendments will be raised.

Does the hon. member know when we will start talking about those amendments to help us make progress so we could make this unfair bill more just and make this dangerous precedent not that way?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

After our leader's speech yesterday, someone on the other side of the House asked him what the amendments were. We are talking about pensions. We are talking about wages that are lower in the proposed legislation than what the employer was offering. We are talking about orphan clauses. In fact, the amendments are simple. We have been talking about them for several hours and we will continue talking about them for the next few days. The rights of workers must be respected and some sort of common ground must be reached.

[*The hon. member spoke in Cree.*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this august chamber to speak on behalf of the people of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and on behalf of all Quebecers on this national holiday. Of course, like all of us, I would have preferred for us to celebrate this day in our ridings with our constituents, but we have decided to take this time for workers today.

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I want to talk about the speech we heard last evening by the leader of the opposition and the many proposals the leader had to offer in his speech. In my opinion, it was one of the best speeches I have heard in the House of Commons in a very long time. We should be grateful to him because it was truly an honour for those who were here to listen to the leader yesterday.

A number of points raised in his speech are essential and fundamental to this debate. A number of my colleagues have been raising a number of those points over the past several hours. I want to come back to one point in particular and that is the cavalier way in which this government is unilaterally imposing draconian conditions on the workers involved in this dispute. This creates a dangerous precedent. It seems that the hon. members across the way are having fun and like dangerous things. Just look at how they feel about chrysotile asbestos.

Tabling this type of draconian measure would create a dangerous precedent. It would very certainly open the door to other measures in other sectors in the future. In my riding, many people are increasingly wondering who will be the government's next victims and what this government will do next. Rest assured, what we are seeing right now is just the beginning.

Good labour relations require respect for workers' rights. That is a fundamental aspect of bargaining and labour relations. That is not the case when this government introduces draconian measures that violate their rights, as is happening with the bill before us. This bill is shameful, outrageous, unacceptable and unsustainable. There are so many negative adjectives I could use. It is unfair and even propagandist in some respects, since it is nothing but propaganda to keep calling this a strike. The Minister of Labour should know that this is not a strike; it is a lockout. Even my constituents are writing to me to ask me to remind the Minister of Labour that this is not a strike, that it is a lockout. It is rather shocking to see that the Minister of Labour was not distinguishing between the two yesterday. A young person who wrote to me even counted, as did we, that the minister said it three times in her reply.

I come from a culture of negotiations. I am a first nations man, from the Cree Nation, to be exact. I can provide examples of negotiations I have been making for the past 25 years on behalf of my people, such as the implementation of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. That was the first modern agreement signed in Canada between a government and aboriginal peoples. In this case, it was the first modern agreement signed by a provincial government. That had never happened before 1975. It was the first agreement signed by aboriginals that involved a province.

● (3455)

The difficulty in this case was getting the provisions of the agreement implemented. It took 30 years for an agreement to be reached.

I am proud to have taken part in the negotiation process in 2002 for the Paix des Braves, an agreement with the Government of Quebec. I also participated in the agreement to help establish a new relationship between the federal government and the Cree nation, which was settled in 2007 after a delay of several years. Furthermore, I am proud to speak about the new, recently signed framework agreement for the civic and public governance of James

Bay. We may end up with a public government in the James Bay area, which is good news for everybody. This would spell an end to the exclusion of aboriginal peoples in the management of their natural resources.

I have given these examples because I know that relationships are at the core of any negotiation process, and that these relationships must be based on mutual respect and cooperation. Relations between management and workers must be harmonious, too. These relationships are the key to any negotiation. In my opinion, there are very serious implications to what is being currently proposed in this bill. These are not solutions; they are draconian measures being foisted upon the workers of this sector.

I also want to talk about the signals this government has sent out throughout this affair. It concerns and troubles me to see how negotiations will be run for years to come should there be further labour disputes. There needs to be a very close eye kept on this process. All Canadians, and indeed certainly every resident in my riding, are watching what is happening very closely. It will be an indication of the arrogant approach this government, this majority government, will take in the years to come.

The right to negotiate, which incidentally has been a fundamental right for a very long time in this country, has no place under this approach. This right is as fundamental as the right to go to court, which this government also disregards. This approach in no way promotes an environment of trust between management and workers, nor by any means a responsible culture of negotiation and compromise, which is fundamental to all labour relations.

We have been labelled ideologues a number of times this morning. The ideologues are on the other side of this House. We are fighting for social justice in Canada.

There is no shame in standing up for the rights and interests of aboriginals in this country. There is no shame in standing up for the rights and interests of women in this country. There is no shame in standing up for the rights and interests of immigrants in this country. There is no shame in standing up for the rights, interests and freedoms of people in this country. And there is certainly no shame in standing up for the rights and interests of seniors, let alone workers, in this country.

I have been involved in negotiations for the past 25 years and I intend to continue my involvement in this particular matter for as long as it takes, and throughout my term in office.

● (3500)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I must say that this moment is a little sad for me. The hon. member who has just spoken talked about social justice and about the fact that the Aboriginals in the north cannot be forgotten.

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The hon. member represents a constituency in the north of Quebec where elderly Aboriginals need things like eyeglasses or medications. They need the Nutrition North Canada program. Vital food is sent to our Aboriginals through the mail. But he says that he wants to support workers who earn between \$21 and \$37 per hour and who want to negotiate. He wants to represent them more than those who need the representation, the Aboriginals in the north.

I am asking him clearly if he is going to decide to support those who elected him, those in need in the north of his riding, the Aboriginals in the north.

• (3505)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Speaker, first of all, let me correct the references to the Aboriginals in the north. They are not our Aboriginals, they are peoples and nations.

Second, I would like to emphasize that the Aboriginal people whom she mentions so proudly are not naïve. They understand perfectly. The young Cree man whom I mentioned just now, the one who sent me an email and counted the times that the Minister of Labour used the word “strike” in her speech yesterday, he understood that the minister was spreading propaganda.

People understand perfectly that this is a lockout. All the Prime Minister has to do is call the head of Canada Post and get him to unlock the doors at Canada Post.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member just mentioned the CEO of Canada Post.

I am putting myself in the Conservatives' shoes. We are coming out of a recession, so everyone is tightening their belts. I understand that. The NDP stands in solidarity with everyone.

Should the CEO of Canada Post who, I believe, earns \$497,000 a year, plus a 33% bonus, also have to tighten his belt to help resolve this dispute?

That question is for my NDP colleague, if he has an answer.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Speaker, I do not think that the CEO of Canada Post intends on doing what the member suggested. However, for the good of all the citizens who currently need postal services, I think it would be smart for him to put an end to the lockout.

The members on the other side seem to be fond of locks. We must unlock the doors of Canada Post. When the Prime Minister was not happy with how things were going here, he locked the doors of Parliament. When my leader, the leader of the official opposition, suggested meetings to find solutions together, what did the Prime Minister do? He suggested another lock.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are currently debating the hoist amendment to this unfair and dangerous bill.

I would like to know whether there are any negotiations.

[*English*]

I know that in a few hours the amendment will be defeated by the majority over there, and I would like to know if there are negotiations going on for what is going to happen next and how we are going to make progress.

I am not aboriginal, but I know I share with aboriginals and other Canadians the feeling that we want to see progress. We have to make progress at some point. We cannot let this unjust, unfair and dangerous law—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Speaker, we have raised a number of questions from this side of the House. I think we have a very good idea of the amendments being proposed to this unfair bill. It would be great if there were an opening, but there is not. Everything is locked up.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, honourable members, brothers and sisters: lockout, lockout. It hurts to hear those words. I don't know whether the Speaker can see it from her Chair, but I have a bump here that dates back to the first lockout I took part in at Commonwealth Plywood some 30 years ago. The workers had been locked out, and the scabs were escorted in and out by police officers and private security services. Those security guards and police officers took billy clubs to the workers there and to the people who had come to support them. To my mind, a lockout is a violent measure. I see a member laughing over there, but that does not prevent it from being very violent. There is political violence in this kind of legislation.

For the Conservatives, when citizens demonstrate, it is often violent. Cutting jobs, imposing legislation, putting people out on the street, cutting \$11 billion from public services: that is not violent for them. Making seniors wait in hospitals for 16 hours is not violent, no.

Lockout, lockout. This government loves locks; we should have suspected that. It also likes big fences around cities to protect them from dangerous and violent demonstrators. The summits of the powerful are protected from the legitimate demands of citizens.

This government really likes borders. It is putting a lot of money into border infrastructure, even in the backyard of the minister responsible for the Treasury Board. This government also likes prisons, lots of prisons with lots of locks.

To justify investing in prisons, the Prime Minister says there is a lot of unreported crime. Do workers who refuse to go back to work in response to a sorry piece of legislation commit that kind of unreported crime? Perhaps.

Touching their fences is another unreported crime that could help fill those prisons. That is dangerous. They arrested 1,200 individuals who dared to touch their fences; that is a major crime.

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This government wants to lock the Canadian people into a system of logic, the logic of law and order. If things do not work the way it wants, it will put locks on our freedoms: the freedom to negotiate, the freedom to exercise pressure and eventually freedom of association perhaps. The only thing it will not put locks on is its privileges. No one puts a lock on the freedom to mine anywhere without the consent of the local communities. They have the right to operate a two-kilometre mine near a lake or near 62 rivers in the name of freedom of trade. They have the freedom to drill shale gas wells anywhere they want. They are free to dig a well in my backyard. No one is putting a lock on that kind of freedom.

They have the freedom to pollute the water, the air and the vast expanses of the Canadian Prairies with mining and oil residues. They have a firm grip on their freedoms. They have the freedom to exercise control to benefit the oil market, to raise prices. They have the freedom to concentrate communications businesses in order to send a message. We cannot put a lock on that. They concentrate businesses. They are good at that.

They have the freedom to speculate with the savings of small investors, without regulation or penalty. They gamble with our savings. They are free to do that.

They have the freedom to charge usurious interest rates of 20, 22, 23 per cent. There is nothing to it. Families are going into debt, young people in particular. They put them at the bottom of a well so they have to pay for 100 years. They have the freedom to avoid taxes.

• (3510)

We have nice little tax havens. We are free to go and put our money there. That is how we launder our money. It is fun. We make money. No one looks into that. Those are the freedoms they defend on the other side of the House. It is true. However, they do not respect the freedom of workers to organize, to negotiate. What about negotiating, exercising pressure or establishing a power relationship? No. We are talking about negotiations. All week long, I have heard the Minister of Labour say they negotiated for eight months. What kind of negotiations are we talking about? Negotiations designed to divide workers into two groups: one group for which they want to cut wages, undermine pensions and increase the retirement age. What are those false negotiations? False negotiations! You would think Canada Post Corporation was a bankrupt business asking its workers to make an effort to save the company. We know that workers, even unionized ones, often make those efforts. But we are talking about a business that makes a profit of about \$281 million a year. It is not the case: Canada Post Corporation is not bankrupt.

To understand the offers made by Canada Post Corporation and, indirectly, the government, you have to understand that there is a political agenda behind this. The first item on that political agenda is to prove to everyone that the Conservatives will not make an issue of workers' rights. The second item is to prove that they are in power and that they are strong. It is true! One need only consider the ministers' condescending attitude in the past three weeks in their answers to the questions put to them. I am thinking of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who systematically repeats the same sentence to us. The Minister of Industry does the same thing when it comes to asbestos. They are not answering questions; their patting themselves

on the back; and they are not meeting the expectations of the members of this House, not at all, any more than those of the public who would like to have answers to certain questions such as: What was done with the \$50 million? How is it that no one has any documents on the matter regarding the decision-making processes that led to those investments? Those documents have simply disappeared.

The fundamental objective of the Conservative government's political agenda is to scuttle public services, to carve up the government, to make cuts to public services and, lastly—the ultimate objective—to privatize and eliminate government, contracting everything out to the market. It would be good if there was no more government and everything was private. That is the Conservative credo. We know that. We should privatize the hospitals, prisons, public services, police, water, the land, our land. In the collective psychosis of privatization, why not privatize the government itself, the government of the people? Let it be replaced by a board of directors! That would be a lot easier.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Let us remove the government and establish a vast board of directors made up of businessmen who will decide what is good for the people. That is the vision, the collective psychosis of the Conservatives, the reform ideal.

If you are engaging in social “desolidarization”, you will need a lot of locks. You would better buy locks! You will also need a lot of prisons. You will have to put a lot of officers on the border. We will not let the speculators, the usurers, the predators of the common good destroy the social and political progress of the last 100 years without reacting. No, it is out of the question!

The NDP members will stand up with workers and Canadians to defend something that cannot be locked up, put between four walls, fenced in, put behind barbed wire, something that you cannot leave at the border, something we cannot lock up. This thing that we will always stand up to defend is our freedom, our freedom of speech, our freedom of association, our freedom of organization, our freedom to get organized to live in a fairer society, enriched by all its members.

• (3515)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that in this debate the NDP continues to ignore the origin of this work stoppage.

It is clear that the rotating strikes had a negative impact on the volume of mail that was being delivered. Everybody who has ever had a business knows that they cannot continue to pay 100% of the expenses when they only have 50% of the income. It was an obvious fact that the work stoppages had led to a decrease in the volume of the mail. Canada Post locked them out, of course.

I have an email here that I just received in the last half hour from a constituent who says, “I just wanted to drop you a quick note of support on the Canada Post issue. Our company relies heavily on Canada Post and we are losing customers daily”.

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What about the companies that are going to shut down? They are losing business, laying off workers and firing them. When is the party across the way going to start standing up for the working families of Canada?

• (3520)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, I would like to respond, just like the Minister of Foreign Affairs, by saying that the Auditor General made recommendations and that we are going to follow them, and that 32 projects benefited from these investments, and so on.

If someone asks me another question, this is what I am going to say.

Honestly, and to answer my colleague's question, I would be remiss if I did not point out that it is June 24, Quebec's national holiday. So I invite all the members to sing along: "*Si j'avais les ailes d'un ange, je partirais pour Québec! Si j'avais des lumières sur mon bike...*"

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened closely to the member's speech and I noted, on a number of occasions, that he used the words "lock" and "locked" as part of his way of expressing what has happened with respect to Canada Post. He also used the word "union".

Back in St. Catharines, I have a union with the people of the community that sent me here to represent them. I take that union with them very seriously. I also know that every mailbox in the city of St. Catharines and in this country has a lock on it. I have 120,000 people in my community who deserve to get their mail on a daily basis, for whatever important reason it is.

The member opposite was just elected, and there are 100,000 locks on the mailboxes in—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, what was the question?

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to raise one point. My colleague outlined the origins of the impasse here as being the ultimate goal of the government to privatize Canada Post as part of a neo-Conservative agenda that would include a multitude of changes; to recreate Canada in the image of George Bush's United States or Johnny Howard's Australia.

Are we seeing the first glimpse, the first insight, the first shot across the bow of the attack of the neo-Conservatives to throw some red meat to their base and finally do the things they were put here to do, which is to devastate the country as we know it, that our fathers built in the post—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, this desire for privatization has been expressed for years in the neo-conservative discourse in Ottawa and in Quebec City. That is their vision of the market. The NDP wants to keep public services universal and free for the population, so that the wealth is shared and we live in a society of social justice. The government should not forget that. In four years, we will still be here to remind the government that social justice will climb its way to power in Canada.

• (3525)

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to say something about the Fête nationale. Since 1964, no government in this House found a way to prevent the adjournment of proceedings for June 24, Saint-Jean Baptiste Day, which is Quebecers' national holiday

To hear the Prime Minister say yesterday that we simply had to vote for the bill if we wanted to go home to celebrate is one of the worst things that I can imagine hearing in this House. This image will stay with me for a long time, and I will make sure that my fellow citizens also remember it in four years' time.

On the other hand, it was an honour to hear the Leader of the Opposition give such an inspiring speech here yesterday. He gave a rousing retrospective of everything the labour movement has done to achieve a quality of life that is beyond comparison with that of our ancestors. The members opposite need to remember this.

I would like to set the record straight on a few points. Canada Post is a crown corporation that has posted a profit of \$281 million. Just to be clear, this is a profitable crown corporation that has locked out its employees. The last time I closed an small business it was because it was not profitable. When a business is profitable, usually things can be worked out and an agreement can be reached. I have to wonder about the skill of our friends opposite as managers.

Despite what a number of our colleagues opposite have stated, the union's position is not the result of vicious organizers who are pressuring others. I met with the group of letter carriers in Montmagny, along with their organizer. When I asked who among them was their spokesperson, the organizer did not speak up; the others pointed him out. A woman said they had chosen him because he speaks well. He humbly asked to meet with me. I had just met a monster, a monster of kindness. He was definitely not pressuring these workers.

The 55,000 workers who will be affected by this bill are not temperamental. They are above all parents, citizens and consumers. These 55,000 workers are not being unreasonable.

Consider the fact that they are also consumers. Consider the impact of this decision concerning a crown corporation that is making a profit. Wages will be cut by \$800 per year or more for 55,000 consumers. How will this decision help what the members opposite call the economic recovery that they have been talking about since the beginning of this Parliament? As far as the economic recovery goes, if a crown corporation is profitable, it should share its good fortune with its workers in order to really get the economic recovery going.

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These workers are also citizens. I am not so sure that our friends opposite remember that. One of our colleagues made the argument that the rotating strikes are affecting public health and safety. Is this some kind of cynicism or desensitization? We are talking about 55,000 workers who will be losing insurance coverage for their prescriptions. They are citizens who also deserve assurances for their health and their future.

They are also parents. Think about the young parents especially who are just starting out with the crown corporation and who are told from the outset that they will have to make do with 18% less, a less generous wage package and more difficult working conditions and that they will have to work longer. These decisions are leaving the parents tired, worn out. That is the impact when a group of workers is seen as simply being temperamental.

I come from the regions. I hope that the broader objective is not to privatize postal services. In the regions, people already have to make do with a small postal outlet very far from home. If the goal is to set up a big postal outlet as you enter Montmagny for 14,000 residents, I hope it does not come to that. If postal services are privatized, it will lead to scenarios just as ridiculous as that. So please let us back off on that.

Contempt and provocation are a way of using events that our friends opposite resort to regularly. Unfortunately, they are practising this kind of politics at the expense of our national holiday.

• (3530)

Canadians and Quebeckers are smart enough to see the strings the government is pulling. They know it is a lockout. They know that this House could have adjourned so we could go home to our ridings for the national holiday. In four years, people will remember. If the government respects people, aboriginal people, seniors and those who need medicines, they should unlock the lockout.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and his party have spoken often about the issue of the pension for Canada Post workers. I have in my hands the equity holdings, greater than \$25 million, for that very same pension fund. It includes, in order of largest investment, Toronto Dominion Bank, Royal Bank of Canada, Bank of Nova Scotia, Suncor Energy, Canadian Natural Resources, Potash Corp., Canadian National Railway, Talisman Energy, Research in Motion, Barrick Gold, Manulife Financial, and I could go on.

The Leader of the Opposition has called for an increase in taxes on these very same enterprises from 15% to 19.5%. That means that the after-tax profits, which come from these companies and go directly into the pension fund of the workers the member purports to defend, would be reduced. In other words, the tax increase on enterprises that is proposed by the NDP is actually a tax on the Canada Post workers' pension fund.

I am wondering if the hon. member would explain to the workers of CUPW why he wants to increase taxes on their already stretched pension fund.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Let me begin by correcting something my colleague opposite said. The solution we put forward was to ensure that big companies duly pay their taxes, which are lower than what companies pay in the United States, in order to be competitive, and to make huge investments in SMEs. That is what was suggested and what is needed to create as many jobs as possible in Canada.

To be fair, I suggest that the government move to impose an 18% salary cut for all new Conservative members for the next eight years.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to clarify something for the hon. member for Oshawa, who does not seem to understand the situation. He put both parties on the same footing. He said that both parties are guilty, which is why the government needed to take action. I would remind our colleague that the union fully intended to keep the postal services as flexible as possible. Therefore, it chose rotating strikes as low-pressure tactics, so that seniors, aboriginal people and Canadians in remote areas could keep receiving mail. Management responded with a lockout, which put a stop to mail delivery. The two parties are not on the same footing and they are not equally guilty, which is why we are demanding an end to the lockout.

My question about orphan clauses is for my colleague and riding neighbour. These clauses are detrimental, since workers doing the same work as their colleagues will be paid less. Could the member comment on that?

• (3535)

Mr. François Lapointe: A friend of mine, who worked in a different crown corporation, could not become a permanent employee because of such an "orphan clause". He had been head researcher in his division for eight years, but he was still waiting to become a permanent employee. That is how ludicrous the situation was. In the end, the workers went on strike and the issue was settled. These orphan clauses lead to absurd situations, like wage reductions for new employees. How do you explain that, for 20 years, a worker hired three years before me will get paid more than me for doing the same job? That would be a two-tier system, as my colleague pointed out. Such a ridiculous situation should never occur. A responsible government should always try to avoid this kind of thing.

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by expressing my best wishes to all Quebeckers on the national holiday. It warms my heart to learn that all francophones, everywhere in Canada, are also celebrating this national holiday. Let us continue the struggle. We will succeed.

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I would also like to say to all my colleagues that I am extremely proud of all the speeches they have made up to now. They are speaking from their hearts. They are speaking from their experience, unlike this government, which seems to speak like a machine, an answering machine, constantly repeating the same message. I am concerned, since I myself have experienced special legislation in Quebec that had a horrible effect, not just on me but on a lot of people in Quebec.

I am going to talk about the history of Quebec, particularly because today is the national holiday. Let us recall the very early days of Quebec. The people who brought prosperity to Quebec and to Canada are the workers. They are the people who cleared the land with their hands. They are the people who built the roads. They are the people who set up local businesses. And later in our history, they are the people who came together to create Hydro-Québec so it became a people's project. They are the volunteers who continue to work with and help people still today.

All these workers sacrificed their time and their energy. This is the people as a whole, let us not forget. This is a shared history, and the connection with the postal service is very important in that history. It is thanks to the postal service, thanks to that connection, that people were able to communicate. And still today, it is the most reliable service there is, and all Canadians know it. Everyone uses computers, but we still have the postal service. It provides us with unbelievable services.

Everyone in my riding is affected by the postal strike. Everyone realizes that the strike has to end, but there is a way to do it, and this government is not doing it the right way. This is absolutely unacceptable.

We are heading toward an historic event. We are a part of history, of a new millennium. Where is this government's new vision? Where is its ability to go beyond the old methods?

In my own work experience, I have worked in unionized workplaces since I was 14 years old, in large and small businesses. I have even been the boss. I have also bargained positions. I have handled all aspects of bargaining. There is a common thread that connects all private and public enterprises, and that is that the proceeds are shared, the success is shared. Canada Post has absolutely no excuse. The corporation had revenue of over \$281 million and it is continuing to prosper, but it is not sharing those proceeds at all. Canada Post absolutely did not want to bargain with the workers, who acted in complete good faith. They were even prepared to go back on the same terms, terms that provided for survival, for continuity.

This government's pretext for the lockout is that the workers were acting in bad faith and are causing the corporation to lose money, when it just keeps making more.

Let us come back to history now, since it seems that this government always operates in the past. All governments that have acted like this, that have created a false situation, like the lockout, and that have then come forward with a special bill, have engaged in dictatorship. That is what I call it, and I will say it today.

Yes, that is where we are heading. It is a right-wing position that runs counter to all the rights of working people, without exception.

By the government's definition, an essential service is one that is profitable. That is a very broad meaning, and if I look at all the workers there are, all occupations are profitable.

● (3540)

This government claims to be creating jobs. I hope that is true, but it remains to be seen. When workers use their right of expression, they are literally gagged, because it costs money. If I understand the government's reasoning, no matter who the workers are, if it costs the employer money to settle an internal dispute, the workers will be gagged. That is the message being sent now, with this special bill. We have a problem.

There are all kinds of workers at present: agronomists, nurses, office clerks, restaurant owners, customs officers, security guards, painters, journalists, bakers, dentists, consultants, accountants, movers, electricians, mechanics, cabinetmakers, telemarketers, translators, sociologists, airline pilots, musicians, engineers, peace officers, bailiffs, guides, convenience store clerks, servers, school principals, and so on. What is their agenda? What influence will they have on the multinationals? What message are they sending? What influence will they have on the provincial labour codes?

If people cost even the slightest bit of money, they have the perfect excuse. Strip people of their right of expression, lock them out, fabricate a scenario and decide to bring in a special bill. Congratulations. We are truly heading in the right direction.

Employment contracts continue to decline. If I understand this reasoning properly, to be profitable, people have to work 60 hours a week and draw a pension at the age of 105. We are heading in an excellent direction.

Myself, I do not believe in any way in a society where the economy controls the people. The opposite is true: the economy serves the people. It is not the 2% who should be in control, it is the 98% of people who live ordinary lives, who want to see solutions with a vision.

I invite the government opposite to sit down with us. Instead of making decisions on its own, with a narrow vision, I invite it to take the time to sit down with us to see the broader picture, one that is widely representative of what people want.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the NDP continue to ignore the source of this conflict in terms of work stoppages. The initial problem was rotating strikes.

I have an email here. I know the NDP members do not like to hear from their constituents, but maybe they will listen to one of mine. I received this email on June 3. This person starts off by telling me that he did not vote Conservative but voted NDP. He goes on to state: "This greediness for more money and job security has to stop. No agency or organization in this day and age has job security and better pensions, while many organizations are cutting back on their pensions and laying off staff because they cannot make ends meet."

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My question is very simple. Small businesses have been threatened by this work stoppage. Their volume of business has been reduced, which has resulted in layoffs or, even worse, business closures. Considering the number of small businesses affected, when will that party start standing up for average Canadian workers?

• (3545)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The solution is very simple: for the postal service to get back up and running again, the lockout has to end. The union agrees to return to work on the same terms. There will be no strike; the employees will go back. They have to end the lockout.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks. He has spoken at length about this lockout by Canada Post and the heavy-handed action of the government in reaction to the lockout. It is very simple to end the lockout by simply unlocking Canada Post and allowing the workers to go back to work, as they have offered to do.

In my city of Toronto, the government put locks on almost the entire city and instigated a massive violation of civil liberties during the G20. Many of our local businesses are still waiting to be compensated for that particular lockout and loss of business to our community.

Does the hon. member see a parallel between the lockout of Canada Post and the denial of postal services to Canadians and the lockdown of the city of Toronto in the G20 negotiations, with its denial of civil liberties and denial of business opportunities for Toronto businesses?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

This is in fact a pattern on the part of the government. I think it feels a bit threatened. When something threatens people's very existence, the government takes a hard line, when it could just take the time to meet with people, as it has the gall to say it does, and understand the situation. I imagine that communication is not its strong point.

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you will forgive me if I feel like I am on the floor of the convention in Vancouver for the NDP, a socialist party. I keep hearing over and over how profits are bad at Canada Post. I remind the member that the chief shareholder is in fact Canadian taxpayers, at the end of the day, as funds get reinvested in, for example, roads, public infrastructure, health care, and education.

Apart from that, I wonder if the member does not feel confident that the union can win final offer selection arbitration. I do not know if the member has read the bill, all seven pages of it, but the workers will be going back under the recently expired agreement. All settled matters will continue to be settled. They will not be reopened or up for grabs again.

There is a guiding principle about an improved pension solvency trajectory. That is a good thing. That has to improve, not get worse. There are guaranteed pay raises for four years. Who else is getting guaranteed pay raises for four years? The final offer selection is for only the outstanding items that have yet to be agreed upon.

Does the member not believe that the union can put together a competitive package that can win final offer selection?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, there have been amendments proposed. I am happy to hear that this government is open to amendments. I think it is important to be open.

The door is open, and it is now up to the government to act.

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate. I have been extremely excited to listen to my colleagues over the last number of hours that I have been here.

Let me take a different tack in this debate and talk about the terminology that we interchange among ourselves. Sometimes we need a hand in understanding what it is. We do not use it in a wilful way. We simply repeat it over and over again. We think we are actually using it in an appropriate way or are helping to clarify.

In her remarks last evening, the Minister continually talked about a strike, when actually that strike ended when the lockout started. I think she came to recognize that.

We on this side recognize that indeed there was a rotational strike. There is no doubt about that. There was a rotational strike. That is a fact. No one denies that. We have to use the proper language and recognize that this has ended and we now have a lockout.

A lockout is a totally different thing altogether in labour relations. It is a different thing altogether. We now have to recognize that it is no longer a rotational strike that went from place to place, some small places and some large, and then moved on. We are in a full-scale lockout. The entire system is shut down.

In the Canadian labour act, only one side can do a lockout. That is the employer. Workers can never lock out themselves. They can withdraw their labour, but they can never actually go and put a padlock on the gate. They cannot do that.

The other piece that has gone back and forth over the morning is this term "union boss". Let us explore who is a union boss and what a union boss really looks like. The terminology of "union boss" suggests that somehow that person is the boss of the workers represented by this particular individual.

Actually, the pyramid needs to be inverted. It is those workers who hire the union boss. They democratically elect the union boss. Every three or four years, or in some cases five years depending on the organization, the workers can get rid of their so-called union boss if he or she did not do what they asked him or her to do.

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The same thing happens to us. Some of us are back from the 40th Parliament to the 41st Parliament and some of us are not. Clearly their bosses, their constituents, said, “Thank you for your time. I no longer wish to have you here. Please move away. I’m choosing someone else.” In the labour movement, that is indeed what we do in many circumstances.

Let me put a face to the union boss. The members who are sitting here today and looking at me are looking at an ex-union boss. I do not have two heads. I did not grow horns. I represented workers who elected me to do a specific task on their behalf, which was to bargain collective agreements, and that is what I did.

When we were finished bargaining collective agreements, I brought it back to them and said, “Here is the best that we have done. We think this is good. Would you like to vote on it? Tell me yes or no.”

Sometimes they said yes and occasionally they said no. What did it mean when they said no? It meant the union boss went back to work. He or she works for the workers. The workers do not work for the union boss.

The terminology we use can sometimes start to impinge upon people’s reputations and give a connotation that is not necessarily true. I would ask the members, when we talk about and use interchangeable terms, to actually use the terms in an appropriate way.

There is a boss at Canada Post, and that is the CEO. Workers do not elect the CEO. The CEO comes to them. The workers do not get an opportunity to say, “You have done a rotten job. It is time to move on.” They do not have that democratic right. However, inside their union they have a democratic right to get rid of their “boss” simply through the electoral process.

I would simply say that sometimes we all use improper terminology. I am not suggesting that we all are not guilty of it. From time to time on this side of the House we are guilty of using terminology that maybe we should think about when we are actually doing those sorts of things.

Let us get past the terminology and talk about the fact that these new workers are about to receive less than the present-day workers under this agreement and the offer that comes from management. Who are they? In my community, they are actually not young people. Many of my colleagues here are younger, and have expressed the sense of what it would be like to be young workers who end up making less than those they work beside.

In my community, a lot of these workers are over at John Deere. They are at Atlas. They are workers who are in the midpoint or sometimes late point of their careers who have to find other work because the places they work for have closed.

● (3550)

Those places are gone. John Deere packed up a little over 18 months ago and is gone. Atlas closed down a number of years ago. We have seen the literal gutting of the manufacturing sector in my riding, just as we have seen across this country.

Here is what happens. When people get a job at Canada Post, they do not start as full-time employees. They start as casual employees. They are told to stay home, that they will be called if somebody calls in sick. Stay by the phone, they are told. So there they are, workers hoping to finally get a job at Canada Post, and they stick by their phones in case a fellow worker calls in sick and they are needed for the day. They get a call and are told, “Come on in today.” Then, if they stay there long enough, they might become part-timers.

Meanwhile, they still have all the responsibilities they had before. Young people have responsibilities, but I am talking about folks who look more like me and less like the young folks we know out there, like my children, who are in their mid-twenties. These folks still have mortgages to pay and children to raise, and yet they find that they are still casual employees or maybe, finally, part-timers. Then, when they are about to take that final step and become full-time employees, they are told, under this collective agreement, to just take less. They will work beside others who are doing exactly the same job, but they are told to take less.

So if they are taking less, why would we allow folks to work side by side doing the same thing? Is the corporation saying that it values one employee more than another as far as rewards are concerned? Whether that will be through the pay scale, because the pay scale is going to be reduced for new hires, talking about the sense that somehow—

● (3555)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Essex is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member keeps referring to a collective agreement with postal workers that includes two-tier wages. Could he table that in the House?

The Speaker: That is not really a point of order.

The hon. member for Welland.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, when I talk about a collective agreement, I am talking about the proposed collective agreement with Canada Post. I thank my colleague for the non-point of order and for at least giving me the opportunity to clarify the terminology we talked about earlier.

The proposal from Canada Post would lessen the amount of money, so the proposal then becomes a proposal for two types of workers, but not workers who are doing different jobs. The letter carrier who gets less money doesn’t get to carry less mail. He or she gets to carry the same amount of mail. These people get to do the same amount of work. They have to work the same number of hours. They have to do all of the things that the others do; they just do it for less. It seems to me that there is an injustice in telling folks to do the job for less.

I have heard Canada Post argue that it is not going to be as profitable in the future as it has been in the past. I wish I had that crystal ball. I think all of us wish we had that crystal ball. It would be wonderful for elections; we would know if we were going to win the next one. It would be wonderful for our RRSPs or investments because we would know how much we could make or lose in the future; we would know what to do with our investments. That would be a wonderful crystal ball.

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So what did the union say to the company? The union said it had some ideas about how the company might indeed make itself more profitable. The company is not really saying no, but it is not really jumping at the bit to do it.

Here's one thing the union is suggesting. I would like the government side to get this, because that side has portrayed the TD bank and others as being highly profitable enterprises with low taxes. The union is suggesting that Canada Post ought to do what it did before and go back into financial services. It is fully capable of doing that. It can do it, and if it did, it could make money.

In fact, as a youngster growing up in Glasgow in the U.K., I remember buying savings stamps at the post office. If I bought a savings stamp, it would be put in a book that I actually had in my hand. If I went back at the end of the month, I got whatever the interest was for that month, and I received another little stamp, a real stamp, not one of those ink stamps. If I wanted my money back, I would take out the stamps and hand them back to the post office, which gave me money.

That was quite some time ago, of course. We can do things much differently now. With all the wonderful electronics we have, we can do all those wonderful things. We can do Internet banking and all the things in that wonderful world.

Here is a golden opportunity for Canada Post, a crown corporation that benefits Canadians when it makes money. Here is a golden opportunity to make money, to return it to Canadians as a dividend and to reward its employees equally and fairly. Yet it is not saying that it wants to rush in to do this. I find it astounding that a business would not want to make money. I find it astounding that my colleagues on the government side are not pushing Canada Post to make more money. The profit motive is not a bad thing. I am willing to say that in the House. One would think that Canada Post would want to do that.

Let me just say that this is an opportunity for the government to say, "Yes, we want Canada Post and the postal workers to get back to work." It is as simple as ordering the CEO to take the locks off the boxes and saying, "Let the workers go back to work and we will figure out a negotiated settlement, because that is what we have done in the past, and we can do that in the future."

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to some of the speeches, or maybe I should call them "the pollutants", from the socialist Marxist party called the NDP—

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I think people would agree that was a really low-class statement that is not befitting of the kind of debate we have in the House. If the member wants to engage—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I did not hear any of that point of order because of all the noise.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

• (3600)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was not allowed to finish because of the interruptions.

I would ask my hon. colleague to do the right thing and retract that rather low-class comment. If he wants to make derogatory comments, he can go out to the washroom or get on the bus. He can use many places to make derogatory comments, but this is the House of Commons. He needs to have a certain decorum in debate.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We are not going to get into a big back and forth on the point of order. I would ask the hon. member for Medicine Hat to think about the types of words he is using. We are trying to elevate the level of decorum here.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I will continue, because I am going to use some of the language that was used by NDP members. They are very socialist and we know that. They talked about dangerous precedents and draconian measures. We understand, of course, that this is exactly what they are doing in terms of hoisting our fragile economic recovery by not supporting this motion to try to stop the postal workers and by not joining us in trying to get postal workers back to work and delivering mail.

I had another call today from one of my small business constituents, who said he is now going to have to lay off employees because he is not getting postal service. He cannot get his invoices out. He has no income coming in and is virtually going broke. New Democrats purport to support small business. I would ask them if they are going to join us in helping to get postal workers back to work and the mail delivered.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, it is abundantly clear that the power rests with the CEO and with the government, which actually has oversight over the crown corporation. The government simply has to give the CEO the key, tell him to put in the lock, turn it to the left, and open it.

The government could have done this yesterday before it introduced the legislation. This would be over with, the workers would be back at work, and the small business owner the member is talking about would be mailing his invoices and getting his remittances, and he would not have had to lay off his employees. That could have been done.

In fact, the government could have done it last week. As soon as Canada Post indicated to the minister that it intended to lock out workers, the minister could have said no, not to go there, not to threaten to lock them out. The minister could have said that if they were going to go back to work not to lock them out, to let them get back to work, and they would try to figure this out. That did not happen and there was a lockout.

The bottom line is that the CEO should be given the key to open the locks and unlock the doors. The workers will show up tomorrow morning to get back to work and we will indeed go forward. It is just that simple.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am probably one of those people who worked in labour and was never involved in union leadership; I was one who would say yes or no to an agreement when I worked as a lumber worker and a teacher.

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Let me take it back to the school system. When I was working in the school system, the tone and morale of the school always depended on the direction the principal was taking. In my talks with postal workers, I've found that the morale in our postal service has deteriorated and had deteriorated since the last CEO was in charge. Prior to that, after the late 1990s, things were moving along smoothly. There was good consultation with the workers and the company was making money, but suddenly it went down. There are more grievances now than there have ever been.

Would the member agree that perhaps this is the reason we are in this situation now, that it is because of the fact that we have not had a good labour relations climate in Canada Post?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. My colleague from down Windsor way will understand this, because he and I were both in the same union at one point in time. If there is not a good industrial relationship between the union and management, the shop floor is poison and productivity goes down, and the company suffers and so do workers. That is clearly what has happened at Canada Post.

As has been pointed out in the debate today, 1997 was the last time that we saw workers being forced back to work. There has been a period of time when we've had basic peace. It is important—

• (3605)

The Speaker: I'll stop the hon. member there.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say right off that I think this has actually been a very good debate overall. I guess now we are into about our sixteenth hour. I have been looking at this beautiful calendar on the table in front of us that is still showing Thursday, June 23. I feel like we are in that movie *Groundhog Day*, where the day just keeps going around. I guess we might be in Thursday for a while.

Overall I think it has been a good debate. So much of what we do in Parliament seems to be pro forma. There is a bill, we debate it, it goes to committee, and we know what each side is going to say. I do feel that on this occasion, with this debate on a matter that is so serious, we actually do not know what the outcome is going to be. We do not know how long the debate is going to go on. I think that is an open question.

We do not know what the outcome will be although there is certainly pressure building. For all of the New Democrats who have spoken, I can say that, contrary to what the Conservatives say, we do want to see the postal service resume, absolutely. We support those small businesses. We support and understand the need for that service to resume.

But the reality is that we are faced with a lockout and with dreadful legislation in this House that we are determined to oppose. I think that is the only honourable and principled thing we can do, while at the same time seeking changes in amendments that will help resolve this situation. I do think it presents a very interesting scenario in the House and it makes the discussion and the debate all the more meaningful.

I have heard some of the pretty amazing speeches that have taken place and the stories that people have told, whether they are about labour history, women's rights, or the impact of the labour movement. Again, the Conservative members really cannot bear to hear that, but it is a side of society that is really coming out and is rarely debated or aired thoroughly in this House.

I am appreciative that we at least are able to have that kind of discussion and get underneath this legislation to examine the principles and issues of why we in this party feel so strongly that we are opposed to this back to work legislation.

Yesterday, in his incredible speech, the member for Toronto—Danforth, the leader of the NDP, talked about the relationship that he and his family have with their letter carrier. I have the same experience. I think we all do.

I know my letter carrier, who usually comes every day at about 9:15 in east Vancouver. A couple of years ago, he noticed that my front door was open. I was not there. I was in Ottawa. He left, thinking that maybe someone was in the garden or in another room. He went on his way. He came back the next day and the door was still open.

Someone who was staying there had inadvertently left the door unlocked, so the letter carrier, my postal worker, took the time to phone the police and report it. The police came down and contacted my office and I was able to then get someone to lock the door. To me, that was a great example of how letter carriers and postal workers are so much a part of our community.

I have been down to the main depot on West Georgia Street year after year to talk to letter carriers, and also in my own community. We see them there at 6 o'clock in the morning sorting the mail, and then out in the community no matter what the weather, be it icy or snowing or raining, or whether one's stairs are broken down. No matter what, they are out there delivering the mail, so we do have a very special relationship with these folks in our community, and that is mirrored right across this country.

To me, it adds insult to injury that we are facing this legislation in the House that is forcing these folks back to work when they have been locked out, when all they want is to get to the bargaining table to negotiate a fair settlement and a fair deal. Come on, this is reasonable, and this is what labour relations are meant to be about in this country.

I am so sick and tired of hearing the Conservatives say over and over that they do not intervene in the marketplace, as that is not the role of government. So what do they do? As soon as they are faced with their buddies at Canada Post who do not like what they are facing at the bargaining table, they rush out and bring in legislation that makes it even worse. What incentive is there for Canada Post to do anything, to bargain anything, when they know that their friends here are producing legislation they could only have dreamed of and that now is a reality?

• (3610)

Yes, we are pretty opposed to all of that, on the grounds of it not just affecting postal workers but also, and I want to stress this, because of its implications for all workers in this country.

Government Orders

We can see the writing on the wall. This is about a race to the bottom. This is about establishing two tiers of wages: If an employee is new, he or she will get a different wage from some who is already there, and maybe a different pension and maybe different work and safety provisions at some point.

We understand that the government is setting a direction with this legislation by siding with the employer in a completely unilateral way that has enormous implications for labour relations in this country for all workers. We just have to look at pensions. Many of us have spoken through the night and through the day of our concerns about the pension system. It does not matter whether one is unionized or not, because everyone wants to have a sense of security for their retirement. Heaven knows, we have been raising this issue year in and year out in this House, before and after the election.

The issue of what happens to people's pensions, whether they are based on defined benefit plans or defined contribution plans, with the latter really having no security, is of critical importance not only for postal workers but for all workers in this country.

Yes, we are onto that. We recognize that the legislation is setting the direction and tone for what is going to take place in this country in terms of labour relations.

I heard one of the Conservative members say earlier that the NDP is opposed to Canada Post because it makes a profit. In fact, we are very happy that Canada Post generates profits; it shows that it is a very viable crown corporation. It is providing an essential Canadian service to all parts of this country. We just want to make sure that those profits are shared in a way that the employees get a fair deal. Again, to us that seems a very reasonable proposition. The fact that Canada Post makes a profit is not a bad thing; we just want to make sure that the workers do not get the short end of the stick.

We have all been quoting the emails we have received. To hear the Conservatives, one would think that they are only hearing from people who support their back to work legislation. However, I want to add to the record that I have heard from a number of people in my community.

I have an email I received from a small business owner, who states that:

Canada Post is running a profit. It is a Crown corporation why not share the profit. Yes I would like the mail to resume but why not focus on Canada Post listening to our postal workers and give them their due rights.

I have another letter from a constituent, who is a postal worker, who wrote to the minister, I guess a couple of days ago. This constituent says:

I know that if we are legislated back with a poor contract that does not address the many issues, especially Health and Safety, this act will do immeasurable damage to the working environment which already is a highly stressful environment. High injury rates, burn-out from extremely long routes and, believe it or not, high mail volumes coupled with extreme levels of under-staffing have made this job unmanageable.

This postal worker went on to say that we should maybe invite representatives of the parties to go on a mail route to actually see what it was like.

I am very proud of the New Democrats in this House and the fact that we understand what this legislation is about and that we are

determined to expose the implications and consequences of this legislation, not only for postal workers but for all Canadians. We want to see the postal service resume and we call again, in this House, on the government to take the locks off the door, allow that service to resume and allow collective bargaining to happen. That is the way things should be.

• (3615)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member for Scarborough—Agincourt last night never really got an answer from the New Democrats to a question he posed. It is important that we get an answer because it is important that we walk the walk in this House.

All that we do in this place is to talk, so it is important to match our talk with action. We and the Liberal members are hearing that the NDP's staff in the House have no collective bargaining agreement and that the Office of the Leader of the Opposition is ignoring the seniority of union staff and new hires in that office are being classified as management to avoid union rules.

Is this true, and if so, when will the NDP put a collective bargaining agreement in place? When will they start respecting the seniority of their union staff? When will they stop classifying new hires as management to avoid union rules? In other words, Mr. Speaker, when will the NDP talk the talk and walk the walk?

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would actually be very happy to answer that question. I do find it a bizarre question because the NDP is the only political party on this hill that stands by its principles and actually has a collective agreement negotiated with the people who work for our MPs and our overall operation. Many other parties lay people off in the summer, some of whom have very low wages. We have a very standardized approach and I'm proud to say that we operate in a very honourable way in terms of our collective agreement.

It is the party across the way that has denied for so many decades having health and safety provisions as rights here on the Hill. Those are things we have fought for. We will take no lessons from that member or the Conservative Party about collective bargaining and labour rights.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that in the last few hours we have heard many wonderful speeches in this chamber, especially on this side of the House. I also agree that what we are doing here reminds us of the movie *Groundhog Day*. Yet I remember that progress was made in that movie: Bill Murray's character decided he just could not live the same day over and over again and he tried to do something to improve himself.

I am wondering how we can do the same. I am wondering when we can start talking about amendments to this bill to further show Canadians how unreasonable and unjust Bill C-6 is and what a dangerous precedent it is.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course we want to see progress. I do not want to be stuck in that movie.

We are here debating this legislation, but we have said all along there is a very efficient and easy way to resolve this situation, and that is to remove the lockout.

Government Orders

Our leader made it very clear last night in his speech that the NDP will offer amendments and, in fact, has already been in the process of trying to offer resolution to this dispute. However, the response from the Conservative government has been rigid and unilateral.

I would ask the members opposite, are they not willing to recognize that this legislation is extremely harmful and that they need to embark on a sensible and responsible course of labour relations?

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate my colleague's point in response to a Conservative member that we do not even have health and safety provisions here on the hill. That issue has been outstanding for years. If the members opposite want to talk about fairness, how about the people on the Hill who do not have the same health and safety provisions workers across Bank Street have? That is hypocrisy. This government is engaged in that hypocrisy when it brings in closure.

I would like my colleague to talk about closure, because if we go back to when the Conservatives were in opposition and criticizing the then Liberal government on closure, they said they would never invoke it. Here we not only have had closure invoked but it has been brought in before the legislation was even tabled. So we now have new heights of hypocrisy and I wonder if the member could comment on that.

• (3620)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, the member for Ottawa Centre is entirely right. Not only are we debating really regressive legislation but the whole process by which this came forward from the government. It really is the first piece of legislation that has come forward after the budget, and it is a very telling story that the government used its majority to invoke closure on a bill that we had not even debated. How is that democratic?

Unfortunately, we have come to expect that of this Conservative government. Even so, we are opposing the legislation and will fight it all the way.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in this House representing the people of Timmins—James Bay who, over the last century, have fought many of the key labour battles that have allowed us the standard of living we enjoy today and who are watching with great concern. I have received emails from people across the region who have been watching a concerted attack against a way of life that has been built in this country thanks to working people standing together.

What we need to do here today is to deconstruct the stage play that has been set up by the PMO and the Conservative Party. This is one of their careful little stage plays where the world is in black and white and there is good versus evil, and Captain Canada over on the Conservative benches is going to rise up and squash the union bosses and the socialists. We hear such language from the back benches of the Conservative Party.

How was this stage play created? There was an ongoing labour dispute with Canada Post and CUPW. Certainly in the Conservative mind, beating up on posties is probably an okay because they think there is a collective memory of a time of great labour conflict. They keep saying that the sides have never been able to get together. In fact, look at the last time: It was in 1997 when we had to order them

back to work. Then my wonderful daughter, Margaret Lola, was not even born and now she is in high school. So this is not an ongoing crisis; it is a breakdown of discussions. Then the government intervened and locked out Canada Post.

We have an unprecedented situation where, in a fragile economy, the government is working with Canada Post to shut down the mail service of the country. That has allowed them to stand up and to say that we have a crisis and that they have been forced to act. It is a manufactured crisis. It is an old tactic of the Conservatives. John Snobelen, the leader of the Mike Harris gang, used to speak about how one has to manufacture a crisis in order to shake things up.

They shut down the postal service across the country. Then the Conservatives have come into this House dressed as Captain Canada, vowing they are going to defend the interests of the senior citizens they have cut off, that they are going to defend the small businesses they have cut off. They create this as an us versus them battle.

It was interesting last night to listen to the Minister of Labour, because she kept trying to confuse the Canadian public that the Conservatives had to intervene because it was a strike. She said the word again and again. It is a misrepresentation, because it is a lockout.

She said the government was not taking sides. Of course, we know what side the government has been on.

When the leader of our party said that we could settle this, that we were speaking with the union and that we were willing to bring forward amendments to make this work, there was laughter and ridicule from the Conservative benches that we would have a phone line to the union workers of this country. Of course, we have a phone line to them because that is how one gets things done in the country. In the New Democratic Party, we believe one should talk and not demonize.

I find it astounding that the Minister of Labour would ridicule the idea of actually talking to the other side. That is what we have been doing. We have offered amendments and offered to work with this government. We have not heard anything back from them except vitriol.

The Minister of Labour defended this. Wearing her Captain Canada logo, the minister said that the Conservatives represented 33 million people. It is an absurd claim that the Conservatives make that they represent all Canadians versus only 40,000 union members. What does that attitude represent, but a narrow mentality that the big get to crush the small.

If we went by that theory, we could undermine all manner of things in this country. That is the Conservative mentality. That is the stage play they are creating, whereas New Democrats do not believe in pitting people against each other or using the politics of division.

Unfortunately, it is not all that surprising, because we need to see the author of this stage play. I would like to quote the voice of someone who is well-known in this House, who said:

In terms of the unemployed, of which we have over a million-and-a-half, don't feel particularly bad for many of these people.

Who was that? That was the Prime Minister of our country.

Government Orders

He said that when he decided he did not like federal politics. He had better things to do. He quit his job as a member of Parliament, which some people might not remember, and he went to work for the National Citizens Coalition. He thought they had a better agenda than could be achieved in the House of Commons.

● (3625)

I was looking at the platform the current Prime Minister ran on in 1997 with the National Citizens Coalition. One point was to start attacking the interest groups such as women's organizations and human rights organizations. We sure saw how the Conservatives put the boots to KAIROS. It goes right back to the original plan. Another one was to launch a media attack against unions. We could hear it from the backbenchers. They would go on about those big bad union bosses. That was there in 1997 when the Prime Minister was running the rabble at the National Citizens Coalition.

There are some other interesting things he ran on. These are the key reasons he left Parliament. One was to set up a lobby campaign to bring in right to work legislation in Alberta. The second was the privatization and elimination of the public service. The third and most crucial one which he ran on with some of his now elected buddies was a campaign to de-unionize the workforce.

When Conservatives say they are not picking sides, we know exactly what they are doing. This has been a manufactured stage play by the extreme right in this country and a Prime Minister who said that he did not care about the fate of the unemployed. He said that in 1997. We know that a leopard never changes its spots.

I would like to indicate how this demonization has occurred under the Conservative government.

I heard the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound yesterday. The Conservatives are creating all these emails and saying that they are talking to the common people, madam and monsieur citizen. The member said his people back home say that if people starting in the workforce get \$12 an hour and three days a week, they should be tickled pink.

I have talked to many people in my riding and across the country. I have never had senior citizens come up to me and say they are ticked pink that their adult son or daughter was getting \$12 an hour with no pension and three days of work a week. They are lucky to have a job; that is the attitude. I have never heard that.

What I have heard is people asking about what has happened to our country. The pension and workforce that have been built up are being eroded. The workforce is being turned into a temp service. By intervening and creating this lockout, the government is creating a two-tiered workforce. It says that the new workers do not deserve pensions, that they deserve lower wages. My hon. colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound said they should be lucky to have a job.

I know what it is like to see communities fight to get basic wages. My grandmother told me that when she was a little girl she saw the first form of lockout and back to work legislation. It was called the army. My grandmother was a young girl when Winston Churchill sent in the army against the dockworkers of Dundee. She never forgot that.

Of course, they moved into the velvet over the brass knuckles. When my family came to Canada my grandmother was in the Hollinger mine strike that went on for six months. At that time the average life expectancy of a Timmins miner was 41 years because minders were dying of silicosis. At that time there was no eight-hour workday. They fought for the eight-hour workday. It was not given to anyone. This is something they built up.

I remember the stories of men like “Big” Jim McGuire of the Western Federation of Miners. He said that when a man gets injured in the mines, there should be compensation. The records show that the Conservatives at Queen's Park at the time laughed and ridiculed him. Their grandsons and granddaughters are here today laughing at us because we have said there is a fundamental principle here. If the Conservatives want to make this a stage play, well this is their play.

The New Democrats have said again and again that we want the locks off Canada Post. We want people back to work. We want a fair negotiated agreement. This takes good will. We have offered to work with the government. We have offered to help bring the union to the table if the government is willing to listen. However, it is not going to happen if the government ridicules the notion of actually talking to the union, if it tries to demonize them as union bosses, and if the members of the government believe that people making 12 bucks an hour for three days a week should be happy to have a job. That might be the Conservative ideology, but it is not ours.

● (3630)

The Conservatives say they will not take sides, but look at Nortel. Look at the Nortel workers who lost their jobs and their pensions. Look at the sick workers whose benefits were cut off and the government did nothing. Every other western nation that was involved in Nortel stood up for their workers. The government did nothing, but—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member's time has expired.

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of State for Transport.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's comments. We are here today to talk about resuming mail service for Canadians.

After eight months of negotiations, the negotiations broke down. There were rotating strikes which led to a lockout, which led to a complete mail stoppage, which has had a huge detrimental impact not only on the postal workers and the financial viability of Canada Post, but most important on the people of Canada. That is why we are here as the Government of Canada and members in the House of Commons, to represent the stakeholders, the people of Canada. Would the member acknowledge that?

We recognize that the member and his party have strong ties to organized labour. However, would they put aside those biases and support the Canadian government in bringing workers back to work so that Canadians can get their mail in a timely manner? Will the member's party support the Government of Canada in supporting the people of Canada?

Government Orders

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the minister's argument and it seemed to get rather convoluted. At one point he said that great stress has been caused to business. Yes, of course. That was caused by his government's decision to lock out the workers.

How much more direct do we have to be? Do we in the New Democratic Party want the workers back at work? We want them back now. This is why we have said let us just sit down and deal with these amendments, but the government does not want to do that.

Then the minister presented a circular Conservative argument saying that they, as in Captain Canada and the Conservative Party, represent Canada. They do not represent Canada. He accused the New Democratic Party of not representing Canada. Why do the Conservatives not do the right thing?

I say to the member that I do represent Canadians. I represent the people of Timmins—James Bay and I will be in this House for as long as it will take to ensure that people get a fair deal.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting listening to the debate. I very much appreciate the fact that there are many people who are also listening to what is taking place in this chamber. There is a great deal of sympathy in terms of the hassles and the bother that the Canada Post workers have had to endure because of being locked out.

Earlier in his speech the member made reference to the fact that the NDP have provided amendments to the government as to what could be done on this legislation. It would be extremely helpful if the NDP could provide that information to the Liberal Party. It would be great to end the lockout and let the workers get back to work.

Having said that, I understood from his comments that there are some amendments which the NDP has shared with the government. Would the NDP object to sharing them with all Canadians and members of the chamber?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we have made an offer to the government to settle this. I am not trying to freeze the Liberal Party out of this whatsoever. We are trying to act in good faith with the government. We have offered the amendments. We have offered not to go public with them. We want to see if the government will sit down and negotiate. That is how it is done.

We are serious about getting this situation settled. We know everybody wants their mail service back. This manufactured crisis by the Conservative Party has an impact on Canadians across the country. We think it is completely unacceptable that the government has held senior citizens hostage when the mail servers said that they would ensure that any cheques for seniors would be delivered. They made that offer. Once again, the Conservatives are not talking to the people on the lines. We have been talking to them. We know what their offers are. We know what the issues are. We are offering as the official opposition to make this happen. We just need to see that the government is actually willing to stop holding the Canadian public hostage.

● (3635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank my constituents for their support. And I also want to wish them a wonderful Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

My riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges is quite awesome. From the top of Rigaud Mountain, we can see farmland, the Ottawa River and Lac des Deux Montagnes on the north side. My constituents know the south shore of the St. Lawrence quite well. Some say that Rigaud Mountain is but a hill, but the landscape tells quite a story. Today's sand plains were once the shores of Champlain Sea, which was created by the melting of ice sheets after the ice age.

Our crucial waterways were shaped by melting ice. Watersheds are an integral part of our lives. The forests, rivers and wetlands in my riding are part of the creation myths of the Mohawks who live on the other side of Lac des Deux-Montagnes.

We also have the Haudenosaunee nation, known as the Iroquois, and Turtle Island, for the turtle coming out of the water. These were among the first communities to be established in the region. There is a long history of fine communities made up of good people looking after each other and rising to every challenge. This is the region where my father decided to settle. It is the region where the father of my party leader also settled with his family. They wanted their children to grow up surrounded by nature, in a healthy environment among warm people who were always willing to lend a helping hand, and in a place where they could attend good schools. They wanted us to grow up in a better world.

[*English*]

They wanted us to grow up in a better world. My father, William Nicholls, was a working man. He worked in a non-union job for a company called Control Data. That was a company that delivered computer paper to all the departments of the federal government in the 1970s and 1980s. That was my introduction to Ottawa, at the age of eight. As we drove into Ottawa in his truck, we would bring boxes through the back doors. He delivered an essential service. He kept the databanks of the government going.

Sometimes he was treated with disdain when he entered through the wrong door. His work was taken for granted. Other times, he was greeted warmly. As a child watching the reactions of these people to my working father, I realized how manual labourers in this country were perceived.

I find it unfortunate that the government is trying to place blame on the working people of this country by confusing for Canadians the difference between a strike and a lockout.

It is not surprising, though. The government is happy to discourage the voting population into thinking that public service and government does not work. It would have them believe that people working in a union have cushy lives and that they are spoiled. I am sure the Conservatives' Minister of Labour will set them straight on that.

Government Orders

Once upon a time there was a young girl of eight years old. Her name was Lisa MacCormack. Her father was a union organizer in Nova Scotia. This girl grew up to be a minister in Canada's government. Through struggle, hard-working values and respect for work, her family was able to prosper. Through her union family's upbringing, she was able to prosper.

My father wanted a better life for me too. That is what I also want for my daughter. I am here for Pera Nicholls, age six. I want her to know that in my short life I struggled to make a better world for her, a world where she will not be worked so hard that her body breaks down before its time like so many workers' bodies in this country do.

My father died at 62 years old of lung cancer. He smoked because it was a psychological crutch for him. All the weight, worries and stresses of the world were channelled into those cigarettes. My father did not like his work. He did it with pride and the knowledge that his sons would have a better life and that they would have benefits, pensions, respect, low stress and an easier life than his was.

Our time on this earth is limited. We have maybe 100 years each, and in a hundred years all of us in this room will be gone. Is it not our calling on earth to alleviate the suffering of all of our fellow citizens?

What I see from the government is a mean-spirited 19th century attitude; that is, survival of the fittest. And I find that echoed in the words of Stockwell Day in his address to the Conservative convention that was held a couple of weeks ago. He said, "The official opposition will bring out the saddest cases, the most hard done by. They will present to Canadians stories of the most hard done by".

Do members know what his advice was to them? He said, "Don't listen to them. They are the exception. We are here to promote Canada's prosperity". That sums up the Conservative spirit for me. The Conservatives are for the prosperity of the few.

The Conservatives throw the label "socialist" at us. I would ask Canadians why Conservatives took the word "progressive" out of their party name. Its absence implies that they are the regressive Conservatives. That name would certainly be apt, since they want to take us back to jolly old Victorian times when there were fewer workers' rights, sexuality was repressed and people lived in fear of God. It was easier to control people and easier for monopolies to form. The term "regressive" always implies rolling back rights and measures that were put into place to make workers' lives less stressful.

I cannot say that the Conservatives are deliberately misleading Canadians when they continually refer to the crisis before us as a strike; that would be unparliamentary to imply that. I will let Canadians be the judge of that.

• (3640)

It is a lockout. It is a lockout that has been done with the approval of the government. The Conservatives are the ones who are keeping hardworking Canadians from working. Why? That is in order to demonize them in an attempt to turn Canadians against working people.

I would like to read an email from Jack Coyne from the Yukon:

Thank you for the telephone call this evening in regards to the Canadian postal... [lockout]. It is heart-warming to know there are those in our nation's capital who are working hard to resolve this dispute.

I believe the fabric of our country is being damaged with the halt of Canada Post. Certainly we all know there are other ways of communicating during this lock-out, but what of the elderly who are unable to send each other birthday cards? What of those who depend on mail-order catalogues? I personally know of dozens of artists who are unable to ship their wares worldwide. I have a farmer friend who was lucky to receive his chicks (chickens) before this...[lockout].

I know of people who are waiting for this conflict to end and are desperate for their cheque in the mail. The lack of Canada Post is a missing link in our lives and I feel people do not understand the significance of this void and perhaps will not understand until perhaps it is too late.

Obviously, the longer the...[lockout] continues, the less faith the public will have in the system, translating into less mail volume; This reduction will result in the inability to support our current level of service and will ultimately spell the demise of our current world-class postal system.

I believe in the importance of our Canadian Postal System. It is part of our culture and it is part of our heritage. Please do not allow it to perish.

I am grateful for your obvious concern and diligence; I appreciate your getting in touch with me.

I believe these sentiments from Mr. Coyne are shared by many, so I would say to the Prime Minister, "Take off the locks, Mr. Prime Minister". Welcome the workers back and let them do their jobs. One phone call and you can stop this lockout. Take off the locks, Mr. Prime Minister.

• (3645)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would actually all get back to work if the opposition made the choice to simply stop this debate and vote with respect to the bill to make sure people get back to work immediately.

Our government was elected with a strong mandate to complete Canada's economic recovery. Recent polls state that 70% of Canadians support back to work legislation to end the work stoppage at Canada Post.

In my riding, Simcoe—Grey, Canadians want their postal service restored so they can get back to business, so their charities can flourish and they can make sure they are going to be profitable and provide jobs to people.

Can the member explain why the official opposition is not on the same side with the majority of Canadians?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately this government is committed to maintaining this lockout. This approach has deliberately caused division and conflict among Canadians. I find it unfortunate that the Prime Minister and his ministers have chosen ideology over allowing Canadians to receive their mail.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post entered contract talks determined to create a two-tier system of pensions, meaning that existing employees would continue to get a guaranteed income at retirement, but new hires would be put on a defined contribution plan. The employer makes regular payments into employees' pension funds but offers no commitment to what the payout will be.

Meanwhile, census figures from Statistics Canada show that younger workers were earning less in 2005 than their parents were a generation earlier.

Government Orders

I am wondering if my hon. colleague could tell the House about the kind of precedent this back to work legislation sets for future generations of workers entering the workforce, many of whom will be young Canadians who already fall within the lowest income brackets of our country.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

I believe that what is being done right now is trying to sell out future generations and their right to the benefits and pay and working conditions that our ancestors have enjoyed. I see this as a mean-spirited approach on the part of the government to sell out the rights of future generations that have been established in this country.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question in regard to the opposition member's views on the people who live in the remote and isolated communities of Canada's Arctic.

The member for the Northwest Territories is very silent. The people from the Arctic depend on Canada Post for their daily livelihood needs, including milk, diapers and food.

Why are the members from northern Quebec not speaking on behalf of the people who live in those isolated communities and who depend on Canada Post for their daily basic necessities, the people from Nunavut, and the people from the Northwest Territories: Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, Paulatuk?

Where are the members from the NDP to speak out for aboriginal people who depend on Canada Post for their daily livelihood?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, everyone knows that the member from our party for the Northwest Territories spoke in this House, and he spoke very fervently and definitely to this issue.

I wonder if the minister could clarify and apologize for her comments.

The Speaker: That is clearly not a point of order.

The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

• (3650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, it is sad that cuts were made in the past to postal service in northern Canada. The Conservatives' lack of respect not only for workers, but also for the people of Quebec who are celebrating their national holiday is also sad.

Unfortunately, the government wants to maintain the lockout. This is a deliberate attempt to cause dissension and division among Canadians, to divide the northerners and the southerners. I think it is a shame that the Prime Minister of Canada and his cabinet have opted for this ideology instead of letting Canadians—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Surrey North.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want start by thanking the people of Surrey North for giving me the opportunity and privilege to be their voice in this House today.

I also want to wish a joyous day to my friends from Quebec on this national day for Quebec.

I want to commend my colleagues for working so hard in the last 24 hours and being here around the clock. They have done a wonderful job of standing up for the hard-working people of Canada.

I have been hearing from government members across the aisle that owners of small businesses have been calling them. Small business owners have also been calling me. They are telling me they want the government to unlock those doors, let the workers go back to work and get our postal service working.

I stand here as a new MP for Surrey North. As the owner of a small business and as a person who believes in our charter rights to collective bargaining, I also believe in good-paying jobs that support our local economies and the small businesses in our communities.

I had a chance to meet a couple of postal workers during the election. In the conversation I had with them, they said they were worried about their pensions and about their wages being clawed back. They were afraid. They wondered what they were going to do.

Lowering wages is basically a race to the bottom that the government seems to support. It will hurt us all in the long run.

When I moved to this beautiful country 31 years ago, my brother had a very good-paying job. He worked in the sawmills. He was a unionized worker and he helped me to go to university because he had that good-paying job.

I have talked to many people in the last years and months who are working in the sawmills. I am mindful that the government and the Government of British Columbia do not want to support secondary manufacturing. They would rather ship raw logs abroad. That is a discussion for another day.

With this lowering of wages, I bet there are people earning \$12 an hour now, working in the same sawmills my brother worked in as he helped to support me. What are these people going to do? How are they going to be able to afford an education for their children?

The extra money that is earned in good-paying jobs is spent in our communities, in small businesses. In this House we talk about small businesses being at the heart of our economic engine. If we are not supporting our small businesses, how can the economy prosper?

I own a small restaurant in Surrey and I know how this impacts our communities. This money is being taken out of our local businesses, out of the pockets of small businesses that are already being hurt by the HST that was introduced by the Conservative government and by the B.C. Liberal government. I know how it hurt the small businesses in British Columbia when it was introduced by the Conservative government and the B.C. Liberal government.

Government Orders

● (3655)

I read this in the paper yesterday. The Prime Minister and the former premier of British Columbia had cooked up this deal in secret. Can we guess who has been appointed high commissioner to Britain? It is the former premier of British Columbia. That is for another day.

We need good jobs in our communities. The Conservative government does not believe in this idea.

The government has a choice. It can unlock those doors and let the workers go back to work.

I am speaking today in the House under very difficult circumstances. The government has introduced a piece of legislation that will take away the right of workers to bargain in good faith. That to me is unacceptable. It is impossible for me or for any person who values the legal right to strike, a right that is in our constitution, to support this legislation.

The government has chosen to violate the rights of the workers to negotiate a fair agreement. It is highly unusual for a government to force back-to-work legislation on locked-out employees. It is highly unusual because it seems to most people to be completely unreasonable. It is clear to most reasonable people that locking out workers is not fair collective bargaining.

Again, collective bargaining is our charter right. I wonder what the government is trying to say to Canadian workers by taking this unreasonable course of action. What is the government trying to say to hard-working families? Is it that the right to collective bargaining does not really exist in Canada? It does not seem to exist under this government.

This intervention by the Conservative government, this imposition by the Conservative government, is something I simply cannot support. I find it very troubling that the government would throw out our rights with such ease. It does not seem to be the Canada that I came to 31 years ago. In my Canada, hard-working people are respected. Their rights are respected, not ignored or trampled upon by government.

I am disappointed by the actions of the Conservative government. These actions are not acceptable to me or to the people of my riding of Surrey North.

The proposed back-to-work legislation to end the postal dispute sets out a wage settlement that is actually lower than Canada Post's last offer. We know that. We have talked about it in the last day or two. The legislation outlines a wage settlement of 1.75% in the first year, 1.5% in the second year and 2% in each of the final two years. However, at the bargaining table Canada Post had offered 1.9% in each of the first three years, followed by 2% in the final year.

Basically, this legislation offers the postal workers lower wages than what they had bargained for in good faith before the Conservative government locked them out. The difference works out to about \$860 to \$870 for a full-time employee over the course of the agreement.

Yesterday we heard our labour minister talk about 45,000 people against 33 million people. Let us remember that those 45,000 people

who work in the postal service have families behind them. They have many small businesses behind them.

The Conservative government has made it clear that it is opposed to workers trying to improve their working conditions and to families making a living wage in our country.

● (3700)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly the NDP members have not thought through the impact this is having on many of the people who live in Canada's remote and isolated communities of northern Labrador, Makivik regions of Quebec, Nunavut regions or Northwest Territories.

Where are the individuals from that party who support the interests of the aboriginal people who depend on Canada Post for every product that is shipped to their communities? There are no highways. They depend on Canada Post for milk, for diapers, for prescription drugs.

Who is speaking out on behalf of those individuals in Canada's Arctic regions of Labrador, northern Quebec, Nunavut and Northwest Territories? Where is the member from the Northwest Territories? Why is he not speaking on behalf of people from Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, Ulukhaktok, Kuujuaq?

Who is speaking on—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Surrey North.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member from the Northwest Territories spoke here last night. I believe the member from the Conservative side was probably not here. I think she needs to check *Hansard* to see that the member for the Northwest Territories was here.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Surrey North should know that it is unparliamentary to refer to the absence or presence of other members.

I should just remind all members that when these points of order keep coming up, going back and forth, it takes away time from members or it adds to their time, depending on who is raising the point of order and whether it is provoked or unprovoked.

Let us try to keep that in mind.

The hon. member for Surrey North.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, the government could start the mail in two hours.

All the Prime Minister has to do is pick up the phone and unlock those doors.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know that this is a lockout, even though the other side wants to make Canadians believe it is a strike.

In reference to the member from the other side who was talking about people being hurt because of this lockout, could the member let her or the government know that if it were to unlock the doors, the problems would be solved? Small businesses would get their cheques and could rehire their employees.

Government Orders

Could the member remind government members that this is not a strike, but a lockout caused by the government? Can the member please tell the hon. members from the opposite side the hardships the government is causing to people from the north?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that this is a lockout.

The government has a choice. It can unlock the doors and get the postal workers back to work and get those cheques to the seniors.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question to this member is this: just when should the government act?

This process has been going on for months. Then we had the rotating strikes. Then we had a lockout. It was over a week ago that the government gave notice that this legislation would be front of Parliament, and they are still not talking, either the union to Canada Post or vice versa.

We have the NDP filibustering the passage of this important legislation. How many months or years of negotiations should take place before the member would take some action on this matter?

• (3705)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, again, the government is not listening to the people.

The government has a choice. The government can unlock those doors and the postal workers would be back at work within hours.

It is also my understanding that the union had proposed that they would continue to work under the old agreement, but the government chose to lock them out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to send greetings to the people of Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Today is the national holiday of Quebec. Of course, I should be in my riding, touring the municipalities, going from one celebration to another and meeting my constituents in Matane, Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Cap-Chat, Mont-Joli, Amqui, Causapsal, Saint-Gabriel and Sainte-Flavie. Nonetheless, here I am. It is important to be here and that is why my Bloc Québécois colleagues and I have been on duty all night to speak and intervene in this important debate.

My skin is not pale and greenish today because I was partying all night, but because I stayed up late. It is not that the Green Party's colour has rubbed off on me, it is that we fought hard all night with the opposition members to make the government listen to reason.

Yesterday, there was a chance of getting unanimous consent to a motion moved by my colleague, the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, in order to suspend the sitting of the House. Even though the government formally recognized the nation of Quebec, in practice it does not. It would have been nice if the government had given unanimous consent and allowed all my colleagues from Quebec, regardless of their party, to be in their riding to celebrate with their family and friends.

Today, I am sad not to be in my riding, but I know that my comments and today's debate are right. Most of all, I am sad for the postal workers. From the start, we have been hearing the government blame the postal workers. It claims that these workers are exercising a right to strike or are engaged in a strike that is not fair and is undermining all workers in Quebec and Canada who have obligations. We understand that the postal service is a very important service, but do we need to remind the government that we are not talking about a strike, but a lockout? A lockout is not remotely the same as a strike.

The postal workers' decision to go on rotating strikes was completely legitimate. A union has every right to apply pressure. The pressure tactics chosen by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers were considered appropriate and were not overly disruptive to Canada's postal services. On the one hand, rotating strikes allowed postal workers to get their point across, while on the other hand, they did not unduly penalize other Canadians who also had commitments, who wanted to get their mail and send letters and so on.

The source of the conflict is not the rotating strikes; it is the lockout imposed by Canada Post with the—dare I say it?—complicity of the government. This lockout was imposed too fast and is an inappropriate government strategy to try to move things too quickly. The bill is completely inappropriate, too hasty and too coercive. In my opinion, the government's strategy is completely unreasonable.

Postal workers play an important role. I am from a rural community. We were talking about isolated areas earlier. Mail plays a very important part in our lives. In our communities, our municipalities and our villages, post offices serve as beacons. In addition to getting their mail and using the postal services, people get together there. Post offices are a meeting point, a focus point.

As you know, local services in our communities are extremely important. When services are undermined through proposed legislation, as the government is doing here today, this generally lowers the quality of service. Canada Post is in the process of conducting a strategic review to examine postal services in rural areas. Some of our country roads have rural mailboxes.

• (3710)

These mailboxes allow people to have their mail delivered to their home. However, rural communities are increasingly being undermined whether due to privatization of some sort, or a reduction in services. I know many Canada Post employees who work out in the field and are disappointed right now by the way the Government of Canada is treating them. It is treating them like pariahs, and as if they have failed to negotiate in good faith, when in fact the methods used by the postal union were entirely legitimate.

The difficulties our regions are facing in terms of regional development are primarily due to government decisions like this one, which weaken our communities.

Government Orders

Earlier, I listened to the Honourable Minister of Health speak about what has been done for northern Canada, and of the difficulties currently faced by northerners. I am fully aware that the existing situation affects them terribly. However, the blame cannot directly be laid upon postal workers. The lock out is obviously to blame for this situation.

Earlier, the minister bemoaned the reduction in services to northerners, but was it not the very same government that reduced government subsidies lowering the cost of foodstuffs, and then reversed tack and reinstated the program to help northern communities? This government is engaging in doublespeak.

The government needs to see reason. It should consider the proposals brought forward by the opposition, take a step back, and acknowledge that it acted too hastily. It might agree to a number of motions or amendments and see them as being for the greater good. It is not a question of interfering in the current negotiation process, but rather of finding some common ground upon which both the postal union and employer could agree.

In closing, I would ask the government to take note of the opposition's unanimous condemnation of the deplorable manner in which the government is treating postal workers. I call on the government to adopt the amendments, when proposed.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to read into the record an e-mail I received this morning from a business owner:

The postal interruption has dried up cash flow to my small business. We, like many other small businesses, receive most of our remittances by cheque from across North America. Our customers are not paying any bills. This week we still had to pay our workers for payroll, still had the lease payments for our trucks and trailers, still had to pay repair bills, and trucks needed fuel. With very little money coming in, we are in an increasingly tight spot. Every other business in our industry that I have spoken to is in the same bind.

Then in bold underline he said:

We need the postal service to get back to work. All I can say is a humble thank you to you as our MP and to your fellow Conservative members who care about small businesses across Canada who are badly suffering. Thank you for the back-to-work legislation and for your perseverance in making sure that it will pass. I will make sure everybody I have contact with knows which political party cares about businesses in this country that employ millions of workers, versus the opposition party, who are only concerned with their narrow, self-serving interest.

Why is the member not standing up for ordinary Canadians whose jobs are at risk because of this postal interruption?

• (3715)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague on the other side of the House for his question.

We basically agree on the effect that the current lockout imposed by Canada Post is having. Indeed, the impact on small- and medium-sized businesses is notable. But the solution does not lie in imposing special legislation that flouts the workers' rights. The solution to this problem lies basically in the understanding that the government must have of the situation on the ground and that the workers must have a fair agreement with their employer.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was involved in the labour movement as president of my local union and president of our local labour council for close to 30 years, and I have never seen a piece of back-to-work legislation so draconian as this. I have a word for it. It seems the Conservatives have just caused the race to the bottom to shift into high gear.

I am really concerned, and I will ask the member from the Bloc, why would the minister not trust her experienced arbitrators to settle the actual parts of the dispute, as opposed to legislating it and destroying people's faith in the system?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

The government's strategy is a serious political mistake. Perhaps I consider it that way because I teach political science. This strategy, as it is being taught, is an unreasonable strategy that would show that the government is creating an entirely new precedent and a type of jurisprudence for future conflicts. It is important that the government change its mind, that it realize the impact of the choice it has made with this special legislation and that it humbly support the proposals presented by the opposition.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the hon. member, after the vote on the order of reference, which I am looking forward to, what do we need to do to make progress for Canadians?

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, we have to allow politics to be much more democratic. We have to allow citizens to regain political leverage. Participatory democracy has to become a new approach to politics. We currently have a patent example of an archaic approach to politics. It is time to change things and take other approaches that will ensure that parties, regardless of what side of the House they are on, will truly be able to co-operate to listen to reason and consider solutions that will benefit everyone.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before beginning my speech, I would like to thank people. Since this morning, we have been receiving dozens of emails supporting us and telling us we need to rise in the House to defend the rights of workers. I am proud to be here with all my colleagues taking turns to defend those rights. I would like to wish all my constituents, those from Beauharnois—Salaberry in particular, an excellent national holiday of Quebec.

The Conservative government is acting in bad faith by wanting to impose an unacceptable labour contract on Canada Post employees and opting for an authoritarian response to the labour dispute, as it did with Air Canada.

Yesterday, I met with a union representative who came to Ottawa to tell me that workers need us and they cannot wait to go back to work and for the lockout to end so that they can continue to work and deliver the mail.

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A few days ago, intensive discussions were held to try to find a solution to the dispute, but management shut the door and called a lockout. I know that I have repeated this several times, but what we have here is a lockout and not a strike. And yet, all the employees did was use a reasonable way to draw attention to their demands, a rotating strike that did not have much of an impact on basic services. It affected only one municipality at a time for a 24-hour period. Now, as we speak here today, all negotiations have been broken off. Clearly, it is in the employer's interest to take a hard line now that the government is on its side.

After all these hours of discussion, I can't believe that the Conservative government has not had second thoughts about its decision and asked Canada Post to lift its lockout. Postal employees continued to provide services during negotiations and all Canadians were receiving their mail. What bothers me most is that the government would have people believe that the problem stems from the employees, when what they are claiming is a legitimate and basic right, the right to properly bargain for a collective agreement that is fair and just.

Furthermore, this same government is making incoherent statements to which I strongly object. Instead of sticking to the facts, the Conservatives are twisting them and trying to scare people, as evidenced by the fact that they keep repeating that we are in a crisis and that they feel they have to intervene. What a deceiving and misleading attitude! Their disgusting intervention, rather than improving conditions for employees, is harmful to the bargaining process. It is harmful because the government, through the use of its special disrespectful act, is making a wage offer that is below what was put forward by management. Shame on them!

Why would Canada Post return to the bargaining table when the government is getting involved in the dispute in favour of management? There would be no advantage for them to do so. This inappropriate intervention by the government is prolonging the dispute, effectively holding Canadians hostage. Clearly, those who are no longer receiving their mail or their pay cheque are increasingly unhappy, and rightly so. But the employees are also no longer receiving any pay cheque.

It is therefore important to remember that it is the insidious strategy of the Conservatives that has plunged us into this difficult situation. Employees are waiting to return to work. Why would the government not encourage Canada Post, which had profits of \$281 million last year, to reinvest in working conditions that would be beneficial to its employees?

Is it not obvious that a healthy working environment in which workers are treated well and acknowledged for their valuable contribution, whether in terms of personal relations between management and employees, or in terms of fair and equitable working conditions, would promote increased employee efficiency and productivity? The more people feel happy and proud to go to work, the more they do their work conscientiously. While this strikes me as elementary logic, management and the government apparently disagree.

And yet, Canada Post workers put body and soul into ensuring that their fellow citizens receive their mail. Some suffer physically from having to walk in storms, lift parcels and repeat the same

movements each day. They don't complain because they love what they do, are well paid and look forward to a happy retirement. Is this something that is now in the past?

• (3720)

Will the government set a precedent? It is important to realize that the key issue here is the health and safety of workers. Letter carriers and postal employees are among those workers who are most seriously affected by occupational injuries. Canada Post loses four days of work per person per year because of injury or illness. Employees spend more time standing in front of machines and this increases the risk of a back injury. Letter carriers must walk 12 to 15 kilometres per day with considerable weight on their shoulders. Not only that, but the new lettermail sorting machines require them to carry more envelopes in their arms and hands, thereby increasing the risk of injury.

By forcefully imposing a labour contract that is disparaging to employees, how does the government hope to restore a positive and productive work climate? Relations between management and employees will be very tense and the morale of workers will be at its lowest ebb. And yet, the Conservative government boasts that it is promoting the economy, creating quality jobs and fighting poverty. These are nothing but empty words. My last school principal told me to be careful of those who talk a lot, and to concentrate instead on people's actions.

I realize that the government is making cost reductions an objective at the expense of its own employees. Because just in case they have not realized it yet, Canada Post employees are also citizens of Canada, from coast to coast, and they contribute to the country's economy. On every post office is written "*A Mari usque ad Mare*". They are full Canadian citizens. There are 48,000 of them, not to mention their families.

Perhaps the government's goal is precisely to sow division among people in order to reign more effectively. By imposing its back-to-work legislation, which causes a decline in working conditions, young people, the next generation, will no longer be interested in this kind of work, the workload will become too heavy and the other employees will become inefficient. And once that happens, the Conservatives will be able to suggest privatization. Is this really the beginning of the end for public services?

We therefore would do well to allow the two parties to settle this dispute. Our public postal service is one of the most cost-effective in the world. In 2009, Canada Post generated millions of dollars in profits and stamps are not very expensive here compared to other countries. For example, a stamp in Canada costs 59¢, compared to 78¢ in Germany and 88¢ in Austria. It is true however that the industry is currently facing many challenges. The emergence of new technologies such as the digitization of communications, is transforming postal services.

Government Orders

Traditional postal services have probably reached their peak. However, the post office is not likely to disappear. It will always remain important, particularly in rural areas. Workers understand the need to modernize services and the importance of looking towards changes for the future. The collective agreement between Canada Post and the union already allows it to adjust levels of workers, and Canada Post Corporation has reduced hours of work to a level that is proportionately higher than the decline in mail volume.

Other countries have managed to meet the challenge of modernizing postal services while keeping them universal. How? They provide services that focus on new public needs that are more lucrative and then using the profits to finance basic services in all regions. Some people seem to believe that no one sends letters anymore and that postal service is doomed to disappear. That is false. The volume of lettermail is 10% higher than it was in 1997.

Despite the many challenges facing our postal service, it is important not to forget that most Canadians support maintaining universal services and are against privatization, as was pointed out by a postal service consultative committee. Canadians want quality, universal and affordable service for all urban and rural communities. Furthermore, the postal service is important for small and medium-sized businesses.

What is happening now is extremely important for all Canadians. The special bill to force through a regulation that attacks the most basic rights of workers is a Conservative government strategy to use force to settle a dispute, and it risks creating a dangerous precedent.

What kind of society do we really want? Do we want a fairer and more democratic society, one in which disputes are settled by means of negotiations, or a country that attacks the rights of workers and forces them to return to work without being consulted? I stand proudly beside my colleagues...

• (3725)

The Speaker: Order, please. We must now move on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans has the floor.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to welcome the new member for Beauharnois—Salaberry and to congratulate her for her spirit and drive. She represents a very lovely region that I have been visiting for a long time, ever since the old regattas in Valleyfield.

We have been hearing from many different people today discordant opinions that would appear to be leading to political polarization, with people laying blame right and left. To be sure, a lockout is no fun. On the other hand, random strikes anywhere in Canada, when we do not know from one day to the next when we will be the next victims, can also paralyze the economy.

I would like to ask my new colleague how long we should have waited before making a decision, a decision that we made a week ago now.

• (3730)

Ms Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the other side of the House for his question. But I find that the question is inaccurate. The strikes do not happen

randomly. They are a right. They were organized. And strikes do not create victims. There were rotating strikes organized 24 hours at a time in one municipality at a time, in order to apply a small amount of pressure to make people aware of the conditions faced by employees who wanted to negotiate and to exert some power over the bargaining that was underway.

We are also not attempting to place the blame on anyone. All we are doing is reporting the facts. Bargaining had begun and is not yet over. Then, there was a lockout that prevented the continuation of the bargaining. All we want is to find a solution that would enable the two parties to resume bargaining process so that everyone can have their mail delivered to them.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank and congratulate the new member of Parliament for giving a very powerful presentation.

[*English*]

After these many hours, everyone has been present but some of us have not slept. I have observed and listened to all the speeches.

At this point, I feel so frustrated. I feel like a mom who wants to call time out. I feel that all the members on all sides of the House have good intentions but we cannot seem to meet in the middle. I honestly believe we could get people back to work. We could open those doors if we reduced the partisanship of the discussion and started trying to figure out where we could come together because we want the mail to move and we want the workers to be respected.

What does my friend, the new member, say?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from the Green Party.

The goal is in fact for all the employees to go back to work. That is what the employees are writing to us every minute of every day. All these people are just asking to return to work, to earn a living and to continue building a future for their families. The goal here is not to take sides; the goal is to really try to help people return to work in a dignified workplace that is mindful of their working conditions.

We are defending working conditions here. We do not want to take a step back to when everything was dangerous, when safety and salary conditions were precarious, and when the living conditions of families were poor. What we really want is to return towards conditions that are more fair and humane.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first opportunity to do so, I would like to say thank you very much to the constituents of Hochelaga and wish them a happy national holiday, this June 24. It is not by chance that I am wearing a blue shirt today.

I have a large constituency. It is diverse but, at the same time, it is very much like a village. The name actually comes from an Iroquois village, Hochelaga. I see a lot of neighbours helping each other in the village. There is a lot of imagination. As I was saying, it is diverse. There are middle-class people, but there are also very many people living in poverty, unfortunately.

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I firmly intend to listen to them, to address the situations they bring to me as best as I can and to protect their rights. What are the rights of ordinary people? We talk a lot about ordinary people. The following are some examples: decent housing, that goes without saying; access to healthy food, that is where it all starts. In short, they have the right to a decent life.

The government is saying that it wants to protect ordinary people—that same term again—by forcing the Canada Post workers to go back to work. It seems to exclude postal workers from the ordinary people category.

The government is also accusing the opposition of wanting to protect these workers, Canada Post workers. These people are cousins, sisters and neighbours. Everyone here knows people who work at Canada Post. These are ordinary people. They are no different from the rest of the population, except for the fact that they are lucky enough not to have to go alone before their boss to ask for a day off to, for example, accompany their child on a school trip. Indeed, it can be intimidating to have to meet one's boss alone to ask him for things like that.

Why do postal workers enjoy that benefit? It is because they go together and they have a body to represent them, namely their union. What do those bad union people do on a day to day basis? We, workers, spend 33% of our time at work. Come to think of it, that is a lot of time. One third of our day is spent at work. The union is there to ensure that the environment in which we spend all that time is adequate.

What do union people do when a new collective agreement must be negotiated? First, union members democratically appoint a negotiating committee. A vote is held. So, a choice is already being made by members. The committee then makes inquiries, asks questions to members and sends questionnaires. It does all these sorts of things to see what improvements could be made. Then, it prepares a document listing all the demands and submits it to members. Again, there is a vote. This is a democratic process. Moreover, and this is important, members are asked to set priorities. They are asked what is most important to them and how they will react if the committee does not succeed in getting one thing or another. So, when the committee enters into negotiations, it already knows what the members' priorities are. It then sets out to negotiate those priorities, while knowing what members are prepared to accept or not.

The Conservatives also often accuse us of hurting ordinary people and small businesses by opposing the back-to-work legislation. Let us clarify things once again. Some workers were engaged in rotating strikes. The mail was still being delivered. Some employees were prepared to deliver cheques to retirees and to people on welfare. Again, the mail would have been delivered. However, the employer ordered a lockout and the mail could no longer be delivered. It is not workers who are preventing the mail from being delivered, it is the employer. The employees even said they will return to work if the employer puts an end to the lockout.

I am now going to deal with a few demands. Canada Post wants different working conditions to apply to new employees. For example, someone who is hired next month will earn 18% less than someone who was hired last month.

Let us say that I work at a job and the person next to me does exactly the same work.

● (3735)

I was hired in July, while the other person was hired in May or June. I will earn 82% of the other person's salary for doing exactly the same work, even though he has held his job for just a month or two less than I have. That is discriminatory and unfair.

Moreover, new employees are often young people who are joining the labour force. It is already hard for young people to support their families, but it is going to be even more difficult.

Let us now talk about salary increases. Canada Post has offered 1.9%, 1.9%, 1.9% and 2%. The government has lowered these increases to 1.75%, 1.5%, 2% and 2%. Meanwhile, between 1997 and 2010, the CEO's salary increased by a yearly average of 2.2%. If we include performance bonuses, we get 3.8% on a \$600,000 salary. That is significantly more money than 1.5% or 2% on an annual salary of \$35,000 or \$40,000. So there is a great injustice here.

This is a government that, in my opinion, uses its majority for disgraceful purposes. That is why NDP members have decided to spend the night in this House, and that is why those who are from Quebec are not with their constituents to celebrate the national holiday. We have principles and we are going to stand up for them to the very end.

● (3740)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Hochelaga for the almost perfect speech that she delivered here today.

We often hear government members say that small businesses are suffering because of the lockout. I wonder if the hon. member for Hochelaga could tell us what the government can do to prevent small businesses from suffering because of this lockout.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The answer is very simple, and that is the answer that I am going to give to any government member who puts that question to me.

We have to end the lockout immediately. Cheques and bills can be delivered. People can receive the documents they need and everything will be fine. That is how we could help small businesses: by ending this lockout immediately.

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to ordinary people who live at the poverty line. The member should know that this lockout and the delay in passing the back-to-work legislation are causing personal hardship to many people in remote, isolated communities of Labrador, Makivik region of Quebec, Kuujuaq, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories. There are many seniors who wait for their pension cheques. They live cheque to cheque to buy food. There are other people in the communities who depend on Canada Post to ship their products like milk or diapers or what not.

Government Orders

What does the member say to those individuals who depend on Canada Post for their daily livelihood about the delay in passing the back-to-work legislation?

What does the member say to those individuals in those communities in Canada?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I already said it and I will say it again. When the rotating strikes were going on, some mail was being distributed. Despite being involved in rotating strikes and considering other action, postal workers were still prepared to deliver cheques to pensioners and to social assistance recipients.

Now, because of the lockout, there is no mail at all. Therefore, I would tell people living in the north to ask the government to put an end to the lockout, as I just said. That is very simple.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all I have to thank my staff in the office who are getting many telephone calls and emails from people who are very concerned. I think the opposition is really trying to belittle the impact these rolling strikes have had. I do have an email and it is quite lengthy and I will not actually read it into the record, but I think you need to recognize that when there is a threat of mail not being delivered, it changes what is happening with businesses, with invoices and with charitable returns, so a rolling strike is essentially the same as a complete strike.

I think I would like the member to acknowledge that perhaps rolling strikes do have a very significant impact on the business of this country, on small businesses and on our charities, and that rolling strikes are not something we can say were not important and were not impactful.

• (3745)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Postal workers have already said that if the employer ends the lockout, they will immediately go back to work. So that would be the solution. It is always the same answer to the same questions.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague if the Prime Minister is being disrespectful by choosing to be in Thetford Mines to celebrate our national holiday and asbestos today—a clearly partisan choice—instead of being here in Ottawa to defend his own bill.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I just heard that. It is very surprising. It is quite shocking, especially since I cannot be in my riding, through which the Montreal Saint-Jean-Baptiste parade will pass today. I find it very, very unfortunate.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by wishing all Quebecers a wonderful Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Like my colleagues, I was supposed to celebrate with my constituents today. However, I am pleased to say that a good number of my constituents are happy that I am here today to stand up for them.

The right to associate and to bargain collectively is the first right young workers learn about. I am disappointed to see that the government is not respecting this fundamental right in its bill.

Instead of promoting collective bargaining, the bill undemocratically provides for lower wages than what was on the table. A democracy, and especially a democracy like ours, should not tolerate such unfair conditions.

Before I had the honour to sit in this House, I worked hard to uphold the rights of young workers. One of the first things I learned as a labour relations officer was that both parties must negotiate in good faith. The government is not negotiating in good faith. Most of the young workers I defended were fresh out of university and many were in debt. These young people choose to go into debt in the hope of getting a good job and earning more than the minimum wage.

The bill before the House has young workers very worried. They worry because they are already having trouble finding a job with fair wages and fringe benefits. The bill suggests that jobs with good benefits are no longer available and will eventually disappear. It also suggests that my generation will no longer have the right to fight for the wages and pensions they need to live a decent life now and in the future.

As our party leader pointed out yesterday, workers at Canada Post are fighting against a divide being created between younger workers and older workers. Under the bill, new workers would have to wait five years before getting the same wages and benefits as their colleagues.

I understand why this bill has young workers so worried. With this bill, the government is telling the workers of tomorrow that they cannot expect the same good wages and fringe benefits as today's workers.

I would like to take a moment to describe the Canada this government is in the process of creating for my generation with bills like Bill C-6. Such a Canada would be a country that does not recognize the workers' right to a collective bargaining process, a country that does not believe that Canadians who work 40 hours or more a week deserve decent wages and a pension that will allow them to retire with dignity.

We will vote against this bill because we will never support the Canada this government is trying to create. Canada Post workers acted reasonably. They continued delivering the mail because they believe it is important to serve Canadians well. They also expect their government to act reasonably too. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Instead, the government imposed a lockout and is now trying to force the employees back to work with lower wages than what was already offered.

I would like to take a moment to read an email I received yesterday. This email, from a Canada Post employee, explains and demonstrates the Canada Post workers' desire to go back to work. Unfortunately, this government put a lock on the doors. Here is what the employee wrote.

• (3750)

[*English*]

Here is what an employee says:

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I (along with my fellow workers) would like to be working right now, processing and delivering the mail, as our customers deserve.

Since Canada Post, with the government as its employer, has locked out the workers and thus stopped mail service in Canada creating hardship on business and families, does it seem just for the Government of Canada (our employer) to punish the workers with Bill C-6.

Indeed, since the full mail stoppage was caused by the government itself.

[*Translation*]

Personally, I think the message is clear: it is unfair for this government to accuse the workers of shutting down the mail service, and even more unfair to force them back to work at such a wage, without going through the bargaining process. The Conservatives are quick to blame our party for not protecting the interests of businesses, but the Conservatives are the ones who shut down the mail service with the lockout. As one of the postal employees said, the employees want to go back to work but they cannot, because the government put a lock on the door.

In closing, this legislation must be opposed. We must oppose it for the workers of the past who fought for the right to negotiate collectively, for the workers of the present who are exercising that right, and for the workers of the future who want to keep that right.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to remind my hon. colleagues that tens of millions of Canadians are affected by what is going on in the House, and they are not part of the negotiations between Canada Post and the union. Canadians are hurting.

[*English*]

It is also worth pointing out that these are the types of Canadians who elected the member to this chamber. These are the Canadians who are suffering because of the postal situation that exists today. We are trying to rectify the situation and we are being blocked and obstructed by the NDP.

I would like the member to explain to her constituents, the ones who are being materially affected by this strike and by this situation, why it is she is prolonging this very deplorable situation that exists right now regarding our postal situation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I would like him to know that Canadians are hurting because of the lockout. Canadians want the government to unlock the doors.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague.

I have a very simple question to ask her. How important are negotiations in collective bargaining? Is the principle of negotiation at risk because of the decisions made by the government?

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, again, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

The bill will create a dangerous and, frankly, terrible precedent. It will remove the right to bargain collectively for all Canadian employees and workers. If the government is allowed to do so this

time, who knows, it might do it again when the next strike or lockout of its own doing occurs.

● (3755)

[*English*]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the people who are really punished in this serious situation right now.

They are not only small businesses but small weekly newspapers, which are a very fundamental and important part of our country. This letter talks about their business being small, but it says it “has grown by leaps and bounds over the past three years since it was established as a start-up...”. It says:

...the labour disruption at Canada Post is taking a toll on our company. Our newspaper, *The Clark's Crossing Gazette*, is the largest independently owned community newspaper in Central Saskatchewan with a weekly circulation of 15,100. The company employs four full-time and three part-time people in addition to providing a few hours of work each week for as many as a dozen high school students. The *Gazette* operates in a highly competitive environment and each day this labour disruption continues, it costs our business money.

If the Official Opposition was serious about protecting “average Canadians” as it preaches it exists to do, then it should step aside and allow quick passage of legislation to put the postal system back into operation. If the NDP refuse to cooperate, our company—like many others—will be forced to re-examine our relationship with Canada Post....

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, we do have very little time remaining.

The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I would tell my hon. colleague that it is workers like the one who sent me the email who want to get back to work. They carried out rotating strikes so that mail could still be delivered to Canadians who deserve it. It was the decision of the government, who imposed the lockout, to stop the delivery of the newspapers she talked about.

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to take a moment to address a short message to my constituents in the riding of Verchères—Les Patriotes. I know that I was expected to attend the festivities on the occasion of our national holiday but, unfortunately, I am not going to be able to be with my fellow citizens.

However, I want to say that I am with them in spirit. I am here today to protect not only the interests of Canada Post workers, but the interests of all Canadians and all workers. I do feel strongly about what is going on, and it is my duty to be in this House with all my colleagues to stand up for Canadian workers and families.

Like many of my colleagues, I keep receiving emails and calls in support of workers and of the NDP stand. Despite the fact that, with this lockout, Canadians are being held hostage by the government, people are still prepared to defend the rights and the benefits for which their parents and grandparents fought.

Government Orders

By targeting workers and families, this government seems not to know that social justice is now an indisputable gain that we will defend to the very end. So, I salute the courage of our 55,000 fellow citizens and I invite them to keep fighting for their universal rights, which the government is trying to trample. The fight of postal workers is also the fight of all Canadians. I wonder what message the Conservative government is trying to send to Canadians with this legislation.

Following the May 2 general election, this government promised to govern for all Canadians. However, it has already deprived Canadians of a service as essential as mail delivery for ideological reasons and to show management that it can be even harsher with the employees.

As Nancy Snow put it: “The government should spend less time promoting itself and distracting the public's attention, and spend more time serving and protecting its fellow citizens”.

It is also important to point out that the government is trying to discredit postal workers by claiming that this is a strike. In fact, what we have here is a plot, a lockout imposed by the employer, despite all the attempts made by the unions to get workers back on the job and to restart negotiations.

The government has to show responsibility and stop intervening in this dispute. It has to acknowledge that workers have the right to negotiate with their employer as equals.

I would also like to share a story about Richard, a 54-year old Canadian who has been providing his employer with good and loyal service for almost 30 years. Richard gets up every morning and delivers letters and packages in good weather and bad. Richard loves his work and over all these years he has developed special ties with all the people in his neighbourhood. He is the one who delivers long awaited cheques, letters that sometimes come from the other side of the world, or even packages. Richard always takes the time to say hello or smile at people, or offer a few words of comfort to those who receive bad news. His work is his life and he puts his heart and soul into it.

Today, Richard is not happy about the current situation and that of his colleagues. Richard has always been a good employee and he is wondering why his employer is trying to trample his rights. Richard is thinking of himself, but mostly of his son who, following in his father's footsteps, has also been delivering letters and packages for four years now. What future is being offered to his son? One in which he will have to wait much longer to retire? One in which he will not have enough pension benefits to allow his family to live in dignity?

He thinks about it and believes that his union has acted very responsibly. It offered to end the strike if Canada Post agreed to maintain the former contract during the negotiations. Canada Post refused and decided to lock out the employees and stop the mail service.

This decision is the only reason why Canadians are no longer receiving their mail. It is important to remember that Canada Post employees have been locked out by their employer and are not on strike. Workers have the right to negotiate in good faith with their employer and that right is currently being denied.

The government interfered and decided to impose an employment contract on the employees of Canada Post. This contract is simply unfair. Not only does it not meet the demands of the employees, but it also provides for wages that are lower than what was offered by the employer. What kind of world are we living in? It is not the role nor the responsibility of government to impose such contracts. What the government is proposing is, quite simply, unilateral and irresponsible legislation. It violates workers' rights. The government's actions do not enable the two parties to properly negotiate an agreement.

The government must not interfere in this dispute or in any other similar dispute. This debate is not just about resolving the issue at Canada Post; it is about the right of workers to negotiate. Canadians fought too long to create a fair and equitable work environment. They fought with all their might for fair wages and suitable benefits to help them meet their families' needs.

• (3800)

These employees are being locked out and are being forced into a contract that would take back the gains they fought hard for. This would set us back years and creates a dangerous precedent.

I would like to remind the members opposite that instead of deceiving Canadians, insulting their intelligence and violating their right to have accurate information by talking about a strike, they should be talking about a lockout.

The government interfered between the union and Canada Post, claiming that the postal employees, by no longer working, were jeopardizing the Canadian economy. But I want to remind the members opposite that the employees of Canada Post want to return to work and serve the public as they have always done.

On June 3, Canada Post workers started a rotating strike. This shows their willingness to continue their job. This strike movement was just a way for them to fight for better job security and fair wages.

They refuse to be the victims of tactics to unfairly take back their money. They refuse to allow their rights, and also the rights of employees of any large employer associated with the government, to be subject to this abuse in the future and have to suffer the consequences.

Today's debate is not only about postal workers' rights, but rather about the interests of all Canadian workers. What will become of their rights? What message is the government sending to the heads of Canada's large corporations? It seems to be saying, “Do not worry, my friends; do as you please; impose whatever conditions you like on your employees; hire other employees for lower wages; do whatever you like and do not worry for a moment about the consequences. The government is here to support you and protect your interests, and not those of your employees. Whatever happens, we will legislate in your favour and we can even cancel your previous agreements and lower your employees' wages”.

Government Orders

Things should not have happened this way. The government had several options to get out of this crisis. I will not bother listing all of them, since my colleagues have already talked about some of them, but I would like to mention one such option: lift the lockout to allow Canada Post employees to return to work, and above all, to resume negotiations.

The postal workers have said this on many occasions: they want to get back to work. By lifting the lockout, Canada Post could give its employees the opportunity to go back on strike, yes, but more importantly, to get back to work and start delivering the mail. Negotiations between the two parties could resume, with the wishes of both sides being respected, and perhaps an agreement could then be reached.

This could all be done without hurting the Canadian economy, without violating the rights of citizens and SMEs, which, let us face it, have suffered from this lockout. Indeed, while they were still able to enjoy Canada Post services during the rotating strikes, that was not the case during the lockout. Whose fault is that?

We are all victims of this lockout. Our seniors are no longer receiving their cheques. Small businesses can no longer send their invoices. And although we are in the digital age and many services can be carried out online, Canada Post nevertheless remains a vital service to all Canadians. Our duty is to stand up for the people who deliver this essential service. The government is imposing restraint measures by directly attacking the rights of citizens to have a decent income and pension plan.

Collective agreements are used to get what workers deserve, to support families and help them pay their bills, work in a safe environment and retire in dignity. That is precisely what we are fighting for today, but the government does not seem to understand that or it is simply turning a deaf ear. The government is supposed to protect workers' rights, not legislate against them.

We are here today, on June 24, on Quebec's national holiday, trying to come up with a solution. The fate of our constituents is in our hands and we will not abandon them. We will fight day and night to defend their rights. As our leader says, we are prepared to work together day and night to restore workers' rights.

• (3805)

[English]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to continue with Terry Jenson, the business person who said:

If there is any indication back to work legislation will be delayed—as the NDP have said it will do—we will act swiftly to move our newspapers to readers via carrier or other means instead of relying on the unionized workers at Canada Post to handle all our distribution. Perhaps the Official Opposition is more interested in our company creating 125 new carrier jobs for high school students instead of paying postal employees to deliver our newspapers.

...our company spends approximately \$100,000 with Canada Post and that business is now being put in jeopardy....

This Canada Post strike costs \$25 million per day. I would ask the member this. How much more will it cost Canadians if companies like this have to find alternative routes?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question, even though I do not really see a question in what she just said.

I would simply like to reiterate what I said earlier. Workers have the right to strike. A lockout is something that is imposed and that is what is hurting Canada's economy. It was not the strike, since the workers were on a rotating strike that allowed the public to continue to receive mail.

Today, because of the lockout, people can no longer receive their mail.

[English]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the government side believes, we are here today to talk about more than just the delivery of the mail. We are here to talk about the value of collective bargaining and fairness. Those are Canadian values.

We have some things to balance here and I am waiting, with good expectations, for the amendments mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition in his speech. I am wondering when they might be forthcoming and whether the hon. member has any ideas about what we might discuss in the hours to come.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Mr. Speaker, we are working on that and should be able to come back to you on that shortly.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the constituents of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles and wish them a wonderful Fête nationale. I am missing the celebrations today and it is the first time that I have been outside Quebec for Saint-Jean Baptiste Day.

I have a question for the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes. As she knows, the cost of living is very high. A loaf of bread is \$3, and gasoline costs \$1.30 or more per litre. Small and medium-sized businesses are very important to the NDP. We have even proposed, in our platform, to reduce their tax rate from 11% to 9%. We support employers.

I would like the hon. member to explain to the House how the lockout and the current situation will harm the Canadian economy.

• (3810)

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

Indeed, workers at Canada Post were carrying out rotating strikes. As most municipalities continued to receive mail, the economy was moving forward. We now have a lockout. Mail is no longer being delivered. Small and medium-sized businesses cannot send bills or receive cheques, which is not right.

[English]

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I compliment the member on some of her comments, but she did say a few words, such as “imposing a collective agreement” and “the union has been responsible”.

Government Orders

I received an email from a postal clerk who said that they were excluded from any discussion on the last offer that was made by Canada Post. In fact, they felt that the offer was more than reasonable and more than fair. So, if the union was responsible, does that not suggest that the union has locked out its members from participating in this decision?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The member is shifting the blame somewhat. The lockout was in fact imposed by Canada Post, and not the union.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I am rising in the House, after asking my first question last week. First, I want to thank my constituents in Berthier—Maskinongé for placing their trust in me. I am honoured to rise in this House to represent them. I will represent their interests every day.

I would also like to highlight the work of Guy André who worked for seven years for the people of Berthier—Maskinongé. Although we have differing opinions on the type of country we want to build, we share the same passion for our community and the same commitment to helping our fellow citizens.

Communities like mine did not simply choose a new member of Parliament. On May 2 they sent a clear message: we want a new way of doing politics; we can change things; we can do better. That is the message sent by 1.5 million Quebecers. They rallied behind the NDP's vision for a better Canada, a Canada where families are a priority and where no one is left behind, a country Quebecers can identify with, that reflects their progressive values. I humbly accept the mandate they have given me. That is why we are here today instead of in our ridings. I wish the people of Berthier—Maskinongé a happy national holiday, even if the calendar in the House shows that it is still June 23.

On this Quebec national holiday, I would like to wish my constituents, the people of Berthier—Maskinongé, a very happy holiday, surrounded by family and friends. I had in fact planned to join the people of my riding to take part in activities organized for the national holiday. This morning I was supposed to attend celebrations in Lanoraie for the first time as a member of Parliament. I had hoped to say a few words there during the flag raising. I wanted to thank Dominique Bellemare for all his efforts in organizing the events for the national holiday, even though it is raining cats and dogs there.

I would also like to thank Céline Bastien, the people of Sainte-Ursule who invited me to attend the festivities for the 175th anniversary of the canonization of Sainte-Ursule. I hope to be able to join everyone on Saturday to celebrate the pride that the people of Sainte-Ursule feel towards their municipality. Once again, I thank them for their invitation and I wish them a happy holiday.

Instead of being with them, I am here in the House of Commons to stand up for the rights of Canada Post employees, and we are proud to be here. As we discuss this situation, it is important to understand it and to know why we are here. After the Canadian Union of Postal Workers began a series of rotating strikes, the union

offered to put an end to its strike action if the corporation would agree to reinstate the previous contract during negotiations, but Canada Post Corporation refused.

On June 15, Canada Post decided to lock out its employees and shut down services. On June 20, the Prime Minister introduced regressive legislation in order to impose a contract on Canada Post employees that actually includes wages that are lower than what the employer was offering.

● (3815)

This is not a strike, but a lockout.

Let us turn to Bill C-6, the back-to-work legislation introduced by the federal government to penalize postal workers and to reward Canada Post for locking out employees and stopping mail delivery nationwide.

The bill legislates wage increases below what Canada Post had put on the table. The final offer mentioned a 1.9% increase for 2011, 2012 and 2013 and a 2% increase for 2014, well below the 3.3% rate of inflation.

Under the bill, the Conservatives are proposing increases of 1.75% in 2011, 1.5% in 2012, 2% in 2013 and 2% in 2014. According to CUPW, Canada Post's focus on concessions make further negotiations impossible.

CUPW members are fighting because they do not want loopholes in their collective agreement, and they are against the wage cutbacks Canada Post wants to impose on future employees

Here is what Denis Lemelin, national president of CUPW, had to say:

We believe in free speech, free association, and free collective bargaining. [It is important.] This legislation hurts the values that our country stands for and is an attack on workers' rights and standard of living.

New Democrats also believe in these values. That is why we are here, in the House of Commons, standing up for the rights of Canadian workers.

Let me give the House some examples from my riding. When we talk about this situation, it is important to recognize the impact it can have on all Canadians. I have a few examples from my riding of Berthier—Maskinongé.

Jacques Meunier, owner of Chroma Peint in Saint-Alexis-des-Monts, explained to me that his operations were being disrupted by the Canada Post lockout. Since he owns a body shop, most of his business comes from customers who were in a car accident and have made a claim to their insurance company.

Insurance companies cannot mail cheques because of the lockout. Mr. Meunier has to cover the cost of the various parts he orders from his suppliers without knowing when he will be able to collect the insurance payments and receive the fees that are owed to him.

For a small business like his, the situation is quite serious and difficult.

Mr. Meunier also told me that this week, despite the situation at Canada Post, he received a statement from Revenue Canada. That is a double standard.

I have another example from a student from my riding.

To go on a school trip to the United States, a student in my riding asked Quebec's registrar of civil status to issue her a birth certificate.

The person in charge assured her that if the postal services were interrupted, the certificate would be sent by courier. However, the certificate was mailed before the lockout and was never delivered to the student.

Since the birth certificate was mailed, Quebec's registrar of civil status could not do anything about it. The student and her family were very worried, but the mother made several telephone calls to the authorities to ensure that her daughter could go on the trip.

The population of Berthier—Maskinongé is aging and a number of municipalities are seeing an exodus of young people to the large centres. It is hard because seniors do not use the Internet as much as young people do.

• (3820)

Many voters in Berthier—Maskinongé chose to place their confidence in the NDP. We are here to work for people.

We have to work together for all Canadians. We simply want the lockout to end and people to go back to work.

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her first speech in the House of Commons. It is a great moment for every member of Parliament to make that first speech. For all of us who have made one, we hope it is some sort of debate or issue that we will remember into the future.

Mine was on the private member's bill to erect a statue to John Diefenbaker outside. That was a great moment for me. I am sure the hon. member will, as will many other new members, will make speeches in the House of Commons, but she certainly will not forget the subject matter of her first speech. I congratulate her on that.

I was pleased that she talked about some of the challenges that the lockout and strike is presenting to Canadians. I appreciated it when she talked about small businesses. She is probably hearing from individuals as well who still need the mail.

Could she comment further on the fact that we all have to work together to bring this to a quick end for everybody's interests.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, this affects everybody. It is really important that we work together. We were all elected by Canadians. We are all here for a reason. We have to work for them. Let us just do it. Let us stop the lockout, move these negotiations along and let us get everybody back to work.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her speech, particularly in light of the history of the right to bargain collectively. That is a very important right.

Government Orders

This system is not ideal. When there is a lockout, as there is now, or a strike, the employer and the employees both suffer economically. Since what is proposed in the bill is unfair, does the member believe that there is a possible alternative, for example, arbitration, to find a fair resolution?

• (3825)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

When I think about this, I try to put myself in the shoes of the workers. Then I think about it from all perspectives. I can see that not being able to get one's mail is hard.

However, being a Canada Post worker, being locked out of work and having one's rights violated like this is brutal. That is not right. We really have to stand here and fight for their rights. We have to stop the lockout. Let us get back to work.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague on her speech. I am very proud of our caucus, particularly our new members and those who are under 30, who are behaving and acting with such poise, intelligence and composure. I thank them for that. It is refreshing.

The member reflected on what a lot of people are concerned about, which is people have been forgotten in this. The people who have been locked out have been forgotten.

I have been on the picket line before. I know what it is like. It means we cannot bring home a paycheck. It means we have to sacrifice.

We have to establish the fact that this affects every day people and the people who work to deliver our mail, as well as small businesses. I would like to hear her comment on that.

However, she said something very important. She said we must end the lockout. How can the government end the stalemate and get people back to work?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, thousands and thousands of people work for Canada Post. It is a unionized business. If the government can do this to a unionized business, if it has the control and is able to lockout workers, which has such a big impact, what will it do to everybody else?

It is important that we work together. We could do this. We were elected by Canadians and we work for them. Let us all work together, stop this lockout and get back to work.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to take a moment to wish all Quebeckers, and especially those from my Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier riding, a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

Government Orders

This holiday is a special opportunity to spend time with our families, our loved ones, and to celebrate our pride in being a part of the Quebec nation, which has a rich heritage and culture. I especially want to thank the municipalities of Sainte-Brigitte-de-Laval and Saint-Casimir for inviting me to attend their holiday celebrations.

I would have really liked to take part in the activities organized throughout my riding over the last few days, but I absolutely had to be here, in the House of Commons, to support the Canada Post workers with my NDP colleagues who are working very hard. We are working very hard for those people today.

Despite everything that is happening in Quebec, it is very important for me to be here in Ottawa and join the Canada Post workers in defending and retaining their basic rights. Those rights include the right to free association, the right to collective bargaining—which seems to have been forgotten in this case—and the right to safer working conditions and fair wages.

The current situation is utterly deplorable, but we have to remember that this is not a strike, as I heard some of my government colleagues say repeatedly during the night. The workers are instead facing a lockout imposed by Canada Post. This is something we must remember and always keep in mind as we debate this situation. The executives are the ones who made the conscious decision to lock the doors and deprive Canadians of their mail services, despite the fact that these are so essential.

Canada Post workers, even when they were holding rotating strikes, always made sure that Canadians received their government cheques and other important documents. The union even offered to end the strike if Canada Post agreed to let the expired collective agreement stay in effect during the negotiations. To my mind, that was a very obvious sign of good faith.

It is only since Canada Post ordered a lockout that service has been suspended; prior to that, it was not. It is because of this lockout that Canadian individuals and small businesses are not receiving their mail anymore.

Now the Conservative government wants to impose an agreement on Canada Post employees. The Conservative government's special legislation is unacceptable. It is an irresponsible bill that runs counter to the fundamental and inalienable right of workers to negotiate a collective agreement in good faith.

These actions of the Conservative government are depriving both parties of any opportunity to negotiate their own agreement, an agreement they are going to have to live with and work under during the next few years.

In addition, the Conservatives' offer adds insult to injury, as it is worse than what Canada Post had offered workers before the government's useless and unnecessary intrusion. Lower salaries, job insecurity, an attack on their pensions; this is what the Conservatives are offering Canada Post workers. It is a complete disgrace.

Do my Conservative colleagues realize that Canada Post workers deserve better? Improved occupational health and safety, decent salaries and a pension; is that really so much to ask? Apparently so, according to our fine government.

But should the Conservatives' attitude in this matter really surprise us? This is far from the first time that the government has shown such utter contempt toward workers, in particular when it comes to pensions.

In my riding, I do not have to look very hard for a tangible example of the Conservatives' dismissive attitude in recent years. We need only look at what happened to the workers at the AbitibiBowater plant in Donnacona in the spring. Unfortunately, it was announced last spring that the plant would be torn down. As the hon. members are all probably aware, 9,000 pensioners are literally watching their pension benefits disappear before their very eyes because of AbitibiBowater's financial difficulties. Even though their pensions are nothing more than deferred wages, wages that the employer formally agreed to pay them when they retired, in accordance with the terms set out at the time of their hiring, the big bosses at AbitibiBowater have no qualms about dipping into the pension fund whenever it suits their needs.

● (3830)

What have the Conservatives done to help these pensioners? Absolutely nothing. There were calls for help, but nothing was done. To this day, those pensioners are still experiencing problems.

Back then, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River introduced Bill C-501, which sought protection for workers' severance and termination pay in the event of a restructuring or corporate bankruptcy, as in AbitibiBowater's case.

In short, Bill C-501 would have given pension funds, as well as severance pay and termination pay benefits, secured creditor status, making them a priority in the event of a bankruptcy. Employers would have lost the ability to choose to reimburse all subcontractors before paying their own employees their deferred wages, as companies should have always done from the outset.

Despite lingering in the House for some time, being debated and seemingly receiving approval, the bill was ultimately defeated by the Conservatives, of course. Shame!

The Conservatives are clearly turning their backs on Canadian workers. Last spring, it was the Donnacona retirees who suffered because of the Conservatives' indifference and contempt. Today, it is the Canada Post workers who are suffering. Who will be next? Which group of workers will the Conservative government try to impose similar working conditions on next? Who will the government try to control once this special legislation has been passed? Everyone is in trouble. Make no mistake. It could happen to anyone, to any group of workers. We need to be very wary.

Personally, I am disturbed by the Conservatives' current attitude. I think that many of my colleagues and fellow citizens from across the country share that sentiment. I am worried about the future of workers' rights when faced with pressure from an employer.

Government Orders

The government's reckless actions are a direct attack on Canada's labour organizations and only serve to reinforce my belief that we need unions that are dedicated to defending the rights of citizens who, like us, work tirelessly to improve their communities. I do not feel that members on the other side of the House are ready to stand up to defend workers' rights as all of my colleagues did throughout the night last night, and as we will continue to do throughout the coming days.

As you know, unions have fought for many years to ensure that our children can go to school instead of having to work in factories, that the salaries workers receive are fair and just, and that workers have safe working conditions.

Very important rights were won through many fierce battles, and these rights include the right to negotiate as equals and in good faith with their employers in order to establish a collective agreement that works for everyone.

It is high time that the government stop eroding the rights of Canada Post workers by interfering so brutally in the collective bargaining process. The government must stop continually siding with management, and it must take concrete action to ensure that the conflict is resolved quickly and satisfactorily. The government has the authority to demand that the lockout cease and that the two parties return to the negotiating table.

Canada Post workers are ready to return to work. They know that they provide an essential service to Canadians and they are aware of their responsibilities and importance in their communities.

All they are asking for is to return to work with dignity and that their request be heard and respected. It is a very small request in the current circumstances. It is high time to end the lockout. We must respect the right of workers to collective bargaining by ending the lockout that prevents the workers from exercising their rights.

● (3835)

[*English*]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to set the record straight. The Conservative Party values the hard work of Canada Post workers. We value anyone who is willing to work hard to put food on the table.

Today I was on the phone with a constituent of mine. She runs a small business and has been running it for 11 years. She was on the phone with me three times today. Cash flow has become critical. She runs a mail house. Her revenue evaporated earlier this week, she is looking for some stopgap financing and on Monday she needs to decide whether she is laying off 16 people.

I am here today to implore the opposition to please allow this woman to get back to work and allow Canada Post workers to get back to work. She questions what really is being achieved by continuing these debates for some 17 or 18 hours. The point has been made. She really sees this as theatrics.

I am here to put the question to the hon. member who just gave her speech to please help me make sure that this woman's employees can continue working for us and to put food on the table for their families.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his question.

We want to help this person. We have a solution that will help this person make decisions and resolve the situation, and that is to end the lockout and allow the workers to return to their jobs.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning I received a number of calls from constituents from my area. One of the things they are telling me is they want to get their mail on time. They asked me to tell the government to unlock the doors so they can get back to work. Has my colleague been getting any calls like that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I have heard from a number of Canadians, people who work at Canada Post and others who support the Canada Post employees who are fighting for their rights. These people want to see the satisfactory resolution of this situation, but it must not be at the expense of workers' rights. People worked for generations before us to obtain these rights and to ensure that everyone has better living and working conditions. We will not arrive at a solution by violating their rights. The solution is clear—end the lockout.

● (3840)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her great speech, but if we thought great speeches would have solved this about 24 hours ago we would have been done.

There are some terms we use around here that the public does not quite understand, whether it is filibuster, legislation or debate, and how we do it. Even some of us in here do not understand some of the terms we use, whether it is lockout, rotating strike or back-to-work legislation.

What the public knows is they are not getting their mail but want to get their mail, and we have put forward legislation that can make that happen. Let us vote on that legislation and get out of here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comment.

I do not believe I heard an actual question. However, if the hon. member is asking for clarification of the terms we are currently using, I can provide that information quickly. It is very clear what a lockout means. The employer locks the door and prevents employees from doing their jobs. What we are doing right now in this House, which the public understands, is very simple. We are defending the rights of workers and we are speaking on their behalf. We are their voice in the House. What we are doing right now is explaining the exact reasons why we have to put an end to this lockout.

Government Orders

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member think that it was disrespectful of the Prime Minister to make a truly partisan choice by celebrating both Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day and asbestos in Theftford Mines rather than remaining in Ottawa, as our leader did, and defending his own bill?

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for this very pertinent question.

I think that Canadians can make up their own minds from what they are seeing in the House. They see which party is standing up for the rights of workers and people like them and which party is not prepared to do so and puts partisanship above the discussion we are having here.

Progress can still be made. Changes can be made to this bill even though I am not yet getting that sense here.

As for the question of lack of respect, I will let the hon. member answer that himself.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I want to extend best wishes for Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, a very important day of celebration. Many francophones from coast to coast celebrate it, and it is an important day on which to stand up and recognize the day and commend all of those who are involved in the organization of the day so that many Canadians, from coast to coast, are able to participate in the many different celebrations across Canada, in particular, in the province of Quebec.

I come from a very unique city when we talk about labour. Many will recall the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 and the impact that strike had on the whole labour movement here in Canada. When I consider the type of legislation that we have before us today, it is hard not to reflect on so many different labour leaders.

When I talk about labour leaders, I am not just talking about those who hold formal positions within the labour movement. I am talking about those who have been involved in the grassroots of our union movement, not only in the last decade but over a number of years.

I believe that Winnipeg, in the province of Manitoba, in many ways has been very progressive with regard to coming up with areas of labour policy that have in fact been of great benefit both for workers and for businesses, I must add.

I want to comment very briefly with regard to postal workers. I recognized yesterday when I had the opportunity to speak, and I wanted to reinforce, what I believe is a very important point, something that is being lost. This should not be about a filibuster or anything of this nature. What this should be about is the employees who are working for Canada Post and Canada Post as a corporation itself. We would have loved the opportunity to allow those two entities to sit down in a collective bargaining fashion that is free in which an agreement would have been achieved.

We believe that the government would have known, and I suspect possibly even supported, Canada Post's decision to lock out its employees. That is really where the problem began. At that point I believe a lot of people lost faith in what was taking place. Ultimately, at the end of the day, the government did have a choice. The crisis

we are in today is a crisis that has been created by the government of the day. I believe that to be the case. I do not believe for a moment that the government would not have known that Canada Post was going to lock out its employees. At the very least, Canada Post would have informed the minister responsible. If not, many might even suggest that the minister responsible might even have had some discussions with Canada Post prior to Canada Post making that particular decision. There is a great deal of concern with regard to what actually has taken place there.

All I know is I have had the opportunity to meet with and have discussions with Canada Post workers over the last number of months, and I made reference to some of those discussions yesterday. I should say "today" because we are still on Thursday inside the House. When we talk about the issues that were important, I listened to what Canada Post Corporation had to say when it came to Parliament and made its presentation, but I also intentionally took the initiative to go out and talk to some of the letter carriers and others concerning what they thought Canada Post's new, next generation of services is going to be like.

They raised concerns, and there were two different sides. The one that came to mind, which I made reference to yesterday, came from not just one letter carrier but a few letter carriers who raised the identical issue concerning how they are going to have to carry the mail door to door. It was a one-pack system. Now it is going to a two-pack system, which is very difficult to carry in their arms because of the way they flip through the mail to put it into mailboxes.

● (3845)

Suffice it to say there are many different issues that we in the chamber are not necessarily aware of. It is important that those issues be brought to a table wherein there is a sense that the bargaining process is going to be fair. Say what one will, I suspect that at the end of the day the employees of Canada Post believe that the government has not been fair and has directly intervened.

It is not to say that there is no place for back-to-work legislation. It has proved to be an effective tool in the history of our country, whether it is in the House of Commons or other provinces. In fact, we will find that there are political parties of all stripes, Conservatives, Progressive Conservatives, New Democrats and Liberals, who have all used back-to-work legislation. Every political party inside this chamber when in government has in fact used back-to-work legislation.

What makes this back-to-work legislation so unique is that it has been taken from the perspective of the arbitrator. Limitations have been put in that will prevent legitimate negotiations. As a result many would argue, and I would argue, and I believe the leader of the Liberal Party argued, that it could even be unconstitutional. By the time it hits the court everything will likely be resolved, but I suspect that given the way in which this legislation is worded it could be unconstitutional. There is a need for us to amend and change this legislation.

I still cannot get over the fact that the government locked out the employees of Canada Post. That is a hard pill to digest. I do not think the postal workers will ever digest that particular pill because it was premature at best, not warranted.

Government Orders

Having said that, I believe that the legislation and the way in which it is worded if taken to the Supreme Court I believe would be unconstitutional. The government cannot put the workers in this position. It shows its bias toward management. That is why it was interesting to listen to what the New Democrats had to say during the debate as they addressed the amendment that is being proposed, the six months' hoist.

We have been asking questions, and in terms of the responses they are interesting because we are looking for ideas. We want to see how the workers can benefit by ideas and discussions within this chamber in terms of how we could resolve this thing. We could tell Canada Post to take the locks off and end it. Then the union and Canada Post could get back together and try to resolve this through mediation. I think that is a viable option. The leader of the official opposition has talked about bringing amendments. There was even one member who stood up and said that there were amendments submitted to the government. I think there needs to be a little bit more transparency in terms of what we are talking about.

If we continue to have this debate for the next number of days, I am game for that. I was in the Manitoba legislature in 1988 when we had the final offer selection debate go for hours and hours and days and days. It was interesting to do the comparisons where they had the six months' hoist. It was a Conservative government and an NDP opposition. I have been there and I can say that there was a great deal of frustration because there was not the transparent debate that is necessary to provide comfort to not only the employees but also to the corporation.

I think we have to start to be a little fairer in our comments and start saying how we can resolve this as opposed to trying to add to the division by saying we are either for the union or the corporation. I believe at the end of the day we need to be more sympathetic in terms of what it is that our letter carriers have to go through in order to be able to communicate their messages, in order to be able to continue doing the fabulous job that they currently do. How many smiles do they put on people's faces when they walk up to their doors to deliver the mail? They are ambassadors to our communities in very many ways. They do not get the recognition that they should be getting. In essence, through the lockout, the government is trying to demonize it when its members talk about it being a strike when it is not a strike.

• (3850)

I see my time has expired, Mr. Speaker. I am thankful for having had the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of people have been reading things from their ridings. Well, I heard from a postal worker in my riding who said that no one in his station voted in favour of striking in the first place, that they were happy with the offer management presented and understood that without modernization their jobs would be gone. He called the union corrupt and said it counted all non-votes as votes to strike. According to him, the union charged \$80 a month in fees and was not accountable to anyone for where the money goes. The union, he said, organized conferences for its top brass in places like Fiji and Maui. He thought that the union ought to be investigated and

that if employees had been able to vote on this online the strike would never have happened.

Will this member join me in calling on CUPW brass to put Canada Post's most recent offer to a vote by its membership?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is what I mean by the divisive nature of politics. The people do not appreciate it. What they want to see are results arising from this debate. For example, the government has in the legislation the amount they can pay, and it is actually less than the corporation was proposing just a few weeks ago.

If the government wants to contribute positively to the debate, why do they not make that amendment? Then they would be sending a message to both Canada Post and the employees. The employees are the people who are out there every day ensuring that we get our mail. They would be giving them something tangible, something that would make a difference and show that we are not just wasting our time.

• (3855)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member for Winnipeg North a question.

Can he explain to us the impact that such a bill would have on upholding and preserving workers' rights and what impact he thinks it will have on our democratic system?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Any back-to-work legislation has to allow for free collective bargaining in some form or another. That is the most important principle we have to recognize when we have back-to-work legislation. We have to be realistic. Political parties of all stripes have seen the value of back-to-work legislation. It is a question of making sure that it is fair to both sides. If it is done properly, everyone wins.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There is a quite a bit of noise in the chamber. I realize that members have other conversations to take on, but I would like all hon. members be able to hear the questions, comments, and speeches.

Questions and comments: the hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague not only for his excellent speech but also for his recent re-election in a riding that for many years was regarded as an NDP stronghold. Given the orange wave of the last election, it was quite an achievement on the part of my colleague.

My question has to do with who should bear the major responsibility for the lock-out. As a former minister responsible for Canada Post, I can tell you that there is no way Canada Post would ever order this lock-out without the agreement of the government. At the other extreme, it is perfectly possible that the minister responsible for Canada Post called up Canada Post and ordered the lock-out. So it is somewhere between acquiescence and order.

Government Orders

My question to my colleague is this: even though technically it was Canada Post that ordered the lock-out, would it not be more realistic to say it was a government-ordered lock-out?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I truly appreciate the question, because it gets to the core of the division that the government has caused. We need to be clear on that point. There is no way Canada Post would have done the lock-out without the blessing of the Prime Minister and the minister responsible. That is one of the points that is being lost in this whole debate.

Who is the government trying to kid? Canada Post would not have locked out their employees without the blessing of the government. I truly believe that. When we focus on the division that has been caused, all we need to do is look at that point.

I appreciate the question and the compliment.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I reluctantly rise today, not because I do not want to represent the workers, but because I believe this repressive bill should never have been tabled. As I said earlier in the debate, with this move the government has shifted the race to the bottom into high gear.

I want to take a moment to thank my wife, and I will try not to be emotional. Yesterday was our 11th wedding anniversary and I was unable to be with her, but she understands the importance of my taking part in this debate and said, “Dear, I will see you in a week or so”.

I am so proud of our Quebec caucus for making the significant sacrifice of giving up their important holiday and their chance to meet and enjoy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day with their constituents. I am sure that Quebeckers who chose the NDP in the election are also proud of their choice. They see each member from that caucus in action in the House defending workers in the province of Quebec and in Canada. I want to thank them.

I spent 28 years in the labour movement and this is very emotional for me. In 1988, I spent over 17 weeks on strike. I decided to script myself, because if I do not, who knows what I might say?

With Bill C-6 the government has broken a tradition in this place, a tradition of balance. With this bill the government has chosen to thumb its nose at the rights of the workers of Canada Post. These are workers who simply want to achieve a fair and balanced collective agreement.

I suggest that the remainder of Canada's workforce serving Canadians under the jurisdiction of the federal government should be very concerned. Those same workers who ensure that Canadians receive the services they need and deserve are now facing the most ideologically-driven government in the country's history.

There is a labour relations chill emanating from the government as result of Bill C-6 that will be felt across this great country. It will be felt most in the homes and lives of good hard-working Canadians. These Canadians thought they could count on their federal government, a Conservative government, for a fair and even-handed approach in the times of significant labour disputes. Sadly, things have changed with Bill C-6 and today Canadian workers will begin

to realize how wrong they have been about the Conservative government.

Throughout this debate I found out just how terribly uninformed the Conservative members of Parliament are in regarding the union's role, its legal role, in collective bargaining. I want to take a few moments to offer a Coles Notes version. Since workers as well as employers are represented, it might be worth the Conservatives' while to understand this.

Prior to setting a national strategy for negotiations, all locals post bargaining proposal sheets on their union bulletin boards. These forms are used to seek union membership proposals for changes to the collective agreement. Members will note that I said “proposals”, not “demands”.

The employees work under and within the terms of their collective agreement and where they find shortcomings they make proposals to their local union officers. An elected bargaining rep from the rank and file of the union compiles these proposals, as do all other locals across the bargaining unit. The union then holds a local meeting where all members can support or reject their co-workers' proposals.

The proposals that are passed at these meetings are forwarded to the central bargaining caucus. The local union bargaining representatives, who are elected by their local, attend this caucus where all the proposals from the local meetings are presented, prioritized, and voted on by the full caucus.

After the bargaining caucus has sent their packaged proposals to be presented to the employer, they elect a bargaining team in whom they place their trust. The bargaining team then meets with the company and they exchange proposals.

Again, it is “proposals” and not “demands” or “offers”. Of course, the media, the spin doctors, call these proposals “workers demands”, while what the other side brings to the table is described as a “company offer”. Do members see the difference?

Now that I have set out the process for union member participation in the bargaining process, I would like to remind members that one thing that comes up repeatedly is the question of how the union gets a strike mandate.

● (3900)

Unions hold secret ballot votes for their members, most in advance of presenting proposals to the company. Some do so after a final offer. Either way, it is a secret ballot vote.

The wording on the ballot usually says that a member who votes “yes” authorizes the bargaining committee to meet with the company and to take action up to and including a strike if they fail to reach an agreement. The point is that this process is open and democratic from beginning to end. More important, it clearly indicates the trust that the workers put in their bargaining committee. For workers, the strike is the last vote, the last tool in the box.

I would suggest in this debate that the uninformed government members have shown more of what they do not know about collective bargaining than what they do know. This stands out when we hear the old clichés about old union bosses. Well, I guess I am an old union boss.

Government Orders

I proudly served my membership in Local 42 of the communication workers, and later CEP, for 28 years. I am also proud to say I was the longest-serving president of the Hamilton and District Labour Council, where we had 105 different local unions. In all of that time, the workers trusted me and I never lost a single motion, because we were always honest with one another. They never called me “boss”; they called me “brother”. I trusted my members' judgment when they took positions at our meetings, and they trusted me. As they said, they were the only boss in the room.

This has been a lengthy way to begin my intervention on Bill C-6 and on the damage it does to all labour relations with this government. This bill is first and foremost about the future of the workers at Canada Post, the posties, the good, hard-working people that Canadians have for generations entrusted to ensure the delivery of our letters, cards, and packages.

As will often be heard from the NDP in this place, these good, loyal workers have followed the rules. In good faith, they have proposed changes to their collective agreement and submitted them to their employer. Throughout the bargaining process their representatives have worked hard to resolve these matters.

In the bargaining process, there are few options for employees to ensure that their proposals are given proper consideration by the employer. If workers decide that the company is not taking their bargaining committee seriously, they can choose to work to rule, for instance.

In this case, in a most responsible manner, instead of an all-out strike, CUPW decided to use rotating strikes to draw the attention of the public and the government to their situation. They were trying not to overly inconvenience the public. Since they were not shutting down the whole system, they proved that point. During the impasse, the union agreed to deliver essential mail such as pension cheques so as not to inconvenience Canadians.

Let us be clear: it was Canada Post, the employer, who locked out the posties. Even when the posties had agreed to stop the rotating strikes and work under the old contract, Canada Post and this government said no.

To be clear, one has to ask what is happening. Why is the Conservative government so quick to trample on the rights of Canadian workers? At least in my opinion, the ideology of the government has overtaken them. Why else would they turn upside down the historical practices of this House?

● (3905)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): It is truly an honour to rise on this debate and speak to this topic.

However, first I would like to bring to the attention of the House some important news happening in Manitoba. I want to announce that the NHL franchise will be called the Winnipeg Jets. I am very happy about that.

I am also going to talk about this important debate. I listened to the member's speech. My question is mostly focused on entrepreneurs and the people who run small businesses. These people drive our economy. When I was an entrepreneur, I relied on the mail quite

often. Every day one would expect information on incoming sales, and marketing information was going out.

My primary question for the member is this: does the hon. member not see that what we are going to accomplish through this bill will have a net benefit to our country and to our economy?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the only way it could be better is if the team came to Hamilton.

Going directly to the question, it is not the fact the government decided to force workers back to work, it is how fast it did. There appears to be, and I use the words “appears to be” a complicity between Canada Post and the government for the lockout in the first place. It may or may not be the case.

It is how quickly Conservatives moved and the fact that they are legislating a worse offer than what the group had. It is breaking the traditions of this place.

Why not trust the staff arbitrators that the Minister of Labour has at her disposal to settle this dispute?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to think of what the link is between the labour stoppage at the post office and hockey. All I can think of offhand is my shot is a bit more like regular mail than email. That is the best I could come up with. It is not all that fast.

I would agree it would be nice to see Hamilton have a hockey team. It is great that Winnipeg is going to have an NHL team again. Next, of course, Toronto will want one, as the joke goes.

Considering the fact that, in my view, this legislation sends an unbalanced system of arbitration, recognizing that when there is a lockout or a strike, even a rotating strike, there are impacts that are negative for the employer and the employees.

Does the member think it is possible to have an arbitration that is imposed where a fair result could actually be achieved?

● (3910)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, in the collective bargaining process there are provisions for an arbitrator to make a ruling on the final disposition of collective bargaining. In this country it is important the government allows that to proceed without a heavyhanded approach.

By the way, when the letter carriers are on strike, they are not like the people who are not getting the letters. The letter carriers are not getting a paycheque. No one wants to be on strike. The reality is it is not good for anybody.

Why does the government side not listen to the proposals that have come from our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, and help us come together so that we can resolve this situation?

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek very ably outlined some of the processes in collective bargaining.

Government Orders

An email says that: "CUPW took a vote to ratify our demands pre-negotiation. We then debated these demands at two levels, locally and regionally, and voted on each one. Our members then got a strike vote, 94.5%, the highest vote ever, highest turnout ever, and we gave our national executive board the authority to vote on our behalf and it gave us the opportunity to vote on an offer and when they vote on that the contract is adequate enough for us to vote on".

It talks about the fact the postal workers themselves are not in favour of this lockout. They offered to stay at work and continue to negotiate.

I wonder if the member could comment on that process within a collective bargaining unit.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I have a bit of experience I would like to talk about. In 1988, I was on the bargaining committee for the communication workers with Bell Canada. We negotiated every day for nine months and then we had a 17 and a half week strike. I understand very clearly the seriousness of this situation. But it is a democratic process. It is an open process, contrary to what is said.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to wish a great national holiday to my constituents. I hope they are seizing this opportunity to celebrate the Quebec nation with their family or friends. I can say that, in electing an NDP member, they voted for a Canadian who respects and shares their language and culture.

On June 3, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers began a series of rotating strikes. However, even though workers were fighting for the right to a decent salary, they continued to provide a service that remains important to Canadians. On June 15, Canada Post decided to impose a lockout, thus depriving Canadians of postal services. Five days later, the government introduced back-to-work legislation that provides for a salary increase lower than the one offered by Canada Post during the negotiations, and also sets strict limits on the arbitrator's mandate in settling the dispute.

Through this action, the government has shown its contempt for collective bargaining and for the rights of Canadians who are waging a legitimate battle for their rights as public service employees. If the bill is passed, the Conservatives will have changed the rules significantly.

During the negotiations, Canada Post tried to impose certain working conditions on its employees, thus adversely affecting their quality of life and that of their families. For its current employees, it wanted to end the Workers Compensation Board's contribution for injured employees, to replace the benefits paid by the employer with an expense account for health care, to abolish the seventh week of annual leave, to eliminate sick leave and to impose a short term disability plan. For new employees, it wanted to reduce job security and social benefits, and to lower pensions and salaries.

Even though Canada Post gave up on certain reductions during the negotiations, it never took into consideration the union's demands relating to staffing, health and safety and working conditions. The fact that the government refuses to admit that this is a lockout, and not a strike by employees, confirms that there is no will to bring

concrete solutions to these issues. Let us make one thing clear: it is the government that locked the doors at Canada Post.

Canada Post belongs to all Canadians, and its mandate is to guarantee postal service to all Canadians. The government is headed toward privatization, despite the fact that there is no alternative for fulfilling the mandate of Canada Post. While we in Canada pay 59¢ to mail a standard letter, the same service may cost up to 88¢ in countries with privatized services. In addition, it should be noted that Canada Post is profitable. Last year, its total revenues were \$281 million.

Why should we punish postal workers and reward Canada Post, which imposed a lockout and was basically responsible for the shutdown of postal services? In addition, the back-to-work legislation calls for lower wage increases than those proposed by Canada Post in its latest offer: 1.9% in 2011 and 2012-2013 and 2% in 2014. The Conservatives' legislation proposes lower increases of 1.7% in 2011, 1.5% in 2012 and 2% in 2013 and 2014. I want to point out that both offers are well below the 3.3% inflation rate.

According to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, that legislation would cost a typical full-time employee \$875.50 over the four years of the agreement. Is the government here to reduce wages? Is it here to create a precedent that will enable it to interfere every time to cut wages?

I am very proud to represent the beautiful Quebec riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

● (3915)

Many families who live in this riding are already heavily in debt, and they are having a great deal of trouble maintaining their modest lifestyle. Many of my constituents are worried at this moment. In fact, they are telling me that if the Conservatives are prepared to impose an act like this one on postal workers, then they would definitely be prepared to show an equal lack of respect for workers across the country. They elected me because they wanted to build a country in which workers had better working conditions, in which the elderly could live in dignity and in which young people could be confident about their future.

Today, we can see clearly that the Conservatives have a very different view of things. They supported a two-tier pension system that was initially put forward by Canada Post management, a system that would allow existing employees a defined benefit pension plan whereas newly-hired employees would have a defined contribution pension plan. Since then, Canada Post management has revised its position, but it is still asking for a five year increase in the retirement age.

If this bill is adopted, it will be a major setback for all workers, including those who live in the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. If the bill is passed, it will be sending a clear message to my generation: we are going to receive less stable pensions than previous generations. The manner in which the government intervened in this matter is blatant evidence of its lack of any political will to defend the next generations.

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The Conservatives imposed the lockout on the pretext that the dispute at Canada Post threatened to cause serious harm to the Canadian economy. If that is true, why did they lock the doors to prevent employees from going to work? The Conservatives measure the strength of the economy in terms of the profits made by their friends, but my NDP colleagues and I believe that the strength of our economy is measured in the ability of ordinary families to make ends meet.

If we take away from workers the right to use legitimate means to defend their rights, we will continue to increase inequities. The government has attacked the defined benefit pension plan and has shown itself open to reducing wages and benefits. If this trend continues, Canada will become a country in which people of my generation will no longer be able to rely on dependable pensions when they retire, and in which the quality of life for workers will deteriorate.

The trend can already be seen. The wages of workers today are already proportionality lower than they were 20 years ago. According to Statistics Canada, between 1980 and 2005, full-time wages for this group dropped by 20.6%. Last evening in the House, the leader of the official opposition pointed out that the gains made by workers in recent decades needed protection. It is these gains that must be built upon.

It must not be forgotten that in 1981, CUPW was the first union to obtain paid maternity leave. It succeeded in obtaining this benefit after a 42-day strike, and once this was achieved, it set additional standards for all other employees. We cannot ignore the fact that this bill comes on the heels of other bills introduced south of the border in Wisconsin, Texas, Michigan, Idaho and Arizona. This is our Wisconsin, and we must stand up on behalf of workers everywhere in Canada.

● (3920)

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the new member to the House of Commons. It is wonderful to see her here today.

A constituent from my riding wrote to say that results of medical tests she had been expecting were hung up in the mail. Some of the tests involved mammograms. Tests that go between hospitals and different clinics are sent via the mail and they are in a holding pattern right now.

I know this is the first bill for the member. I know she is very mindful of the health of Canadians and wants the best for Canadians. I ask the member to encourage members of her caucus to get Bill C-6 passed right now so we could get the mail delivery moving.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify that this is a lockout and not a strike. I would like the member's caucus to make it clear to Canadians that this is a lockout, that the government has put the locks on the doors of Canada Post, and that the government can take them off anytime it wants to.

I would like to remind my hon. colleagues of those facts. I would like to remind Canadians that it is a Conservative government that is preventing Canada Post employees from going back to work.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prior to my question, I just want to join with the member for Winnipeg South in recognizing the Winnipeg Jets as the formal name of our NHL hockey franchise, something that many Manitobans wanted to see.

The question I have for the member is in regard to whether or not the NDP would maybe support the amendment that would take out the clause dealing with the amount of money being suggested for Canada Post employees. I assume that they would support it given the fact that at one point a number of weeks back there was an agreement with Canada Post that would have seen a better pay increase.

Would the member support an amendment of that nature?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague knows that Canada Post employees are ready to go back to work right now. I think my hon. colleague is also aware that we cannot discuss this matter right now.

● (3925)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North has just spoken about wages, and the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles also spoke about working conditions. I spoke to the union representative in my riding yesterday, who said that there had been a 1,000% increase in work-related injuries after their assignments had changed recently, requiring them to simultaneously deliver many things other than envelopes.

These work-related injuries are likely to increase, under the new conditions Canada Post would like to impose. Employees, therefore, have good reason to want to negotiate their working conditions.

I would like to ask my colleague whether, as the members on the other side of the House claim, we are opposed to the resumption of services or whether we are fighting against the manner in which this is being done and the fact that it is becoming impossible for workers to bargain for their working conditions.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is obvious that workers took legitimate means to claim their right to reasonable wages. It is really up to the government to put an end to this lockout and to allow workers to return to work.

I would like to add that when I speak to young people in my riding, they tell me that they are worried about their future because the bill in question is creating a very dangerous precedent. They have the impression that we are witnessing a downward slide.

I am worried for the young people in my riding as well as for future workers.

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great intent to my hon. colleague across the way. I have numerous letters from my constituency as well. Postal workers are complaining that their union is not giving them an opportunity to vote on the offer that is on the table.

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However, most importantly, I wonder if the opposition member actually understands that the longer this goes on, the more that businesses and Canadians will find alternate ways to deal with this work stoppage. That can only undermine the ability of Canada Post Corporation to go forward, which would undermine the ability of the CUPW workers to have a job.

I wonder if the member understands that the longer this drags on, the worse it is for everyone involved.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague when the government will be ready to put an end to this lockout and when the government will be ready to allow these workers to go back to work and keep serving Canadians the way they have been doing.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sadly, I am rising to speak on Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services. It is important for us to continue to emphasize the importance of a healthy environment for fair and collective bargaining. This back-to-work legislation undermines that process.

Why do workers need to continue to have faith that they have the right to a fair collective bargaining process? It is about working conditions. It is about protecting those hard-won rights that workers for many years have fought for. It is about trust in the democratic process.

This country has a long history of needing to work toward protecting workers' rights, of needing to protect worker's health and safety. I want to provide a bit of history about why this is so important and why workers need to continue to have their rights protected.

I am from the riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. Tomorrow there is a miners heritage picnic put on by the South End Community Association. In part, this miners picnic is about remembering our history in Nanaimo—Cowichan and honouring the proud history of miners in contributing to the development of Nanaimo, Ladysmith, and other parts of the riding. I want to go back a bit in history and talk about the protection of workers' rights.

I have an article dated Friday, April 1, 2011, titled "Nanaimo is no stranger to deadly fires and disasters". The article talks about what happened to workers when their rights were not protected and when they did not have the safe working conditions that are so important to them and to their families.

The article states:

A massive explosion had torn through Nanaimo's No.1 Esplanade mine, instantly killing dozens of men while leaving those trapped to die from carbon monoxide poisoning over the next few days. When rescuers finally made it inside, they found final messages to loved ones scrawled on shovels in coal dust; the miners had known they would never escape those dark caverns alive.

This tragedy on May 3, 1887 marked one of the worst mining disasters in Canadian history. In total, 153 men died....Local historians say it's important to never forget about these tragedies. They often highlight the need for better working conditions or improved regulations....The 1887 tragedy, caused when a spark ignited methane gas, had the highest death toll but several other mining disasters also resulted in numerous fatalities.

Seventy-seven miners died on Jan. 24, 1888 at the No.5 Wellington mine at Diver Lake when a miner-fired shot ignited gas or dust. Just over a decade later, 32 more miners were killed in an explosion at the No.2 West Mine at Extension; in 1918, 18 miners died when a mine collapsed near Protection Island.

We know that mining conditions in Canada have substantially improved since that time. We also know that in recent memory we had the Westray disaster, which resulted in the Westray mine bill in the House being brought forward over a number of years by Alexa McDonough until the House adopted it.

• (3930)

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I am trying to be very attentive, as I have been all day, listening to the speeches from across the way. I am wondering about the relevance. I did not know the debate was about mining. I thought it was about postal services.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member. Obviously there is a standing order that urges us to keep our remarks in the context of the question before us, and I am sure the hon. member is getting near that point.

Carry on.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. member for that intervention because I was about to make the link.

This brings me forward to modern days. I was setting the context for the importance of the trade union movement in this country in terms of protecting workers with safe working conditions and fighting for regulations that keep workers safe. Here we are, fast-forwarded to modern day.

I have an email that states:

I would love somebody from the government side to comment on the increased levels of injury that have been documented in every province since the Postal Transformation was initiated a year ago...the new delivery system which was referred to earlier in a somewhat derisive way requires that one arm balance two bundles of mail while the other is needed to sort the mail while going from point of delivery to point of delivery. This new method of carrying the bundles effectively removes the free that was needed in the past to navigate up and down slippery stairs. This has contributed to more injuries while the restructures associated with lessening the work force has led to forced overtime which has contributed to increased injury levels.

The email goes on to say:

...I can assure you that at least 10% of the work force, at any given time, is either sick, injured, or on some kind of modified duty or disability related to the onerous workplace conditions.

In 1887 we had miners dying because of unsafe work practices. In modern day we still have workers injured or being killed on the job because of unsafe work practices.

It comes back to the importance of the trade union movement and a collective bargaining process that protects the rights of workers and continues to fight for the rights of workers to ensure that those conditions stay in place. I hope the member can see the relevance of continuing to protect these rights.

Now, other workers in Canada continue to be abused by their employers, but many employers in this country provide safe working conditions. They respect the labour standards in their particular provincial jurisdiction. I do understand that. However, some employers are terrible employers.

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I want to turn to an article entitled “Abuse of foreign workers must be stopped, says labour group: Alberta government action needed in light of new criminal charges, says AFL” .

This is an article about some of the working conditions for some of the most vulnerable workers. They often do not have protection. They do not have the protection of a trade union. They do not have the protection of a collective bargaining process. Fundamental to part of what we are talking about today is the collective bargaining process, which is so important to the rights of workers in this country from coast to coast to coast.

In this particular article, dated April 16, 2011, it states:

News of criminal charges being laid in relation to welders and machinists from Poland and Ukraine working in Alberta is more evidence of widespread violation of employment laws and the abuse of foreign workers, says the province's largest labour group.

It goes on to state:

Foreign workers are vulnerable because they fear deportation and are not always aware of their rights.

It further states:

Last year, the NDP revealed government documents that showed 74 per cent of Alberta businesses hiring temporary foreign workers that were subject to inspection had violated the labour code.

It goes on:

Workers are charged thousands of dollars in illegal fees, often live in homes owned by employers or agencies who charge outrageous rents, are told to work long hours while being denied fair rates of pay—but are afraid to complain because their employer can lay them off and have them deported.

Of course, in this country right now, because they are temporary foreign workers they are not eligible to be covered by a collective bargaining unit. It is shameful that these kind of conditions, with two-tiered labour practices, are allowed to continue in this country.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers almost feels like a test case for the government. If it gets away with this, what is it saying to workers across this country in terms of being able to be protected by their union, by their collective bargaining process, by the understanding that they will continue to have those rights protected in this country?

Another case again concerns people coming from outside the country: “Caregivers urge 'wage theft' victims to go public”. We have a program here called a live-in caregiver program, and in some cases it is tantamount to slave labour.

There were a couple of cases recently where people went public because of the conditions they were working under. In this case, the claimant said she cared for an elderly woman and her two adult children with developmental disabilities for 10 years. In the last four years of working for them, she alleges that she was living with them and putting in—

• (3935)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Kitchener—Conestoga is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. Earlier in my colleague's comments she was challenged about not getting to the point of the debate. She immediately linked it well, but I think she has lost the link again. I would ask her to please get back to the issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair recognizes the fact that relevance is an issue and that at times members take detours or circuitous routes to the business at hand. I have every confidence that the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan can do that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, part of this demonstrates that there continue to be working conditions in this country that need to be protected by the work the trade union movement does. It is important that New Democrats and others in the House continue to fight this back-to-work legislation, because it undermines the collective bargaining process.

We have heard from members opposite that this situation is undermining the economy and that we should support the legislation. I need to remind those members and others who are watching that what we have here is a situation where the workers were locked out. If there is that much concern for the economy, then these workers would be allowed to continue to work while the negotiation process went on.

I urge all members in the House to vote against Bill C-6.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of comments have been made about the member deviating from the issue at hand, and that is because what we are seeing here is just a good old-fashioned filibuster.

The opposition party is not acting in the interests of Canadians. If they were serious about helping Canadians, serious about helping postal workers, serious about ensuring that Canada Post can function in the future, they would pass the bill as it now stands.

There has been eight months of negotiations. The government has watched the two parties. They have not been able to come to an agreement. The legislation provides an opportunity to bring the parties together so Canadians can get their mail.

Will the opposition stop this filibuster and allow Canadians to receive their mail immediately? Pass this legislation.

• (3940)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, if the government were serious about getting the mail moving, they would unlock the doors.

Members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers had offered to remain at work while negotiations continued. Instead, Canada Post chose to lock them out, halting mail delivery from coast to coast to coast.

If the member is serious, his government would support the hoist motion put forward by the leader of the official opposition, take six months, unlock the doors, allow the workers to go back to work and get the mail moving.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my honourable colleague for her great speech.

Although hon. members on the other side of the House do not always see the link between the importance of the work that the unions have been doing over the last few decades, even a century, many of the benefits that we get now right across the country are thanks to unions. I want to thank the member for bringing that up.

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The important thing to understand right now is that we are seeing unfair legislation. The government is trying to legislate lower wages. They need to take that out of the legislation. I would like to hear my honourable colleague's comments.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Sudbury for that question. Of course the member's community is no stranger to what happens when workers are locked out or workers need to go on strike because of the conditions they work under.

I appreciate my colleague raising the question about the relevance in this day and age of what working conditions are like for some workers in this country and why we need to continue to support the rights of workers to collectively bargain fairly and not have government interfere in that process.

What we have in this back-to-work legislation is an effort by the government to impose wages on workers outside of the collective bargaining process. How is that a fair collective bargaining process?

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my honourable friend from Nanaimo—Cowichan if she is aware that just recently, in the last hour, there was a news release from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations announcing their conclusion that this piece of legislation, Bill C-6, would do permanent damage to collective bargaining across Canada.

I would like to ask the hon. member if she has heard of this development and if she has any thoughts.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for bringing that to my attention.

There are others who have written about how this kind of back-to-work legislation undermines the collective bargaining process in this country. Again, collective bargaining is part of our democratic process. It is part of the process where workers and employers get together and negotiate. This is not negotiation. This is imposition.

I would again urge all members to vote against Bill C-6.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): To begin with, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleagues from Quebec, who have taken a principled position against this terrible bill. I would like to thank them for defending the rights of workers on Quebec's national holiday.

They are here today in Ottawa—rather than in their ridings to celebrate the Quebec holiday—to represent Quebecers. They are here to protect the workers of Quebec and Canada. In other words, they are here to do their work. I can assure the constituents who elected them on May 2 that they made a very good choice.

[*English*]

I am pleased to rise today to bring a northern Ontario perspective on this government's horrible piece of legislation. This legislation is truly scary, because it is an attack on the rights of workers in Canada. This Conservative government has always had a fundamental dislike for workers' rights because they have always placed corporate profits ahead of decent wages.

Bill C-6 is designed to cut short the collective bargaining process at Canada Post and offer postal workers less than they are currently being offered by the postal company.

Northern Ontario has a unique perspective on the issue of workers' rights. My generation has made their living as miners. They have been proud members of the United Steelworkers of America and the Canadian Auto Workers union. I am a proud member of USW local 6500, having worked at Inco for 34 years. I proudly held many positions in my union. Whether it was as a shop steward or a picket captain, I took my job and my responsibilities seriously. Health and safety were foremost in our thoughts because our work was so dangerous.

These standards came about because our workers organized and pushed the government to end reduced health and safety standards. The recent deaths of two miners at the Stobie Mine only serves to underscore why we must remain vigilant at all times. With respect to strikes, we have never taken a strike lightly or without a vote.

In 1978 and 1979 my union spent nine months on the picket line. I was married with two young children, and the strain on our family was severe, but at no point did my wife complain. At no point did I waiver in my determination to fight for our rights. And at no point did my brothers and sisters at local 6500 complain. Why? It was because management was unwilling to bargain in good faith. That's why. This is exactly where we are today.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers decided to put in place rotating strikes in part to reduce the impact of a total strike. They undertook these rotating strikes while continuing to negotiate. What happened next amounts to negotiating in bad faith and a concerted attack on workers' rights by this government. Canada Post locked out workers just as the Conservative government was bringing in legislation with lower wages than the postal company was offering. This legislation is contrary to the International Labour Organization conventions and contravenes the fundamental rights of all workers to organize and bargain collectively.

New Democrats believe that this legislation is a clear signal of where the Conservatives intend to take labour relations in this country. Denis Lemelin, national president of CUPW said, and I quote:

We never got a chance in this round of bargaining. Canada Post spent months just saying no and misleading the public about our proposals. Now, as we call for a meeting with Canada Post's President, the Harper government is going to rescue him from a responsibility to negotiate realistically with the workers.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has been trying to bring postal proposals to the bargaining table that address health and safety issues around Canada Post's new sorting machines and delivery methods. Contrary to the myth being perpetrated by members of the Conservative government, CUPW has also offered proposals for innovations and expansion of the public postal service.

Canada Post's focus on concessions has made it impossible to negotiate. CUPW members are fighting to keep their collective agreement from being eroded and are also resisting wage rollbacks for new hires. The union has called on the government to require Canada Post to immediately lift its lockout of members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and reinstate the recently expired urban operations collective agreement. Once this is done, CUPW members have committed to returning to work. It is required that Canada Post give their negotiators a new mandate to arrive at a new collective agreement with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that enshrines the principles of respect, dignity, and the sharing of benefits of new technology.

These are responsible demands, Mr. Speaker. Back-to-work legislation is unjust and unnecessary.

● (3945)

In his letter to the labour minister, Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress wrote:

Minister, the proper role for the government in this instance is to tell its own Crown Corporation to get back to the bargaining table and negotiate a collective agreement. It is not to aid the Corporation to achieve, through back to work legislation, its collective bargaining objectives. There is no incentive here Minister, with your actions, for the employer to return to the bargaining table and negotiate.

Your role, as Minister, is to foster the process of collective bargaining and not get directly involved in any dispute. For collective bargaining to work, the parties themselves must willingly negotiate. Your actions have removed the employer's obligation to negotiate which will only serve to further poison already acrimonious labour relations.

I agree with Mr. Georgetti. It seems that the government lacks a true understanding of the impact of wage rollbacks on the economy as a whole. After all, these workers are not sending their wages and pension benefits to banks in the Bahamas or secret Swiss accounts. They are spending that money at businesses in their communities. Decent wages help the housing sector, the retail sector, the transportation sector and help create jobs and spur the economy. They also lead to increased tax revenues for the government. It is basic economics.

Recently, northern Ontarians experienced the longest strike in our history when members of the United Steelworkers were on strike for almost a year. They were fighting to protect their wages and pensions, as well as the pensions of future workers.

Pensions are under attack today and the government is signalling that it will support those attacks on pensions. How short-sighted. Why did the members of United Steelworkers have to go on strike for almost a year? It was because the Conservative government supported the foreign take-over of a successful Canadian company and then refused to defend the rights of workers when the new company laid them off by hundreds, in violation of their condition of purchase of Inco.

Northern Ontarians understand the value of good wages. They understand the value of defined benefit pensions. They understand because they experienced first-hand how good wages and good pensions benefit their communities.

Northern Ontario is essentially a collection of small communities dotted along the highway. Workers spend their wages in these very communities. They get married and have children. They buy their homes and even buy their cottages in northern Ontario. When the

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government attacks the workers' rights by bringing in legislation that lowers the wages of workers and circumvents the collective bargaining process, I can say that, as a northern Ontarian, I see this action as an attack on our way of life.

This legislation is a classic example of ideology trumping economics. Conservative members have used as an excuse the lack of progress in negotiation as a reason for this legislation. I ask the House why Canada Post would negotiate in good faith if it knows the government will bring in back to work legislation.

The government has actively undermined the collective bargaining process. This intervention will not be forgotten by workers across the country. It will not be forgotten by workers in my community. New Democrats will continue to fight to protect workers' rights in the face of such a concerted attack by the government.

I am proud of the efforts by my leader and his great New Democratic caucus in their determination to protect the rights of workers.

● (3950)

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening with great interest to comments continually coming from NDP members regarding the need to protect all workers and yet their actions today show me very much to the contrary that they have any desire to protect all the workers of Canada.

I give, for an example, the 58,000 workers employed in the print industry that, at the very beginning, was drastically affected through the rotating strikes. Companies were afraid to send out anything via direct mail in advertising forms, things that were date sensitive and time sensitive. It is having an impact on the printing companies already, which is affecting those workers. We have 58,000 workers across Canada affected, a large portion of whom are also union workers.

Are NDP members only here to defend CUPW or are they truly here to defend all the workers of Canada?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are here to protect workers, all workers, unionized and non-unionized workers. All Canadian workers can depend on us to protect them. What Canadian workers cannot depend on is the government to unlock the doors so they can go back to work and protect the very people the member was talking about.

● (3955)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

One of the most troubling aspects of this legislation is the fact that the government is trying to impose lower wages than had been proposed.

Can my colleague tell us anything about the possibility of deleting this part of the bill?

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Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. I would like to thank my colleague for having asked it.

Yes, the government is in the process of offering Canada Post employees lower wages. Having two salary scales for employees who do the same work is truly shameful. If the government were serious, it would eliminate this portion of the legislation.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read a number of letters that demonstrate that the NDP is not standing up for workers. In fact, it is beholden to a small group of union boss thugs.

I will read a letter from a local postal worker. The letter reads, "I'm a postal worker. As you know, we didn't get the right to vote on the final offer. Why? The union knew we would have taken the offer. We're being held hostage by them. Plus, the strike vote was unfair and unjust."

This worker is on sick leave and has lost all benefits and coverage because the union will not allow local members to vote. I want to stand up for my local postal workers and demand that CUPW hold a free vote for its membership. Why are members of the NDP standing in the way of that? Why will they not allow CUPW members to vote? How can they possibly contend that they are standing up for workers in this House?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister would use such a word as "thugs". He is well aware that in the bargaining process for the collective agreement the membership voted for a negotiating committee and gave the committee all the powers to negotiate for them.

When Canada Post comes up with a reasonable offer, the committee will take that offer back to the membership for a vote. However, until that happens, the committee is not obligated to let the members vote because the committee has been given the power to make the proper decision.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would seek the unanimous consent of the House to table a document written by a local postal worker in which he says, "This is for the real workers at Canada Post, not union thugs". A Canada Post worker used the term.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have unanimous support?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have a letter that is written by a postal worker from that member's riding that was sent to me because that worker is unhappy with his member of Parliament. Am I allowed to table such a letter?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is not a point of order.

The member from Timmins—James Bay. I trust this is a legitimate point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Your ruling this morning really set the tone for this debate. Some of the members might not have been there but we need to reflect on the role that we are playing in this as people are watching.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you ask members to settle down. We need to have a civilized debate. I was very impressed with your ruling this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would agree that we all ought to give all our colleagues the respect to which they are due.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the citizens of Jeanne-Le Ber who elected me to represent them in this House. I am very proud to be in Ottawa now and to work on their behalf in connection with this important bill.

[*English*]

We hear much talk from the government about the economy, about how important the economy is to this country and about working for the average Canadian.

I do not think the so-called strong, stable majority government, which, incidentally was supported by a minority of 40% of Canadians, is feeling particularly warm toward the 60% of Canadians who did not vote for it.

● (4000)

In fact, I would venture to say that even the 40% who did vote for them were not voting to have stripped away from them their established right to grow and build their own self-worth and value through the accepted and democratic process of collective bargaining.

It is quite frankly beyond me how the current government does not see the conflict of interest in this process of shutting down a well-organized and responsible expression of job action to only then introduce back-to-work legislation.

Let me break this down. The government owns Canada Post. The government is in negotiations with its employees, as Canada Post. The employees, after much negotiation, take job action that sees at least partial delivery through rotating strikes. The government, as Canada Post, locks out the workers. The government, as itself, tables back-to-work legislation. In addition to eroding the process of collective bargaining, it further intrudes in that process by imposing its own views on what these workers should be paid, totally disregarding the agreements already made.

Now, excusing the possibility that the government may at this time be suffering from an identity crisis, what with playing both sides of the fence, does this government truly not feel any responsibility to the 60% of Canadians who did not vote for them?

The government speaks about democracy, but then proceeds to deny the democratic process of contract negotiations, because it does not like how it goes. The government says that it is looking out for the greater interest of Canadians, but then attacks those Canadians it says it is protecting. In case it is unclear, postal workers are Canadians too.

Government Orders

Postal workers are also consumers. In this one-dimensional, myopic vision of the economy the current government practises, I suppose it makes sense to cut out the buying power of a significant number of Canadian consumers to satisfy some ideological belief in the absolute numbers. “We are focused on the economy”. That is a familiar mantra that all members of the Conservative government are well versed in.

I do not claim to be an expert, but it seems that there are many facets to economic growth, including standard of living and morale in the workplace, to name two.

I wonder what kind of Canada can be built when workers' rights are disrespected. In fact, history shows us what that disrespect can yield. It was that type of disrespect that sparked the beginning of the labour movement in the first place.

Is this lockout an inconvenience? Yes, it is, and please, let us remember that it is a lockout and not a strike. Then again, I can see why the government might be confused.

Dare I say that there are many Canadians who would accept some inconvenience to protect the rights that so many Canadians fought and died for. Here are some of the thoughts these Canadians are sharing.

I have been a postal worker for the past 21 years...most people don't know that we have to be casuals without paying pensionable benefits for approximately 6 years. With an average income of \$49,000 a year, I will be able to retire in 2024 with a rate of \$1,391 a month! Now, in 2024, that won't even pay for an apartment...why would I want to lose more from the new collective agreement? Chopra started this year and will be getting a pay of \$650,000 a year with a major retirement off of my back!

When we put in our right to strike notice on May 31st, the corporation retaliated by cutting off all of our benefits including medical. I have a brother-in-law who has progressive MS and couldn't get his meds while he is in severe pain from the waist down. He is paralyzed.

We responded only then after they cut off our benefits within 3 hours of our notice to strike submission, with rotating strikes without intention of harming the mail flow. Only with the understanding that it would delay mail for one day in that city!

It is wrong what the [Prime Minister's] government is doing! They collaborated with the management of Canada Post and took away our right of collective bargaining.

● (4005)

I want to work and I did volunteer, as did many other workers across Canada, only because we do not want to affect Canadians in a harmful manner. I love serving the public, but not at the expense of our pensions! I don't want to be on some government assistance when I reach 65. There is no need with a Canadian Crown Corp that is making major profits off of the backs of us, the backbone of Canada Post.

This is a Halifax postal worker.

I was always taught that one should be careful of the seeds one sows. The seeds this government is sewing are seeds of discontent, mistrust, indifference, and absolute contempt. It is contempt for the workers in this country, workers who, when the need is there, are willing to work with management towards the greater good. We saw this at the beginning of the economic crisis over and over again.

What we do not see, however, is the CEOs and the upper echelon colleagues willing to practise what they are forcibly trying to extract from the people who make them rich.

If this government is so interested in participating in the collective bargaining process and feels perfectly justified in imposing lower wages than were fairly negotiated, why not be of true help to

Canadians by forcing those same CEOs to convert their pension plans, give up their bonuses, and reduce their salaries. I suppose that this is too socialist for this government.

Human beings by nature are social animals. We need to work together to survive. Although there may be a pecking order, there should always be respect. This is something this government seems to feel does not apply to it.

The economy of this country is, and always has been, its people. They drive the country, both as workers and as consumers. If this government truly wants to help Canadians, then treat workers and consumers, as they are one and the same, as they should be treated.

The government needs to take responsibility for its actions. The government needs to unlock the doors. The government needs to put the workers back to work, not by legislating them but by legislating the government to unlock the doors and the lockout.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this debate has lowered itself to simply reading e-mails and letters from constituents. I'd like to join in.

I have an e-mail. I am reading this to the member who just spoke. He and his NDP colleagues should realize the havoc they are creating in this country and in the economy of this country. This is just an example.

This is from one Lori:

I'm in the small business community. We can't pay our vendors and we might miss payroll for the first time in 18 years. Lots of our printing suppliers have now laid off their staff.

You have to do whatever it takes to end this useless NDP tactic and get a vote in. Have to get them back to work. Let an arbitrator decide...We have no alternatives here. We are being held hostage. We have thousands and thousands of dollars trapped in the sorting station with respect to cheques that were mailed before this strike. Please, please.

The point of reading this is that the people of this country are getting desperate. Why not stop the nonsense that is going on in this House? Allow the votes to take place.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

● (4010)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: I am sorry that the hon. member feels that this is a useless exercise. The fact is that while the government wishes to break this down to a simplistic “Deliver the mail”, this is about more than just mail delivery. This is an attack on workers' rights.

I am sure that the person who sent the e-mail would be quite distraught about the fact that he and members of his family might have their rights eroded through this.

If the member really wants work to resume and to have these cheques go out, it is in the government's hands. The government acknowledged this lockout. The government is responsible for this lockout. Thus, the government is the one that can end this lockout. If the government wants the mail to go out, end the lockout.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member tell us how unfair and how unjust it is to lower the wages and how this needs to be removed from the current legislation?

Government Orders

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Mr. Speaker, I think it is pretty apparent. The negotiations have been dragging on for so long and they finally actually got to the amount of money they would be paid, the salaries, which is usually the largest and heaviest sticking point.

As a union leader myself, I have been involved in many negotiations. It is always the largest sticking point, but they managed to get to that.

Why does the government not respect that and move forward from there? Why does it have to bring back-to-work legislation that includes lowering their wages? Answer that question.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been here now 36 hours or better. My constituents of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex usually do not have to be told the same thing 120 times. I have listened to the comments that keep coming. We hear the same thing over and over again. It has been said that this is about ordinary families that need to be able to make ends meet and that they do not have the opportunity to make a decent living.

Canadians now pay \$3,000 less in tax than they did in 2006. They voted against it. They put forward proposals to raise the EI by 35%. They want to double the Canada Pension Plan, which will cost employers and employees, because they are the only ones who pay for it. They opposed a GIS increase. I think it was going to cost a little more than \$200 a year, yet they opposed everything families stand for.

I wonder if the member could help explain why they voted against everything for these same families.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure what that question has to do with the issue on the table.

We did not vote against those things because we do not believe in them. We voted against those things because they are not enough. The \$1.36 a day, or whatever it is, is not enough to lift a grandmother out of poverty. It is not enough.

If the government really cared about seniors, it would give them the money they need to lift themselves into some sort of dignity. Please, do not twist words.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by wishing a happy Quebec national holiday to all Quebeckers, and in particular to my constituents in the riding of Saint-Lambert. I am not with them today, but they understand that the current circumstances are keeping me in Ottawa and that I will be with them very soon.

They will also no doubt be aware that defending the rights of workers is the basic reason why we are here in this forum this afternoon. Bill C-6 is just one more example of the attitude of an authoritarian government that cares about nothing but its own decisions.

As we know, Canada Post workers are simply fighting, as you or I would, to protect their jobs and their wages. They simply do not want their basic rights to be sacrificed and abused. They are refusing to allow their families to suffer the consequences of the Conservatives' unjust policy.

In this matter, the unions assumed their responsibilities perfectly. The postal workers' approach demonstrated respect for the public by holding rotating strikes. Canada Post acted in bad faith by declaring a lockout. Canada Post decided to unjustly penalize people and businesses by depriving them of their daily mail service.

In any company, employees are entitled, through their union if there is one, to negotiate their working conditions with their employer and to arrive at a favourable outcome, which is not the case for Canada Post employees, on whom the government wishes to impose a contract that runs counter to their interests.

This is not normal, all the more so as it is not part of the government's role nor within its jurisdiction to interfere in labour relations between employers and employees, and thus take away the employees' right to negotiate a collective agreement.

The government's interference in this matter does not give the two parties the opportunity to achieve a negotiated agreement that is in their mutual interest. This is all the more unacceptable given that the government is proposing an agreement in which the wages are lower than those Canada Post had offered.

This is a dangerous precedent for all workers in Canada, who could find unfair contracts, wage cuts and misunderstandings with their employer imposed upon them. No, the government absolutely must stop interfering in this matter, as it is doing, and to give a negotiated settlement a chance, because it is not yet too late.

This matter not only inconveniences individuals and businesses, but also and above all attacks the basic rights of all workers and all unions to negotiate a collective agreement with the employer.

Passing this unfair act would be a major step backward, because Canadians have fought for a long time, too long, for a fair and equitable working environment, and for acceptable wages and benefits.

The Conservative government cannot ignore this and impose a contract that runs counter to the interests of Canada Post employees.

Canada Post is a dynamic corporation that serves all Canadians. Citizens have always relied on this public corporation, which is one of the best postal services in the world. And these merits, it must be recognized, are due to the employees of Canada Post.

Our duty as the official opposition is to defend these workers, who operate this essential service for our citizens: our constituents need to get their mail every day, our senior citizens need to receive their pension cheques on time, small businesses must be able to send out their invoices on time. The Conservative government wants to do away with all of that. It wants to privatize this country's postal services and ask citizens to pay more for it, even though Canada Post is doing its work well at a competitive price.

The government is now, for purely ideological reasons, against providing our fellow citizens with an essential public service. The reason is clear: to maximize corporate profits at the expense of workers. If there must be austerity measures, the government should look to the CEO of Canada Post and not the ordinary wage earners.

Government Orders

• (4015)

A collective agreement allows workers to enjoy benefits such as working in a safe environment, preparing for a well-deserved, dignified retirement, and having a sufficient wage to be able to support their families and pay their bills.

The purpose of government is to protect workers and their families, not to place them in a difficult position.

This legislation runs counter to the model of social progress that is championed by the NDP, and we cannot allow the Conservatives to do whatever they want because, after Canada Post, who will be next?

This power grab against workers by the Prime Minister and his Conservative government shows Canadians where they really stand.

The NDP cannot allow this to happen and we will fight to protect the rights that are fundamental and essential in a true democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I sit in the House and listen to members opposite, I wonder if they are even reading the same bill that I am reading. It seems that they talk about everything else except what is in the bill.

It is important for Canadians to know what is in the bill. In particular, I would like to refer the member opposite to subclause 11 (2) and ask her what it is she finds so objectionable in the guidance that this bill gives the arbitrator. It gives the arbitrator four principles on which to base a contract between these parties: first, that the terms and conditions should be consistent with those in comparable postal industries; second, that the terms provide the necessary degree of flexibility to ensure short- and long-term economic viability; third, that the terms maintain the health and safety of the workers; and, fourth, that the terms of the contract ensure the sustainability of the pension plan.

I would like to know which one of those four guiding principles that this bill sets out is the opposition so vehemently opposed to.

• (4020)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our colleague for his question.

I would simply answer that it is not beneficial to wage earners to impose lower wages than they had negotiated at the outset.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech because she touched on some things that are extremely important: what this is, what this is not, and what this is about. This is not about a strike; it is about a lockout. This is about the government setting a precedent in what normally would be a fair collective bargaining process, where it imposes wages, not just any wages but wages that are lower than what was already on the table.

This is something that should seize us all. It is not just about Canada Post but about how we bargain in this country and how legislation goes forward. I would like to hear from my colleague

about the implications of this bill if it passes the way it is without any amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

I would simply like to tell him that if this bill is passed, there will be very significant repercussions on wage conditions and on all the work done to date, and on everything to do with negotiating collective agreements. In a democratic and free country, such an impact is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened patiently yesterday and today. I have sat in this place for some period of time, and there has been a lot of misinformation with regard to the B.C. Health Services case. I am not going to get into the particulars, but I practised labour law for a period of time, and I would recommend that my friends read the judgment, especially in relation to Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin's comments, which sets out the particulars in relation to the right to strike, etc.

In this particular case, it is clear that there is a right to associate, to bargain collectively, and a freedom to strike, but there are consequences for that, just like there are consequences for what Canada Post and the union are doing. Clearly, those consequences can be dealt with in the future because we have the rule of law in Canada and people can actually be sued when they do things wrong.

The government clearly has power to do what it is doing. What I want to know from the member is what New Democrats are trying to accomplish. Really, they are wasting time. They are wasting the time of Canadians, especially the time of people who are waiting for the important things that Canada Post can deliver, like seniors' cheques and other things. I want to know what they are trying to accomplish by wasting so much time and money of Canadians, because clearly it is not going to be the result they want.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

At what point will this Conservative government—which caused the lockout—accept full responsibility for its actions?

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish all Quebeckers a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Today is a day of celebration.

I would also like to say that I am very proud to be working with such a good team from Quebec, and particularly with the new MPs.

Government Orders

• (4025)

[English]

I want to start on an issue that I think is important to understand, and that is how we got here. As people know, there were ongoing negotiations, there was job action, and then there was of course the lockout. We have to underline that point, because some would say that if we believe what we have heard today from the other side, there was no lockout. Let us be absolutely clear about what is happening. There was a lockout. There was an offer by Canada Post to go back to work to keep things going.

When we hear from others who suggest that somehow Canada Post workers were trying to undermine the economy or hurt others, it is just not the case. There was a choice made, and the government can make the choice; let us be clear about that. It has the power to do that. The choice it made was to have a lockout, and I think Canadians will hold it accountable for that.

But it is important to also understand that in this country we have fought collectively for fair bargaining. I have been on both sides of the table. I have been negotiating contracts on behalf of members. I have been on the other side of the table when I worked in the NGO sector, where we were negotiating contracts with employees. The guiding principle in negotiations is to make sure you have fair bargaining. Everyone gets that. For those who do not, I am thinking of that commercial where the guy presents one kid with a toy pony and brings the other kid a real one. That is not fair bargaining, for those who do not know what it is. It seems that the government wants to go down that path.

A younger worker will not get the same entitlements for their pension and the same wages as people who are more senior. That really flies in the face of fairness. I think that is pretty clear. That is the kind of issue we will have to confront. We're saying that if you are a young person or a new worker, you will not get the same benefits. That is kind of strange when you think about it. We are asking young people to give up the opportunity to have a decent wage so that they can actually settle in a community, stimulate an economy, and have something that we have all been able to benefit from.

I know the members have young kids. I do too. What do we say to our kids? We say, okay, in our economy we have decided that we will lay hands on certain people and say they will not get as much because there is just not enough. It is like that kid who gets the toy pony instead of the real one. Sorry, we cannot help you.

It does not make any sense. It flies in the face of fairness. In this contract that was imposed it is important to note that; it is important to note that we are talking about a two-tier system.

I want to turn to the legislation, because I know it was important for some of my colleagues across the way to read. It is actually on page 6. When I first looked at this legislation, there were a couple of things that grabbed my attention. One is the final offer selection. For people who do not know about that way of bargaining, it is a method in which both parties agree to—that is the first point—a process whereby they boil down the issues to a couple of issues, put in what appears to be the best offer, and provide it to an arbitrator that has been agreed upon. It is not an imposition. In this legislation, this is

being imposed. It is taking a method of bargaining and torquing it such that it is undermining the whole relevancy of what was final offer selection.

It gets better, because on page 6—and it ignores the Canadian labour act in some ways—it says that wages will be imposed. Some people might think that it is not a big thing and that they have to put the wages in there because they could not agree. I think it is terrible and regressive.

Here is the kicker. They impose wages that are less than what was on the table from the employer. If I tell anyone in this country that an offer was put on the table by government, whose role is not to take sides—the role of the government is to be a fair arbiter, and I see other members nodding yes—but then in legislation on page 6 the government put in wages that are less than what the employer was offering, at the least it is confusing. What we have here is a method of bargaining that will change the way in which bargaining is done in this country.

• (4030)

We have to stand up against that. The one thing we have to stand up against is unfair bargaining, and we can do that in this place. Today we are here to make sure the bill is changed.

This is an offer to the government. We can change that, so why not change it? If we told everyday people that an agreement was being negotiated and a wage rate was put in front of the employees, and another party, who is supposed to be fair in arbitrating the dispute, imposes wages lower than what the employer was offering, most people would say that would not pass the smell test. It certainly does not pass the fairness test. It would be reasonable for the government to look at that. That should obviously be dealt with. That is one of the reasons why we are here today.

This is not about us as a party deciding we want to spend a day and night here. This is not our idea of a retreat. If we want a retreat, we will have a retreat. We can do that. This is about a principle, and it is about bargaining and about the direction this country is going.

If the government is going to put bargaining, like final offer selection where there has been no agreement, and put it into legislation, then we have to deal with that. If the legislation is going to impose wages on workers that are less than what is being offered by the employer, then we have to stand up to that.

As I mentioned before, bringing in closure and then bringing in legislation is a little untoward. When government members were in opposition, they fought very hard against closure. Mr. Manning was the leader of the opposition in 1998. He was very strong on this point. He believed that the whole issue of closure that was being rendered upon Parliament was fundamentally undemocratic. He fought hard against that. Preston and I do not agree on everything, trust me. But he had it right when he talked about what Parliament is about and when he said that closure should not be used to ram legislation through, that closure should ultimately never be used. To use it before legislation is brought in is new. That is something we have to deal with.

I think of the people who spoke against closure.

Government Orders

Brian Mulroney's government on closure was a pillar of virtue compared to what the Liberal government has done since it came to power. It continuously uses this hammer. It is not a matter of negotiation. It is just too bad: "It is my way or the highway".

It is unfortunate the government has decided to go this way. It is a trend. It does not bode well for this institution that the government has decided this is the way to force through legislation, controversial or not. The government is just doing it.

Do members know who said that on November 22, 1999? It was one Preston Manning.

Mr. Strahl, who was in this place not too long ago, said in reference to the government of the day:

It uses closure and time allocation to choke off debate in the House. It stacks committees and committee hearings....How can such a government possibly be pretending to exercise democratic leadership in government when it behaves in that way?

I just say that for the record because it is important to know how closure is being used.

I ask the government to take a look at this legislation, take a look at this imposition, and ask themselves: Is this fair?

• (4035)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments.

Before I get to my question, I just want to point out that I personally have had a very positive relationship with Canada Post workers in my lifetime, whether it was with delivery to my constituency office where Dean delivers the mail with a smile every day, or to my home where Cathy has delivered mail for over 20 years. I have a very positive relationship and I respect the professionalism and the work they do.

However, over the last number of days we have had dozens, if not hundreds, of emails written to this place by our constituents and constituents of members across the way, pointing out the negative impact that this ongoing work stoppage is having on our economy. I just received another one from my riding. It says:

We currently have hundreds if not over a thousand shipments either stalled with Canada Post or are unable to ship.

A secondary issue is receiving payments, sending invoices and payments. These are problematic, but obviously not as crucial.

He goes on to ask us to move quickly to bring this work stoppage to a halt.

Small businesses are at risk. Seniors are at risk. Charitable groups who do such good work for us are at risk. How much longer will the New Democratic Party cause these groups to suffer?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I think that will be when we see we get some fairness. Simply put, every single small business operator I know, and my sister is one, works extremely hard. They are looking for the government to do a very simple thing: pick up the phone and call the person they appointed.

This is a point I have to make. The head of Canada Post was not hired by Canadians; he was appointed by the Prime Minister. Guess what happens when the government wants something to be done? It can do whatever it wants in terms of direction, and I think we heard this from the former Liberal minister, that it just picks up the phone and says what it wants to happen.

This government could, if it wanted to, end it right now. It could pick up the phone, call the head of Canada Post, and it would be done. It is that simple. That would help all the people who are concerned, whom the hon. member mentioned.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House for most of the last day and much of last night. I have heard from both sides and I hear one common element, which is the importance of getting the mail service back and the importance of ensuring that average Canadians, senior citizens and small businesses are not impacted. That should be our primary goal here.

To get through this, we can throw rocks at each other for days. I think the government understands that we are serious about fairness. However, we both have to look at the issue of compromise in order to put senior citizens and small businesses first.

I ask my hon. colleague, because of his experience, if he thinks that it would be fairly straightforward for the Prime Minister to take out the clause that forces wages down in the back to work legislation. Could he take that out, call on Canada Post to unlock the doors and send both parties to mediation and arbitration?

This could be settled immediately. I think it is incumbent upon us to show Canadians that in this 41st Parliament we could actually get something done for the good of the people of Canada.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I think we are at that point. I think we need to ask the government what is reasonable, what is fair and how we ensure that we all do our jobs. Is the government going die on the hill on this particular contract?

Again, the main focus of my speech was around page 6 of the legislation, where it has the salary grid laid out. In fact, it is lower than what was on the table in negotiations.

I think we could see some form of agreement so that this House could do its job. We could get through the next number of hours, not by debating points back and forth, but perhaps by ensuring that we do get a resolution to this issue. We could ensure that Canadians get their mail and have postal workers back doing their job. We could ensure fairness so that all of us could go back to our constituents and say that we all did our jobs and be proud of that as parliamentarians.

That is what I think Canadians are looking for; that is what we should be doing; and that is what I think is a reasonable offer. It is something that should be done. We ask the government to take a look at this.

• (4040)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this today.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, and as my colleagues in the House know, especially my friend from Peterborough, I like to think the glass is half full. He knows that is true.

Government Orders

I just want to point out to everybody in the House that over the past 18 hours or so the government is no longer referring to this as a strike. It is now referring to it as a lockout. That is a very positive step forward, for that is exactly what it is.

Speaking of that, I had an email from someone who publishes a weekly paper in my riding. He asked why, if the government was going to lock people out, it did not give notice to people like him. That is a very good question. We have had that question in the House a number of times. Why all of a sudden did things get stuck at the post office? Things were not going anywhere. People were upset. It was a hardship for many, including this small business owner in the west end of my riding.

Why did the government not give notice, for example? That is in the spirit of compromise. That is in the spirit of saying that the government may have to do something, so we had better sit at the table and work things out.

Why did the government not do that? I do not know. I told the fellow who owns that weekly paper that I would ask that question today. Perhaps in the question period we will have a chance to do that.

The government's insistence on locking out Canada Post employees and sending them back to work is not just an attack on collective bargaining rights. It is also an attack on young workers and an attack on the retirement security of all Canadians.

I want to talk about what the bill says about imposing new hourly pay guidelines on the workers at Canada Post. It is significantly below Canada Post's last offer, which makes no sense at all. In fact, over the four years of this contract, \$35 million will be taken out of the pockets of Canada Post workers and their families. That is important: it is workers and their families. That is \$35 million that will not be taxed. That is \$35 million that will not be spent in the local economy.

What this boils down to is fairness. That is what we are really talking about today and tomorrow. We talk about the younger workers coming into Canada Post and not getting the same deal, getting partial deals of what the older workers get.

We do not have a two-tier system of rent in this country. We do not have a two-tier system of mortgages. We do not have a two-tier system of going to the grocery store and buying groceries. We do not have a two-tier system of filling up our gas tanks. It is outrageous to say that young workers in our country should be paid less than their older counterparts. It is outrageous. They are doing the same work.

I want to say something about pensions, an important element of this, and about the pension changes that the government is trying to impose on workers at Canada Post. In the last legislative session, pensions and retirement security came to the fore in just about every discussion. Bill C-501, my bill, came to Parliament, was voted on a couple of times, and was passed those times. I know that there is a will on that side of this place to ensure that Canadians have the retirement security they need.

In fact, before the last election, the government was actually warming toward increasing CPP and making CPP better. Then the Minister of Finance said it would hurt the economy. He forgot that

we were talking about phasing it in over seven years. We were not talking about some big shock.

The Minister of Finance has also suggested that increasing CPP is administratively difficult. The president and CEO of the CPP investment board, David Denison, has made it clear that there is no administrative impediment to enhancing CPP. In fact it is quite the contrary. He says private plans will cost significantly more for the same benefit.

● (4045)

In 2007 Canadian RRSP holders paid private fund managers \$25 billion in fees, fees that we do not have with CPP. CPP is simply the lowest-cost option. If that were enhanced, the kinds of negotiations that go on at Canada Post on retirement security would be made easier and clearer and we could plan for the retirement security of those beginning work in their twenties.

A phased-in CPP is an increase from \$960 a month to \$1,868 a month over the next seven years. What would that mean to the average earner? For people who make \$30,000 a year, every week over the next seven years they would pay \$2.27 out of their salary to ensure their CPP doubled. It simply makes sense.

We have heard some stories from business owners and other people. Let me talk about Canadians who are hurting, and I am not going to put any blame here. I will read a couple of passages from emails I have received from northwestern Ontario.

This is from a postal worker and her husband. She says:

Our sick leave provisions are such that a fulltime employee earns 10 hours per month of sick leave credits. This sick leave accumulates until you retire. At that time, any sick leave you have not used is gone. WE ARE NOT PAID OUT!!!

That seems to be a misconception of many people. Their sick leave provisions in their contracts are protecting them in case of long-term disability. She goes on to say:

Well, last August, my husband...was diagnosed with cancer and shortly went off work on sick leave. Fortunately, he had almost a year of sick leave credits. As such, he has been able to still provide for us by receiving a regular pay check. His drug benefits were still active as well. This has been a great comfort for him as he has gone through months of treatments and surgery and made this situation much more tolerable. He could just concentrate on healing. He was hoping to be able to return to work by the end of the year and work a few more years. We still have a mortgage and bills like everyone else. We put three kids through University...

On June 2, 2011, CPC declared that our collective agreement was no longer in force. This resulted in [his] sick leave and benefits being cut off...

Lest people think, from this discussion, that it is small-business owners, seniors and others who are suffering because of this. Many people who work for Canada Post are also suffering. This means that Canadians right across the country are suffering.

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Another person writes, “I am 62 years old, a single mother. Nine years ago, I became partially disabled, only working a half shift at Canada Post”. Her son is just coming to the end of university. She is already poor. She is asking why her employer proposes to make her poorer.

Here is one from a woman in my riding. She says, “I’m currently on sick leave after experiencing a heart attack. I also have numerous other related health issues”. All her benefits have been cut off. She continues to say, “After only two days without my insulin, my glucose levels have doubled and I’m experiencing difficulty breathing without my puffers and heart medications”, which she can no longer afford. That is what is happening.

We, on this side of the House, and I am sure many on the other side, believe in free speech, free association and free collective bargaining. This legislation hurts the values that our country stands for and is an attack on the rights of workers and their standard of living. The proper role is for the government to tell its own crown corporation to get back to the bargaining table and negotiate a collective agreement, but first it must unlock the doors.

• (4050)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite had many good points. However, the one point I would like to underline is what he clearly said about Canadians all across the country hurting, and that includes postal workers. I have had emails from postal workers in my riding and from across the country. They want to go back to work now. They want us to encourage members opposite to stop delaying this and to pass Bill C-6.

Would the member agree that the bill needs to be passed for the good of all Canadians in our country, and it needs to be passed swiftly?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning of my speech, this is not a strike; it is a lockout. It could very easily be ended by simply taking the locks off the door and getting everybody back to work.

In fact, she will remember that CUPW said that it did not have a problem, that it would keep working with the existing collective agreement, while it continued to negotiate. That would have been fine, too. It does not have to be this way.

My final point is we have proposed amendments to this, which we think will help to solve the deadlock we are in right now. Perhaps if another member from the Conservative Party has an opportunity to ask me a question, I would like to know why the Conservatives have not accepted those.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in a situation where we are hearing from people in our ridings. I have certainly had emails and phone calls from constituents who are concerned. I had one from a postal worker who said, “Negotiate, do not legislate”. I can certainly understand his point of view.

I have calls and emails from people who are in business. They are suffering because they rely upon the postal service to bring them reimbursement or payments but they are not receiving. There is a real need to find a way to solve this.

My hon. colleague has talked about possible amendments. It seems to me we ought to be discussing what could bring us together here. We have a lot of back and forth, a lot of rhetoric on both sides about how each side is wrong. We are hearing two very divergent points of view. However, I am encouraged by the talk of amendments. Perhaps we ought to be focusing on what could bring us together.

Would my hon. colleague tell us some more about what his party has in mind as a way to resolve this impasse and move forward?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely right. We should be talking about coming together, not moving further apart. I think we have achieved that and are achieving that as time goes on.

It is heading into the weekend. We all know this will come to a resolution eventually.

One of the amendments is to ensure we do not have this inequality in the pay. We should take that clause out of the legislation. Canada Post had a last offer. We should go with that offer and move ahead.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank and congratulate my hon. colleague for his incredible work on behalf of his constituents and the Canadian people.

I also thank him for raising the issue of the impact of this legislation on the younger members of the workforce at the beginning of his speech.

The Conservative government vows to fix the Canadian economy, but this back to work legislation will have the opposite effect.

Could my hon. colleague explain for the members of the government the disastrous effects the working conditions and lower wages that the Conservatives want to impose will have on the youngest members of the workforce and ultimately because of that, on our economy?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I have already talked about the wage part of the issue for young people, but let me briefly say something about retirement security. We know the retirement security will be the biggest issue facing the country as we move forward over the next 20, 30, 40 years. To erode people's pensions as soon as they start working when they are 20 does not make any sense at all.

We should all be working in this place to enhance retirement security, not only for those who are approaching retirement age or those who are already in retirement, but also for those who are in their twenties and their thirties who probably have not thought much about retirement security. We need to ensure they are ready to retire.

• (4055)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy standing up as I have been in the House uninterrupted without sleep for 31 hours. I mention this not with any sense of bravado, but merely to apologize in advance if anything I say is somewhat less than coherent.

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[Translation]

It would also be better if I were not to speak in French, given that I am very tired.

[English]

I will speak to the motion in a couple of ways. I find the challenge of being original, after 31 hours of debate, is my main obstacle. We have heard a lot of very fine words on all sides of the House, but it has become, and I hope I do not offend anyone, a little repetitious. Therefore, I thought I would take a different tack.

We do want to stay on the subject, and the subject of the motion is a hoist amendment. It is useful to go back and reflect on the fact that hoist amendments used to be used by the government, not by opposition. They were used most commonly around 1867. That is why most of us had not heard of them before, but we have learned more about hoist amendments.

However, what it comes down to is the fact that to accept a hoist amendment in these circumstances is basically to reject Bill C-6. Why would we want to reject Bill C-6? Those reasons have been well canvassed.

I want to state the position of the Green Party on this as clearly as I can.

We sympathize with all those people who are disadvantaged by the current lockout, work stoppage, however one wants to put it. Small businesses are disadvantaged, some in my own riding. Others disadvantaged are: small operators of all kinds; individual Canadians waiting for their cheques, whether they are seniors, or single parents waiting for child support cheques; the workers are disadvantaged, people who cannot go to work when they want to, who are not receiving their paycheques.

I would like to take it as a given that every member of the House would rather have the members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers do their work with a management structure of Canada Post that allows them to do that work efficiently, effectively, with proper supports for their training. A lot of the issues that have come up have to do with new equipment purchased by Canada Post. I hear from Canada Post workers in my riding that it did not provide adequate time or adequate training. There are some structural issues here that are real.

For CUPW, it has not really been primarily about the salaries. We have also heard that. That was not the big sticking point in the negotiations. What then was? Issues of fairness, issues of pensions, issues of this training equipment.

How are we to resolve this? This is where I would like to try to be original. What are our duties as members of Parliament? To whom do we bear allegiance?

It was not long ago that every one of us in the House swore an oath of allegiance. Members may recall, unless they have individual practices within their own parties of which I am not aware, that none of us put our hands on the *Bible* to swear allegiance to our political party or the leaders of our political parties. Quite simply, we all swore allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

We did that not because we admire a very admirable woman of enormous sense of duty and responsibility, named Betty Windsor, who lives in England and has a lot of grandchildren and some great-grandchildren. We take the oath to Queen Elizabeth II because she represents to us, as head of state, our country. Our primary duty in this place is to our country. As such, I would beg of each and every one of us to think primarily about what is in our national interest, which is clearly to end the lockout, to get people back to work and to stop blaming each other for how we got in this pickle.

The Government of Canada clearly sympathizes more with Canada Post. That is understood. I think all of us in opposition tend to sympathize more with CUPW. However, the opposition is not CUPW and the governing party is not Canada Post. We cannot continue to be proxies for people who cannot get to the bargaining table on their own. We need to fix this for them and we should not fix it in a blunt way, with a draconian instrument, that would cause long-term damage to something we need to thrive, our national public postal system.

I know I have heard from many members, and I am not pretending for a moment that this idea is original, certainly in the official opposition and from some within the governing party that we should be able to bend a little. We should be able to fix this. We should not conduct an ongoing echo chamber in our House of Commons that leaves Canadians from coast to coast absolutely stupefied as to what we are doing here.

● (4100)

Let us surprise the people of Canada by having the members of the 41st Parliament act differently. Let us actually get together out in the corridors, and maybe people are already doing it. Let us remove those sections of Bill C-6 that are unacceptable at least to this side of the House. Let us find a way that gets the postal workers back to work as soon as possible, which satisfies all the needs of the people that we have heard so much about, the people who need their glasses, the delivery of food to the north, services to small communities. All of those needs and hurts will be mended the minute we take the locks off the door and get people back to work. People who want their mail delivered really do not care whether we keep clause 15 in Bill C-6 or not.

I beg of all of us in the next few hours that we find a way to hoist ourselves out of hoist amendments. In studying this I learned to my horror that we could move a hoist amendment again and continue to debate the bill. We could be here for days. That is in no one's interest.

Let us move to unanimous consent on things that make sense and let us solve this problem. Let us get the postal workers back to work and do it in a way that shows a collective respect for them and their work.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said she does not like all the repetition. There is no repetition on this side of the House of messages we are getting from businesses and individuals in our ridings. I received one from a constituent in the riding of Blackstrap who owns and works at a local insurance office, a small business, the type of people the NDP members claim they represent.

The constituent wrote, “We look out for all types of people, seniors, farmers, students, families, small business, churches, and we rely on Canada Post to send our clients their insurance policies and other necessary communications. For many younger individuals and urban families we send correspondence by mail. However, for those such as seniors, farmers, etc., these seniors are rural individuals and now are without the documents that would confirm their interests are protected or are without notice of potential risks they should be aware of. I would be interested to see how many vulnerable individuals would the federal opposition like to put in the position of having their valuables and investments destroyed with no protection so they can champion postal workers having extensive pay increases and receiving lavish but economically burdened pensions.”

That is from one of my concerned constituents in Blackstrap.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for sharing that point of view. If the hon. member can consider that everything I said spoke to that concern, that individual with that difficulty would not be in any difficulty at all if the government benches were prepared to compromise just a bit and tweak Bill C-6 so we can get people back to work faster. That is all I am asking. I am just asking the member to consider that when she reads out valid and important concerns on all sides of the House.

I have received similar emails. I read one yesterday in the House from a local newspaper that cannot get its papers delivered. How on earth does it advance the interest of those mentioned in the email the hon. member read out loud to keep the lockout going by failure to compromise?

• (4105)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister must have Deepak Chopra's phone number because he only just hired him in January of 2011. In fact they scoured the countryside to find a corporate hitman to come in and stir up problems at Canada Post and upset the delicate and fragile balance of industrial relations in a fairly volatile workplace. We know the Prime Minister is now in Thetford Mines revelling in a pile of chrysotile, even though the global community has condemned Canada for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would like to remind all hon. members that it is not appropriate to comment on whether members are or are not in the House during proceedings.

Would the hon. member quickly move to his question.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague's views on whether or not the Prime Minister knows the phone number of Deepak Chopra, because he hand-picked him and parachuted him into that position in January 2011. Could he not pick up the phone again and tell Deepak Chopra to lift the lockout, let the workers go back to work and the mail will flow?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has me at a disadvantage. I am not in a position to speak to what is in the Prime Minister's rolodex.

I do agree with the hon. member and I applaud his quite valiant work over more than a decade on the asbestos issue. However, on this issue, to solve the lockout we need to be perhaps less skilled in our rhetoric and more skilled in the communication skills that Deepak Chopra is famous for, harmony and co-operation. The

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rhetorical flourish is fine, but to solve this, I think we should all tone it down.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague, a former fellow Cape Bretoner on entering these chambers and being the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

I have been receiving emails from people in my riding in Cape Breton also. The last one I got is from Mr. Richard Andrews. He is asking me to do everything I can to get the mail moving. In Cape Breton we see all the postal workers being locked out with no income and their family members have no medical plan.

There is a lot more co-operation here and I see the NDP made some space so the member could make her statement. I see more co-operation. It seems that it comes down to half a per cent when we look at the difference between the Canada Post offer and what the Conservative government has offered.

If an amendment were put forward regarding that half a per cent, the minister might take a look at it, and we could have the mail moving and people back at work.

The hon. member used to work for a minister here and knows the system. Does she think an amendment is possible which would somehow get the mail moving again?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, yes. I believe the first step would be for the official opposition to have private conversations with the Minister of Labour. Those conversations should be shared with the House in the hopes of achieving unanimous consent so the workers can get back to work this weekend.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by wishing the people of Roxboro, Île-Bizard, Pierrefonds and Dollard-des-Ormeaux a happy national holiday. I would very much like to be with them this evening to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day at Île-Bizard, as I did so often when I was a teenager, but it will not be possible this year.

Many of my colleagues today expressed their regrets about not being able to be in their ridings, to which the MPs on the other side of the House replied several times by saying it was their own decision. Unfortunately, this allegation is very different from reality, which is not surprising. Indeed, since the beginning of this debate, we have heard a great many unfair accusations and phony arguments from the Conservatives.

For example, they have used the economic crisis to justify the need to act quickly, when it was the government itself that imposed the lockout. The Hon. Minister of Labour said on June 15 that she had not received many complaints about the rotating strikes. Another example was from my colleague on the right telling us that they were worried about the viability of Canada Post. And yet, he knows full well that Canada Post earned \$281 million in revenue last year. This money goes into the coffers or is invested to modernize the corporation's infrastructure and equipment, and it all created employment here. We could also point to the fact that we receive excellent service from Canada Post and that our stamps are among the least expensive in the world.

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In another phony argument, the legitimacy of the union's decisions are being attacked. We heard this a lot today. Who is surprised that the Conservatives are taking advantage of this situation to launch a smear campaign in an effort to demonize any workers who organize?

And yet, as the MP for Hochelaga explained earlier today, the union consulted its members about the mandate they wanted to give it. The members voted and the union obtained 94% support going into the negotiations. And yet it would appear that my colleagues on the other side of the House, who boast of receiving support from 40% of the population, are claiming that they have a clear and strong mandate. The union received 94% support to conduct these negotiations.

The Conservatives are also hiding behind reports from worried citizens. They read many such comments to us, and it is touching, but they never say anything about those who support Canada Post employees. Some people might be surprised to hear it, but there are indeed people who support the striking employees, and take them coffee and food. There are also worried workers awaiting the outcome of this dispute, and wondering how the government will react when the time comes for them to negotiate their own working conditions.

I am nevertheless sensitive to the fact that a number of people are suffering because of the work stoppage at Canada Post. I am trying to be very clear. Although we are standing up today for the workers, those at Canada Post and all others who fear for their future working conditions, we are just as mindful of public concern about the lockout at Canada Post, among business owners, people waiting for their cheques and everyone else. We are well aware of that.

That brings me to another false line of debate all too often raised by the Conservatives. They accuse us of prolonging the closure of Canada Post and of not working with the government in the interests of citizens. That is a red herring. Let us get something clear here: the NDP wants postal services to resume just as much as the Conservatives do. No one is in favour of stopping postal services—no one. What we are denouncing today and what is intolerable to us is the way in which the Conservatives want to resolve this dispute.

We are opposed to this bill on the resumption and continuation of postal services. We are not opposed to the resumption of postal services, but rather to the working conditions that this bill imposes on workers, to this government's way of rejecting the workers' right to negotiate.

• (4110)

To sum up, the members opposite have said this is a situation that no one wanted. That's true; we agree. So let us stop the false debates, let us stop the lockout and let us resume the negotiations now.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is quite a bit of inconsistency in the NDP's argument. On one side they say the government should play no role and that we should allow the two sides to bargain. On the other side they accuse the government of somehow being involved in the

lockout. Therefore, on one side we are not supposed to be involved, and then they say we are involved. They are all over the road on it.

One thing seems very clear to me. We are calling this a lockout, and my hon. colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac said some time ago that in fact the workers themselves are locked out by their union. They are locked out from having the opportunity to have their say on the most recent contract offer that was made by Canada Post, and I do not understand why. I have letters from postal workers.

I hear the member for Malpeque shouting, but I want to ask this member a very succinct question. I have a number of letters from postal workers in my riding who are experiencing hardship and who want the opportunity to vote on Canada Post's most recent contract offer.

Would this member join me in calling on CUPW to allow its members to vote on Canada Post's offer? Doing that would make this bill redundant.

• (4115)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite, who has just given us further proof that the Conservatives' arguments are red herrings and lead us into false debate. Thanks once again. I heard my colleague say—and I'm sure the translation was excellent—that the lockout was imposed by the unions. I am sure there is something completely distorted and false in that statement.

Yes, unfortunately, there is a lockout, and it was not at all imposed by either the workers or the unions. The unions had a strong mandate from their members, and we must respect their rights and let them negotiate their collective agreement.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by our honourable colleague.

A few minutes ago, I put a question to our colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River, who mentioned, for example, that the NDP might perhaps be able to reach an agreement if the government could offer the same wages as Canada Post cited in their last offer.

Can she confirm that that is indeed the NDP's position? I also hope we will have some comments from the government on that offer.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for raising the point that this bill on the resumption of postal services indeed suggests giving employees a wage even lower than what was negotiated. That is something we find intolerable and it is an example of the way in which the government is intervening in the negotiations. It is something we find utterly reprehensible. We would also prefer that workers have the right to negotiate, not just Canada Post's workers, but all organized workers.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as soon as they get a majority, they exercise their authority. That's how I would characterize this government's attitude toward its responsibilities. The rotating strike started just one month after the election, to the day. The principle of a rotating strike, of course, is that it lasts 24 hours at one location before continuing at another.

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The rotating strike was not supposed to penalize the entire country and would ensure service at all locations, with the exception of the municipality affected by the strike on a particular day, on a rotating basis, one municipality after another.

The government cannot tell us that a rotating strike is worse than a work stoppage forced by the employer. What is happening now is not a rotating strike, but rather a lockout. We can therefore say that everything has been brought to a standstill with the aid of the Conservative government.

The public is not blind. The rotating strike left the door open to negotiations between the two parties, but the lockout does not. The workers decided to conduct a rotating strike because they were aggrieved, as the government had offered them less than their employer, Canada Post.

The workers sought increases at least equal to the rate of inflation, particularly since Canada Post is profitable and therefore would run no risk by improving the situation of its employees. Remember that it earned a profit of \$281 million last year.

A number of labour strikes have been harshly suppressed in the past. I can offer the example of the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919, the most famous strike in Canadian history. Within a few hours, 30,000 workers walked off the job. The issues were the collective bargaining principle, wage increases and improved working conditions. In 1949, there was another famous strike, the strike in Theftford Mines, involving 5,000 workers, including 2,000 miners from Asbestos. The issues there were wage increases, the pension plan and recognition for the family. The issues have always been the same.

That was a time when any attempt to organize in the workplace was immediately repressed. It was a time when there was no legislation on working conditions.

I get the unpleasant impression we are reliving that period when workers had no rights.

The current incidents at Canada Post are strangely similar to what happened in the last century.

The government complains of the harm done to small businesses, harm that it has caused through its lockout.

The government is trying to pass this bill as quickly as possible in contempt of the workers' most fundamental right.

The NDP sensed what I would call this totalitarian attitude long before the election. Unfortunately, our worst fears have been realized, and not just once, but twice.

The NDP opposed the budget tabled on June 6, 2011. It opposed the bill to end the strike by Air Canada's 3,800 call centre and check-in counter personnel, which was just barely avoided. It now opposes Bill C-6 because the bill does not enable the two parties to go back to the bargaining table to reach a joint solution.

However, the workers wanted to negotiate with management, and they want to continue those negotiations.

Canada Post wants new employees to accept reduced wages, benefits, job security and pension plans compared to what is offered

to current employees. Quebec law prohibits employers from creating working conditions for new employees that are different from those enjoyed by current workers. However, employees of businesses under federal authority, such as banks, telecommunications companies and the Canadian public service, are not protected by that legislation. This "orphan clause" providing for differential treatment made headlines in Quebec a few years ago.

Might we state once again that it was the government that subjected the postal service to a lockout, not the unionized employees? Unionized employees were conducting rotating strikes to avoid harming small and medium-sized enterprises and the public. Unionized employees delivered pension, workers' compensation and employment insurance cheques to Canadians.

"Aimed at the black duck, killed the white, oh, son of the king, you are unkind." That line from *V'la l'bon vent*, an old Quebec folk song, is very appropriate to the work required of us today by the Conservative government.

● (4120)

Mail service is of course very important to Canada's economy, and any extended stoppage of that service would call for action by the Government of Canada in the public's interest. But what is the black duck at which the Hon. Minister of Labour is aiming in this matter? What is the cause of this interruption in mail service across Canada?

After a few days of perfectly lawful rotating strikes that had virtually no effect on mail delivery, Canada Post management decided unilaterally to cut back Canada's postal service, violating, with impunity, its own mission to deliver the mail quickly and efficiently across Canada. That decision alone would have constituted grounds for the minister to table a bill to summarily dismiss Canada Post management for incompetence and contempt of public order.

But now the Minister of Labour has drawn her big silver gun in the form of a special act and drafted legislation mistreating postal workers instead of rightly attacking those who are disturbing the public order, Canada Post's senior management.

This legislation is out of all proportion to the harm it aims to remedy. Senior management at Canada Post, feeling supported by such a well-connected accomplice, will thus order a lockout of its workers, putting the finishing touches to its sabotage of mail delivery across the country.

One can just imagine the size of the bonuses those gentlemen will be receiving for that brilliant idea.

This bill is a crude joke that rewards the turpitude and incompetence of Canada Post management. "Shameful," as our leader would say. In addition, the minister adds insult to injury by getting back at the unionized workers: the legislation even provides for working conditions inferior to those set out in the draft collective agreement.

To vote for this bill would be to show contempt for Canada's unionized workers and to deny them their rights. However, Canadian taxpayers pay the minister's salary in order to protect those rights.

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To vote for this bill would be to reward the laziness of Canada Post's senior management, who are more concerned about their year-end bonuses than about the performance of the service they are required to provide to Canadians.

● (4125)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, if I could, I would like to congratulate Toyota. In my riding of Cambridge the workers and the management have actually received recognition as being the number one auto assembly plant in the world.

I want to put forward as well an email that I have received.

I [am] writing to you in a hope that you would help intervene in the CPC/CUPW strike. I want to work; the union is not allowing the membership to vote on the generous offer put forward. Please contact the appropriate member and give them the concerns that many postal workers are unhappy with the union's approach and would like the Gov't or CPC to order a vote.

My question to the member is this. It appears to me that the union has locked out their membership in a very undemocratic way. Will the member support a call to her union bosses and the conductors of the socialist party to demand that the union allow its membership a free vote?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, while we were all in the House last night, our leader suggested that negotiations resume and that there be a truce so people could have six months to negotiate in a thorough manner. The lockout has to be stopped and the locks removed.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to the member, I appreciate the great speech but the members on the other side have forgotten something. They have locked out the CUPW workers. Their legislation prevents them from voting on the contract, so what are they talking about? The legislation prevents the workers from voting on the contract.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would just remind all hon. members that questions and comments are directed to the person who has given the presentation.

[*Translation*]

Does the honourable member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles wish to answer the question?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the question. Would it be possible to repeat it? I did not hear the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): This is a period for questions or comments. That was a comment. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, what happened was that my hon. colleague requested to hear the question. Because of the heckling and shouting from the Conservatives, she was not able to hear the question, so she said, "Can I hear the question?"

● (4130)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate the intervention from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

After a speech is given, members have an opportunity to ask a question or make a comment. It is widely misunderstood that there is a requirement that there be a question. There is not. My understanding is that the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek actually made a comment rather than pose a question, as he has the right to do.

I would also agree that the noise in the chamber made it difficult for the hon. member to hear.

On questions and comments, we have time for a short question from the hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I do not think the hon. member had time to respond to the comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): We will try this again.

[*Translation*]

If the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles wishes, she may answer her colleague.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government must really do something and stop this lockout. That is all the parties are waiting for, to resume negotiations, and the unions are waiting to resume mail delivery. As the member at the far end of the House said, people are waiting for their diapers, their mail and their prescription drugs to be delivered. So it is time everyone started negotiating.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country, with a short question, please.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her talk this afternoon, this evening, or today, whatever time it is wherever people are.

The fact is that this is a serious issue for all Canadians. I have had the opportunity to be in management and work with a unionized company and I have also been in a union. I had the unfortunate opportunity to participate in a strike for several weeks, walking around the printing plant for a newspaper, from midnight to 4 a.m. It was not a good experience for anybody involved.

The workers lose on both sides of the perspective. The only winners in this are the union management and the company management. I think the fact is that people are being blamed for locking out or striking when everyone knows it is a work stoppage and we need to resolve this issue. The way to get the locks lifted is to pass this legislation.

Does my hon. colleague not believe that the best way to resolve this issue, to get the workers back to work, is to pass this legislation opening the locks so we can resume the delivery of the mail to small businesses—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Madam Speaker, to respond to the hon. member, as he said, it is often the management party that emerges from negotiations or strikes in a winning position. There is a power grab here by the management side, Canada Post.

Second, like the hon. member, I have also managed businesses and conducted negotiations. It was done in another manner, not by lockout. We discussed and re-discussed the issues and we ultimately found a solution.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin my remarks by doing something that perhaps we should have done a great deal earlier, and that is to recognize and to pay tribute to one of the most well-respected, well-known, brave and dignified labour leaders that this country has ever seen, and I make reference to Jean-Claude Parrot, the former leader of CUPW, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

He led a couple of strikes in the mid-1970s against a draconian situation in probably the most hostile industrial relations environment in recent history. He wound up going to prison for his convictions and his beliefs. I met with JC just a few years ago in Geneva, where he was representing Canada at the ILO.

I raise this because our conversation led to growing trends in his home country, my current country. The name of Thomas d'Aquino came up because we were talking about the driving influences, the dynamics, facing the labour movement and the economy generally today, and that seemed to be the wish list of Thomas d'Aquino, the declaration of Thomas d'Aquino on what Canada needs to do.

He was the unofficial prime minister of Canada. He was guiding things during the 1990s. He had 10 or 12 things that he said Canada must do in order to prosper in the 21st century, et cetera. One by one, he was ticking them off, and right up in the top three was that corporations had to get out from under their legacy costs.

"Legacy costs" is code for pensions. Legacy costs are blamed all the time, even when the auto industry got into trouble recently. They never let a good crisis go to waste. The first thing the industry said was that it was not industry mismanagement and not the fact that the industry builds cars that nobody wants to buy, but the legacy costs. If only the industry could get out from under their legacy costs, said the auto industry, it would be as good as Honda and Toyota.

Jean-Claude Parrot, in his wisdom, flagged this for me as we sat having dinner in Geneva. I have been watching his prescient observations come true, because we have seen an unprecedented assault on the very notion that workers should have an expectation of a reasonable pension plan when they retire. It has been systematically undermined and chipped away at.

Here is the modus operandi. First, we get Thomas d'Aquino, or John Manley now, to say something. He will say that we need to get rid of pensions. Suddenly, a couple of right-wing think tanks come along and validate that. Sure enough, a couple of studies by the Fraser Institute say that we have to get rid of pensions. Then, sure enough, the lobbyists are unleashed; let loose the hounds. The lobbyists descend on Parliament Hill. Suddenly, Tim Powers and

Geoff Norquay are on Parliament Hill saying that we have to get rid of pensions.

All of a sudden, a neo-conservative government dutifully falls into line and says that we have to get rid of pensions, although perhaps in a nicer, kinder tone, because villainy wears many masks, as we know, but none so treacherous as the mask of virtue, and the government is good at putting on the mask of virtue when necessary.

We will even see the government use that trick tonight as it tries to misrepresent what is really going on in the lockout at Canada Post. Because this is not really about 0.5 of 1% of a wage increase for one of the three years; that in and of itself would probably not be enough to cause an impasse in a national institution. What this is really about is the systematic erosion of a public service pension plan and the benefits and the expectations of that group of workers. They chose to take on Canada Post because, frankly, it has been an irritant for years. It has been a very militant union, and as I said, it is one of the most volatile industrial relations environments in the western world. It has been a sick, sick environment, and I am the first to recognize this.

There was a fragile balance. After the extremely hostile days of the seventies, a relative labour peace, a compact, as it were, was managed, and that survived until about the time the Liberals started demanding that Canada Post pay the government dividends. All of a sudden, the mandate of Canada Post was expanded to not just delivering mail on time and providing good service and reasonable postal rates, but to paying millions of dollars per year into the general revenue.

● (4135)

That is when the government started milking it like a cash cow. That is when the pension started to get starved, et cetera. This has been a problem throughout, but Canada Post did manage to get relative labour peace for a number of years, until Moya Greene was parachuted in. Moya Greene tried to change the corporate culture at Canada Post, but then most recently the government went head hunting.

This is one of the problems with not having a public appointments commission. They went head hunting for a corporate hitman who would come in and do the really dirty work, who would really throw a spanner into the gears of industrial relations, who would stir things up to the point where we would have this impasse and the difficulty we see today.

It is the same as in the movie *Wag the Dog*. One manufactures a crisis and then points to the crisis and says that the only thing to do is to use the extreme measure of privatization. It is not paranoid to assume that is the ultimate goal here. I have watched the reaction every time we raise it. All those people on the Conservative benches nod their heads saying, "Well, what is wrong with that? It's a given, isn't it? We are going to privatize it sooner or later. We might as well start now".

Frankly, most of the country does not agree with privatizing Canada Post.

Government Orders

They parachuted in this hitman, Deepak Chopra, not the guru with the incense and all that stuff, but the other one, the corporate hitman. They parachuted him in at \$650,000 a year plus a 33% bonus for everything he can squeeze out of the workers in this round of bargaining. That is pretty good change for the CEO of this company.

We had an expression in the labour movement when I was negotiating agreements that we do not want tourists at the bargaining table. We do not want tourists, but we surely do not want an agent provocateur. We surely do not want a saboteur at the bargaining table who is going to deliberately undermine things, deliberately provoke a conflict and then have the government of the day run to the rescue to put the fire out. They threw a bucket of kerosene on the smouldering embers of an old historic labour dispute and then came rushing in with the fire brigade saying, "Put out the fire with back-to-work legislation. It is a lockout, more hose, more pressure. We need more steam". It is crazy.

I represent the riding of Winnipeg Centre. In 1921 the Government of Canada wanted to lock up J. S. Woodsworth as a leader of the 1919 Winnipeg general strike, but the good people of my riding sent him to Ottawa instead to be their member of Parliament. He stayed there for 21 years and became the founder and first leader of our old party, the CCF, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. I am very proud of that history and that tradition, and we are not going to stop that tradition today no matter what we call our party, because we smell a rat in the woodpile.

This is not a normal labour dispute. There is something sinister going on here, and it is not paranoid to assume that. I keep seeing nodding heads on that side every time we imply that what the Conservatives are really trying to do is find justification to privatize this crown corporation either by starving it to death or using it as a cash cow.

It is really hard to understand why there would be an impasse for a cost of living wage increase when the company showed \$281 million in profits last year and similar amounts in previous years. This is a stable work environment. The company has shed a lot of labour costs by technological change so its operating costs are actually going down even though its capital costs went up to put in new mail sorting services et cetera.

It does a good job. It is a Canadian institution that we value and treasure. We are not going to let those institutions by which we define ourselves as Canadians be dismantled one by one.

The labour compact in the postwar years led to relative labour peace and an end to wildcat strikes. The deal was when productivity was up and profits were up, workers' wages would go up. That was the deal, and that deal has been eroded and compromised.

• (4140)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I must say I always look forward to the member opposite's grasp of theatre. It is very interesting to listen to some of his comments, and his use of hyperbole is absolutely astounding. However, the factual content is somewhat worrisome.

The facts are that on May 2, this country elected a strong, stable Conservative majority government. Canadians elected a strong, stable majority Conservative government because they had con-

fidence that our government could handle the economic downturn that we are coming out of in such a fragile economy.

Is the member aware that Canada Post is losing \$25 million a day from this strike, this lockout? Is he aware that the economic downturn is not helped by what is happening right now? Is he willing to pass Bill C-6 and encourage his caucus comrades to do that?

• (4145)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, when we form the first strong, stable majority progressive social democratic government, we would probably pick up the phone and tell Deepak Chopra to cut the bolts on Canada Post's doors. My colleague comes from Winnipeg, and we know that every kid on the street there has a bolt cutter so he can steal bikes. We could borrow one of those bolt cutters and cut the padlocks off Canada Post to get its workers back to work.

Actually, what Canada Post is saving in wages probably offsets anything it is losing in terms of mail volume. However, the fact remains that the solution to this problem is not back to work legislation. The solution to the problem is to accept the offer of the union to go back to work without any rotating strikes, which it has offered to do, which could happen tomorrow morning if the Conservative government told its flunky, Deepak Chopra, to unlock the padlocks.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I too enjoyed the member's remarks and I agree with his last question. It is funny how in this legislation there is really nothing to cut back the massive bonuses that management gets. It is all taken out on the workers.

My question really relates to an area that I know the member is very concerned about. Earlier, the member for Peterborough got up in the House and went after the NDP strenuously in trying to argue that the workers were not allowed the right to vote on the contract. Is that not a major contradiction with what his own party is trying to do when it comes to the Canadian Wheat Board? The government is denying farmers the right to vote on whether the wheat board remains or not. Is that not a major contradiction?

I ask the member if he could maybe explain that to the House and to the member for Peterborough?

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): It does seem to be a glaring contradiction, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate my colleague for raising the question. Let me just answer on a serious note.

The strike mandate given to the bargaining committee at Canada Post was the biggest in its history. Some 97.5% of all the employees gave a strike mandate to the bargaining committee, because they were told there were rollbacks on the table from the company and the mandate was there. It is customary, actually, to negotiate the best deal possible and then take it to the employees.

The lack of democracy here, or the undermining of the industrial relations process, comes from the heavy hand of the state imposing its will on a democratic process and a constitutionally protected process of free collective bargaining.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I would like to advise hon. members that if they want to be recognized, they ought to wait until they are recognized to make their comments. Otherwise, they will wait for a long time to speak.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I do not know how I always draw the short straw, but I always seem to speak after my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre, so I will try to have as much theatrics in my speech as my hon. colleague did.

Before I begin, I would like to wish all Quebecers and francophones right across the country, but specifically those celebrating in my riding of Sudbury, and especially my wife, Yolanda, and my two daughters, Trinity and Thea, a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. *Bonne fête nationale.*

I speak today with much worry, worry for working families in this country. I worry for people like Todd and Chris and Conway and Steve, as I have spoken to them about their concerns. They worry that their invitations to an important event tomorrow are stuck in the postal outlet.

While today we are fighting for the workers at Canada Post, tomorrow I worry that it could be another union, another working group, or other public sectors workers. Who is next?

Today's debate is to fight for all Canadian working families.

The attacks on Canada's postal workers may not be as bold as what is happening to public service workers in the United States, but they have started. They are as deeply rooted in an ideology as what we have seen south of the border. A troubling aspect of these attacks, whether they are happening in the U.S., in Canada, or anywhere else around the world, is the skewed portrayal of workers.

As Paul Moist outlines,

The large majority of public-sector workers are in health care, schools, social services, and local government. They are mostly women and are far from highly paid. Of the over 600,000 members of CUPE, the average annual pay is less than \$40,000.

It takes a certain amount of gall to portray these workers as privileged.

Attacking the workers and attempting to put all responsibility on workers is at best a mistake and is at worst an all-out assault on the middle and working classes.

However, as the current government, try as it might, attacks these workers, people across the country cannot seem to figure out exactly why pensions and good wages are so bad for Canada and why this government is against letting families have a decent living. Why would they legislate lower wages? It is unfair, let alone unjust, and I would encourage the government to withdraw this from the bill.

First, contrary to what various Canada Post management officials are claiming, postal workers are not a cost of production that is some kind of burden on taxpayers. Postal workers, through their labour, create tremendous new value in the economy, just as miners do and just as other transportation and communication workers do. Indeed, as a crown corporation, Canada Post has consistently made a profit over the last few years, despite the fact that electronic mail usage has

grown significantly. The contribution of postal workers to the creation of this new value should be praised and not belittled.

That is why I want to praise the CUPW Sudbury Local 612. On Monday, this local volunteered to deliver government cheques to seniors and others in my community, and 5,600 government cheques were delivered, despite the workers having been locked out.

While my colleagues on the other side have called the union members thugs, I would like to mention that the union members in my community and the union members right across the country work hard for their local charities. I can attest that they work for the United Way, for the food bank, and for cancer care. Our union members care about their communities and care about their country, and we reject the idea that they are thugs.

We are seeing the effects of slashing workers' wages, pensions, and benefits in quite dramatic form, but for the CEOs, the story is quite different.

The compensation for the CEO of Canada Post is approved by the President of the Treasury Board. For the last four years, the salary of Canada Post's CEO was as follows:

● (4150)

In 2007, the base salary was \$455,000, plus a 25% bonus, equalling \$568,750. In 2008, it was \$482,000, plus a 33% bonus, or an 8 percentage point increase in bonuses from one year to the next. In 2009, it was \$489,700, plus a 33% bonus. In 2010, it \$497,100 in base pay, plus a 33% bonus, totalling \$661,143.

What does this government offer? It offers 1.75% in the first year, 1.5% in the second year, and 2% in each of the next two years. Obviously, the CEO has the support of this government, not the workers of Canada.

As Dan Charbonneau, the president of OECTA's Sudbury Secondary Unit, wrote to me, he could not believe the legislation being brought in by the Conservatives dictating that they had to return to work. Mr. Charbonneau added:

This government has gone one step further by tilting the arbitration in management's favour by imposing wage increases that are less than those already negotiated at the table.

As was mentioned before, it is unfair and unjust to legislate lower wages. Why would this government not withdraw this from the bill? That is a question we are still trying to understand.

In summary, this is not a strike but a lockout imposed by management and the Conservative government. The government is now imposing a contract on the workers. This is not fair collective bargaining. Along with all New Democrats, I will work hard to ensure that the government recognizes the importance of fair and negotiated contracts.

If the Conservatives are so concerned about mail service for Canadians, especially in rural areas, including ones that fall in my riding around Sudbury, in Nickel Belt and throughout the north, then end this lockout now.

Government Orders

• (4155)

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have had tonnes of communication from residents in the City of Barrie who are concerned about the strike and how it is affecting small businesses and the economy. I am surprised how one-sided it has been. People have been adamant that we need to see postal workers get back to work to make sure that we do not damage small business and that the seniors we have spoken about get their cheques across Canada, not just in Sudbury.

One letter I thought was very telling. It spoke to me of the many different ways Canadians are affected by the NDP's inability to support this very important legislation and how this filibuster is hurting Canadians. I want to find out what the hon. member thinks about this and if there are similar circumstances in his riding of people being affected.

This is the letter I received today, whose author asked if I would read it. Debbie from Barrie, who is restricted in a wheelchair, asked me to pass it on. She said: "I read your information about Canada Post. I really hope this gets resolved soon with the back to work legislation. My older brother passed away June 6 and he was cremated in Ottawa and his ashes are stuck in the mail. I am sick about this. We had a service Monday without his ashes. Thank you for trying to pass the back to work legislation".

That was a message sent today. I couldn't believe it. I bet there are hundreds and hundreds of examples of Canadians who are being tremendously affected by the NDP's inability to support this legislation.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Madam Speaker, of course there are many people being affected right across the country. However, it is in the hands of this government.

The hon. member knows that he could easily talk to his colleagues and that they could make the phone call to ensure that locks are cut at the doors of Canada Post, so that the employees could go back to work and distribute the mail. This is a very easy solution. They just have to make the right choice, and they continue to make the wrong choice.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, what has been unfortunate in this debate—it is not a filibuster, it has been a debate—is that the Conservatives have been trying to tell Canadians that the mail has been stopped because of the New Democratic Party. We know what has actually happened is that they locked out the workers and they shut down Canada Post. They introduced legislation last night, and even if it had passed the mail still would not have started today

We have at no time stopped this. Mail is not going to start again until Monday, so that gives us 48 hours to discuss this. It seems to me that the only people who would be discomfited by having to work the weekend to find a solution would maybe be some of the Conservatives. We have been saying all along that we are more than willing to find a solution.

We have 48 hours within this House. Of course it will go past that if they do not want to negotiate.

However, given the fact that the Conservatives have promised again and again that their primary concern is getting the mail

running, I would ask my hon. colleague whether he does not think that in this 48 hours before Monday morning they could take a few reasonable steps: for one, sending a message to open Canada Post, and two, ensuring that it pulls the wage clause out of the back to work legislation. They could then go home to the barbecues and the mail would run.

In 48 hours, do members not think we could solve this?

• (4200)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Madam Speaker, I have been in this House for three years, and it has been an honour to do so. I have seen this House come together and work as one team to pass legislation quickly.

We have the opportunity, if the government so chooses, to withdraw that unjust and unfair wage reduction legislation and to cut the locks off the doors so the workers of Canada Post can go back there to start getting the mail out.

If the Conservatives want to do this, I am sure we can get this done. They can get back to their barbecues and the mail can get out by Monday.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to wish everyone in my constituency of Pontiac and in Quebec a happy national holiday.

I have listened closely to the debate over the past 18 or 20 hours and have come to the conclusion that it is a debate about the role of government in civil society. On that issue, I believe this government must be reminded of the history it seems so easily to disregard. That is odd for a conservative party.

The 19th century proved that unbridled capitalism was unrealistic. We have learned that we cannot rely on the good faith of big business and management when it comes to workers' conditions. There are good reasons why we have unions. I would remind the government that the higher the degree of capitalism, the more abuses there are. Sometimes the "big bosses" decided all issues for workers, sometimes even life and death matters.

The work week in the 19th century varied from 60 to 70 hours. It was 60 hours in the secondary sector and 70 hours in the tertiary sector. Fifteen-hour days were not unusual. Workers generally did not even have enough time to eat. Children made up 8% of the labour force in Quebec in 1891 and were such cheap labour that demand exceeded supply. They worked to the point of exhaustion in unsanitary conditions, exposed to all risks and without supervision. It was in those extremely difficult conditions that workers established unions to protect themselves from the vagaries of the new, impersonal labour market.

Although the first unions were small, local organizations, they immediately triggered hostile reactions from governments and employers. Governments in fact declared the unions illegal. Union movement sympathizers were blacklisted and constantly subjected to intimidation. That is why legislation was introduced to protect workers. Despite the strength of this opposition, the poor wages and the dangerous working conditions, strikes and protests increased, and the unions became established. It is a heroic story, I think.

Government Orders

The government often played a negative role in this story, and we have learned a great deal about the nature of government thanks to the union movement. The dark hours in the history of the union movement show that the role of the state should be to protect its citizens and to remain neutral in labour-management disputes, but, instead of remaining neutral, this government shows contempt for workers and their hard-won rights.

The truth is that the workers of this country and of the world, the ancestors of the vast majority of us, have bled for the right to organize and protect themselves.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers began a series of rotating strikes last week. They have a right to do that. The union nevertheless offered to end the strike if the company allowed the old contract remain in effect during the negotiations, but Canada Post refused to do so.

At midnight on June 15, Canada Post decided to lock out its employees and to shut down mail service. That is no longer a strike; it is a lockout, an unjustifiable lockout because Canada Post is profitable and provides high-quality service.

Let us compare the cost of sending a letter in Canada with the alternatives in the private sector. We pay 59¢ to mail a standard letter. In Germany, it costs 77¢, in Austria it is 88¢, and in the Netherlands it is 64¢. Therefore, why put workers into a corner and force them to accept concessions regarding their salaries and benefits, when the corporation is making \$381 million in profits and its CEO is paid over \$600,000? It does not make any sense.

● (4205)

It is difficult not to conclude that Canada Post is taking a hard line, to the point of putting services in peril, particularly in rural and remote areas such as mine. Again, the role of the state is to remain neutral and to facilitate an agreement. It is not to side with the employer.

[English]

I, like many others in the House, have heard concerns from constituents in my riding about receiving cheques and payments. These concerns are well-founded, but the reality is that they are not caused by striking workers.

The rotating strikes by CUPW were designed to ensure that the essential mail was delivered, but Canada Post has chained the doors. The workers cannot get in to do their essential work. They did not ask for this. Canadians did not ask for this.

I invite Canadians and the people of my riding to see the situation for what it is: a tactic on behalf of Canada Post and the government to exert pressure. Instead of acting to bring both parties back to the table and restore good faith, the government has chosen this labour dispute to stomp on the rights of all workers.

It is Canada Post and the government which have attacked the most vulnerable. It is this lockout and this bill. They are the ones depriving single mothers of their monthly child tax benefit cheques. They are the ones depriving seniors of receiving their GIS or OAS payments. They are the ones depriving Canadians who depend on CPP disability benefit payments and low-income Canadians waiting on tax return cheques or, in the case of some of my constituents, their

disability cheques and business payments, both of which Canada Post refuses to give them. Those are tactics.

We should also realize that this legislation is not an accident. The fact that the first great labour battle with the government is with CUPW is not an accident. I, for one, salute the great work postal workers have done in the past to ensure social progress in our country. They have been at the forefront of many progressive struggles.

CUPW was the first Canadian union to pass a boycott resolution against South African apartheid. It has also taken stances against the Iraq war, as well as against NAFTA and FTAA. CUPW is also a major reason why we have maternity leave benefits in our country.

If the government is neutral, as it repeats ad nauseam, as if repeating it will make it true, why impose a lower wage than offered by the management of Canada Post in the bill. This goes against the entire principle of collective bargaining. We call for this section of the bill to be removed immediately.

Finally, I will add my voice to that of my colleagues. Take the locks off and give Canada Post workers a decent wage, decent pensions and dignity.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, there has certainly been an awful lot of mischaracterizations about what is going on and how we have arrived at this point. The member in the official opposition continued along that route. He indicated that he thought this was a provocative action in many ways and that it never should have happened.

However, there was no talk of how Canada Post significantly had suffered economically through the rotating strikes, especially when it culminated in Toronto and Montreal. It indicated that some \$100 million had been lost by Canada Post. That money belongs not just to the workers of Canada Post, but to all Canadians. That \$100 million is real and it really did not have a choice.

This is the position that Canada Post and its workers are in, but it made an offer just last week. The members across the way have constantly talked about the wages in that offer and it seems they are prepared to accept it on behalf of the Canada Post workers. Is that what everyone else is hearing? That is what I am hearing.

I certainly never called CUPW members thugs. I said the union bosses are thugs, the ones that go to Fiji and Maui on—

An hon. member: Union dues.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Yes, on union dues. Why will they not allow their members to vote on that contract?

● (4210)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member is getting his statistics, but Canada Post has made \$381 million. One would think that it could pay a decent wage to the workers and ensure pensions. The CEO is making close to \$600,000 a year. There are 55,000 postal workers in this country who should have a decent wage and a decent pension, and Canada Post can afford it.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): If we are going to have—

The Deputy Speaker: I am assuming further to the comments that have been made.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): We have at least another 48 hours before Monday comes. I ask the member for Peterborough to withdraw his comment, which he just made when he sat down, where he called people “union thugs”. I am sure the people who work in Peterborough are not union thugs. I would like him to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: On the same point of order, earlier I asked for unanimous consent to table a document from a local postal worker in Peterborough who I support, who actually referred to the union management as “union thugs”. I asked for unanimous consent to table it. Can I have it now?

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

There is no unanimous consent.

Order, please.

I was unable to hear the comments from either the parliamentary secretary or the hon. member because of the shouting and the heckling, so I would ask everybody to calm down and listen to each other so that we can have a more respectful debate.

Is there a question now? I have lost track.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou has the floor for a question.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am certainly going to please members opposite by pointing out that the current lockout does indeed have a significant economic impact. That impact is not just related to the shutting down of postal services, but also to the imposition of certain working conditions on postal workers.

Mr. Stephen Jarislowsky, who manages a \$46 billion investment fund, said he was worried about the current economic situation, where the natural resources sector is dominant. He compared this situation to the housing bubble in the United States.

Does the hon. member think that a good negotiated settlement would be a better solution to ensure good working conditions and retirement benefits for our workers, while also ensuring our economic viability?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Of course, Madam Speaker, but first we must act in good faith. We must start off on the right foot and resume negotiations.

How can it be done when the government imposes salary increases that are less than those offered by the employer? It is impossible. The first thing to do is to ensure that workers' interests are protected, so that we can then sit at the table and resume negotiations in a respectful fashion.

● (4215)

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, five months ago the Prime Minister of the Conservative government appointed the president and CEO of Canada Post. He gave the president and CEO a half a million dollar salary and a 33% bonus. That means he earns more than three-quarters of a million dollars a year.

Five months later, on June 3, this CEO cut off the drug coverage and other benefits of all employees, which includes those on sick leave and disability insurance. Ten days after that he locked out 48,000 workers. While they are locked out, he continues to get his salary and bonus every day, and that is more than \$2,000 per day. Meanwhile, of course, the workers do not get their salary.

Why does a CEO kick out the workers and prevent them from working, you might want to ask, especially given that the company has made, in the last 15 years, \$1.7 billion. They are not losing money. It has been profitable. In fact, their profit has come back to the taxpayers of Canada. Remember, the first mandate of Canada Post is to deliver services, to deliver mail universally to everyone in Canada. That is their mandate, not just to make money for us. But they do make money.

Let me contrast that with a letter carrier. The hourly rate for new workers is \$19 per hour. That is what is being offered. The current starting rate for workers before this was \$23.11, and the maximum dollar amount per hour is \$24.15. The offer on the table, given by the CEO of the post office, appointed by the Prime Minister, is 1.9%.

Now remember, the CEO, on average, over the last few years, has received a 4% salary increase. He gets a 4% increase. The annual average rate of inflation is 3.3%. This worker is given 1.9%. The Conservative Party, with the Prime Minister, is rubbing salt on the wound and saying, no, 1.9% is too high; let us lower it to 1.5%. That is what this legislation is all about, lowering the wages that were offered by Canada Post from 1.9% to 1.5%. I do not know how these members of Parliament can justify that.

A letter carrier carries up to 35 pounds. I would challenge any member of Parliament on the opposite side to carry 35 pounds of mail in all kinds of weather—snow, sleet, rain. Do it, and do it for 35 years and see what happens to you.

Let me tell you what happens to the post office workers, the sorters and the mail delivery people. One out of ten of them are injured on the job—one out of 10. That is three times more severe, on average, in terms of injury than any worker in Ontario. This kind of injury is three times more serious.

In all of last year, 6,335 incidents of injury were reported, with close to 3,000 workers being disabled because of injuries. What kinds of injuries? There were 27 concussions, one amputation, one electric shock, 91 fractures, three frostbites, 325 bruises, and 978 sprains. Over 1,000 workers in pain, all in the last year.

● (4220)

These are our public servants that we are talking about. They are not thugs. They are our workers. They deliver service to our public.

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Where were they hurt? There have been 405 who have hurt their ankles and 579 who have injured their lower backs. Can anyone imagine carrying that weight? There were 302 of them who have injured their knees, hundreds have injured their hands and wrists, and 10 have injured their lungs and other internal organs.

How were they hurt? They slip. They trip. They fall. They are hit by trucks, cars and carts. They are assaulted. And there were 87 workers who were bitten, stung and scratched by animals and insects. It is not an easy job. It is a dangerous job.

There are many ways for a post office to make money. With regard to postal banking, for example, New Zealand and Italy introduced it. Now, a few years later, 30% of the revenue comes from postal banking, representing 70% of their profits.

There are many ways to make sure that Canada Post is financially viable and that it continues to make a profit. They have to think creatively and try something new rather than targeting the workers. The job of a postal worker is really difficult.

I want to read a letter from a constituent of mine. He is a concerned Canadian, not a postal worker.

He said, "If Canada's economic action plan is delivering results to Canadians and supporting job creation, it does not make sense to support a contract by Canada Post that would hurt Canadians and risk the elimination of thousands of jobs. This is a time when we should be strengthening Canadian jobs and the Canadian economy, especially those jobs that provide a vital service across our nation. As the economy improves, concessionary demands by management should be dropped. Demands for cuts in benefits for new hires, lower rates for current temporary employees, and the replacement of sick leave with personal days and a weak short-term disability plan sharply undermine the hard work of CUPW members and the maintenance of a quality public postal service. Canada Post's behaviour has been unethical and very discouraging. Please ask Canada Post to stop the cuts and accept CUPW's offer. The parties should negotiate a fair contract. It should not be forced by legislation."

Another note said, "Canada Post should not be allowed to stop mail delivery. The Corporation is responsible for an essential service."

They want to remind me, and all members of Parliament, that the union was willing to continue to deliver mail on a rotating basis while the negotiations continued. The postal workers are willing to work if the doors are opened.

Given how dangerous their jobs are, and given how little they are paid compared to the CEO who earns 14 times more than they make, what we should do today is to show some respect to the hard-working, beloved postal workers. Let us open the doors. Let them work.

Stop the lockout now and bring them back to their jobs so they can continue to deliver an essential service to all Canadians.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member from Trinity—Spadina for her lecture on why, in her opinion, the class war continues in Canada.

Before that, we had the member for Pontiac, who has unfortunately departed, giving us a speech—

• (4225)

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, I do not believe that anyone should talk about whether a person is absent or present in this House. I could start naming all the people who are absent, but I do not think that is allowed.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member. That is accurate.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): I apologize for that.

Madam Speaker, the member for Pontiac also gave us his version of an address to the 15th plenum of the communist party of some country. I have never heard an attack so absolutely outrageous and bombastic against capitalism. He called our system of market economy "savage capitalism". It takes me back to my days in Moscow.

What we really need to know from the hon. member is if she will extend the same concern for injuries of non-unionized workers to the injuries of business people who are not receiving their mail because of the blockage her party has brought about in this Parliament. Will she express the same concern for the injuries of the Canadian Forces, fighting for our country in Afghanistan? Or is she going to simply focus on continuing to block—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): I am concerned about the injuries of all workers.

I want to read a note. This is from a postal worker from Peterborough:

I am not sending this e-mail to my member of Parliament...as it is clear by his behaviour in Parliament that he is against unions and it would only hit his trash bin as fast as back-to-work legislation hit the floor. My MP only adds to our burden by sending us 20-plus meaningless unaddressed ad mails per year. Please do not let this current Bill C-6 pass.

I think that the very insulting lowering of wages being offered from 1.9% to 1.5% should be withdrawn. That is what is in front of us.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

On a point of order, the honourable Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Madam Speaker, the hon. member has just referred to a document. I would request that the member table that document.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member wish to ask for unanimous consent to table the document?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, I have this in front of me. I could send it in, but I think I require unanimous consent.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Just to be clear, there was no unanimous consent on that, and I have asked the hon. member for Churchill to speak.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Madam Speaker, unless I am mistaken, if a member refers to a document, as the member did, and it is asked that it be tabled, with all due respect, I do not believe that unanimous consent is required, because the person who read the document has simply to say no and no documents would be tabled.

Therefore, there is no requirement for unanimous consent when a member asks that a document referred to be tabled. I suggest, with respect, that the member has no choice but to table it.

• (4230)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Indeed, except for ministers, any member who wishes to table a document must seek and obtain the unanimous consent of the House to do so.

[*English*]

I think we will move on from this point of order.

The hon. member for Churchill.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am concerned by some of the questioning in the House that has this light humorous tone. After about 24 hours of debating this issue, we should all recognize how serious it is and give the respect that is owed to the people on the picket lines fighting for rights that we all ought to have as Canadian workers.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague to elaborate on the point she raised about the draconian nature of this legislation. The government has taken a position that it will go farther than Canada Post, farther than management, and give workers who are doing nothing more than asking for a fair wage less than what management has put on the table. What does she think about this measure?

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the inflation rate is 3.3%. The union is asking to catch up with the cost of living. This is not unreasonable. The CEO of Canada Post, who was appointed by the Prime Minister, offered 1.9%. However, this legislation would give them 1.5%, lowering that by 0.4%. That is a complete insult.

This means that if a party goes to negotiate, they need not worry, the Conservative government would not only legislate them back to work, it would actually lower the wage increase. This approach would create even more labour conflict.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to rise in the House during debate, I will take the opportunity to thank the voters of Halifax who voted me back with a very strong mandate to represent all the constituents in the riding.

For those political trivia buffs, such as the member for Winnipeg Centre, it is an interesting fun fact to know that I was elected with more votes of any member since Robert Stanfield. That is not bad for a New Democrat.

I am here representing the constituents of Halifax, regardless of whether they voted for me, I have had a lot of contact from constituents since we started this debate in the House, and actually since hours after the rolling strikes began and the government announced in the House that it would introduce back to work legislation.

It is the constituents' voices that we are missing. We are doing a good job, standing up for the workers and for Canadians, but their voices are missing. Therefore, I will take this opportunity to bring their voices to this chamber, to this magnificent place, and actually share with hon. members what they are saying in my riding. Some of them are postal workers, some are not, but they all care deeply about this issue.

I will start with a letter I received from Thomas Beazely. He wrote:

My name is Thomas Beazely and I am a lettercarrier and 29 year employee of Canada Post in Halifax. I urge honorable members here today to reject the legislation before you. Remove this unjust act that impedes the ability for our union and Canada Post to negotiate a fair agreement for both parties. Allow history to show that government allows collective bargaining to resolve issues and does not permit legislation to tip the scales and handcuff the Rights of workers and labour in Canada. Let the record show that all parties here today worked together to make the playing field level so that Canada Post is forced to negotiate in good faith. This has not been the case thus far. We the workers, I a lettercarrier, want to do our work. We want to serve the citizens of this great country, we want to deliver the mail. We did everything we could to ensure our service was maintained with as little disruption to the public as possible while attempting to force Canada Post to negotiate in good faith. They have hidden behind the promise of legislation and today hide behind the act of legislation. They caused the loss of service to our customers and now should not be allowed to hide behind the misleading information they are providing to our customers. Let "nay" be the vote that carries at the end of the debate, let history show all parties are concerned about workers rights. Thank you for your time....

I have another letter I received from a constituent named Scott Mason. He writes:

...I am a mail carrier for Canada Post. I strongly oppose the back to work legislation because it gives the corporation a way out of bargaining in good faith. Why should Canada Post negotiate when they know the Gov't. t is going to side with them anyway. We started out with rolling strikes to put some pressure on the Corp. and very little on the public. We do not have any problem with the public, as a matter of fact we have been getting overwhelming support from the public. If we do not have the right to fair negotiations, what kind of future will we and our families have? What about future generations? It seems like we are going backwards! If the majority of the population is only making minimum wage, where will are economy be? The Prime Minister would be wise to think real hard about this situation, because there is a lot of unions in this country with a lot of votes. We are not asking for the moon, we just want a fair deal. We were ready and willing to deliver the mail, and still are. Now if the Prime Minister would legislate Canada Post to let us get back to doing our jobs, which many of us love and make them negotiate, he would earn a lot of respect.

The next letter is actually from someone in my riding who I know is not a postal worker. In fact, he is a scientist but he wrote to me because he cares about this issue as well.

• (4235)

His name is Chris Majka, and he writes:

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A just and democratic society is one that knows how to hear and balance the voices, ideals, and legitimate concerns of all its citizens. The right to collective bargaining by unions representing working people, are an essential component of how modern, progressive, democratic societies work. These rights were hard fought for, and represent a significant triumph for citizens, not only of Canada, but also of nations throughout the world where the principles of civil society are respected. They ensure that working people have a right to be heard with respect to legitimate concerns relating to the conditions of their employment and the remuneration they receive. But they also represent something even more important—dignity. The dignity that is every person's birthright. Dignity to be respected as an individual, as a human being with fundamental rights—and not simply as a mechanical cog within an administrative or corporate machine.

And these rights must also not be toothless. Where collective bargaining fails to achieve a mutually acceptable consensus, unions, and the members they represent, must have the right to withdraw their services, and strike for what they believe in. Without this capacity collective bargaining pales into insignificance. Unions must be able to take a principled position on the picket lines, literally standing for what they believe. Except in demonstrably dire circumstances, this right to collectively bargain should not be abrogated by government.

Forcing workers back to work needlessly muddies the waters of collective bargaining. It disenfranchises workers from the fundamental rights of every person to have to have a role in determining the conditions, circumstances, and remuneration under which they offer their services to an employer.

I submit that in the case of the current [lockout] by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, there is no dire threat to Canada of the sort that would warrant the federal government passing back-to-work legislation.

I urge the Canadian government to respect the rights of workers, to respect the principles of collective bargaining, to respect the right of unions to undertake legal strike action, and to drop its plans to pass such legislation. Canadians from all walks of life are looking to see if this government intends to impose governance on its citizens, or work in concert with them. This is the time to demonstrate good faith and show a commitment to respectful civil society.

Actually, I feel like I could not have said this better myself. People have written really passionate letters and it is a real privilege to be able to bring their voices to the fore.

In the time I have left, I would like to read a little bit from Jim Guild in Halifax. He wrote:

Any fair-minded parliamentarian would have to rise and speak forcefully against the legislation forcing postal workers back to work. Any law that so precipitously and unnecessarily takes away the democratic right of workers to lawfully withdraw their labour would be reprehensible. But this Act is so flagrantly one-sided in favour of the employer — Canada Post — that it does discredit to even this Conservative government. And this is a government that most Canadians expect to be unfair and unreasonable.

Not only is the legislation an attack on public sector workers, it is a disrespectful assault on the very public service upon which Canadians rely. This is particularly true for Canadians who live outside our urban areas.

It is a slap in the faces of the very workers who created the Canada Post profits these past years that have flowed directly to the Canadian government coffers. And it insults every new employee before they have even start working for Canada Post.

This is the [Prime Minister's] gift that keeps on taking.

So I encourage any Parliamentarian to do whatever they can to delay, if not prevent, the enactment of this short-sighted and mean-spirited legislation.

As I said, those are the voices of people from my riding who I represent. I think they have put it just beautifully. I urge the government to start acting reasonably, take the locks off the doors and let the two parties negotiate and put an end to this lockout.

● (4240)

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I recognize the hon. member's passion in her comments but her comments are misguided and reflect her party's focus on narrow interests and even a narrower vision.

We have heard from Canadians overwhelmingly that the government wants us to act on their behalf and expects us to

because of the strong mandate that they have entrusted us with. We will not break faith with the Canadian people.

Why can the member opposite and her party not join us in supporting the broader interests of all Canadians?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, Carole Woodhall, from the riding of Halifax, has the perfect answer to that question. She writes to us on the NDP side and says:

Thank you for your support of postal workers who have exercised their legitimate rights to bargain for a fair collective agreement. It would be a grave disservice to postal workers for the government to interfere in the collective bargaining process. The parties should be left to work out their differences without government intervention. What is the emergency? Postal workers were willing and ready to deliver cheques as they had done in past labour disputes during the 1990s.

This is a lockout and nothing else. It is time for Canada Post to cut the locks off.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am getting tired of hearing about special interests whenever it refers to working people across this country.

This debate today is not about just unionized workers. This debate is about all workers. If we want to talk about special interests, we could talk about a government that instead of telling Canada Post to open the doors so workers can deliver the mail, it introduces legislation which introduces a lower salary than that offered by Canada Post. So talk about special interests. Members across the aisle have a special interest, and that special interest is attacking working people.

I would like to ask my colleague to make a comment.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, in response to my colleague, I would like to bring up something that a constituent from Halifax wrote to me that directly relates to this question. She says:

“Postal workers have always wanted to continue to deliver the mail and have showed up daily to do so only to be turned back at the door. I ask you, how can the government legislate us back to work when we have never chosen to leave work or strike? I urge you to do what you can to squash this motion, have us legislated back to work and instead a motion that Canada Post be ordered to come back to the bargaining table to work on a fair and collective contract. We employees are not trying to be difficult or impede or inconvenience the Canadian public by demanding that we be treated fairly and with respect, and along with the help of the NDP and others in the House who realize this is wrong, we will continue to fight for justice”.

● (4245)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find it very interesting that my colleague has been reading letters from her constituents talking about the postal strike. I would like to read something from a constituent of mine who is an employer in the area. He says:

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“As a business owner in your constituency, I am part of an industry that employs over 58,000 Canadians, and when you consider family members relying on those employees has an impact on some 150,000 Canadians in total. As you can appreciate, in addition to our loss of business, the impact on the cashflow for all small business is an extreme hardship we can ill-afford to face in these challenging times”.

What does the hon. member say to 150,000 Canadians who are in danger of losing their livelihood?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, I certainly hope the member's constituent is watching right now, because I would like him to understand that it is her party and her government that has put the locks on the doors. The postal workers have said that they will go back to the table and bargain, but it is her government that put the locks on the doors.

I hope that all the businesses in her riding realize that it is that member's responsibility and that the losses that they are suffering are a result of her party's actions.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to take a different tack here today in this debate.

We have asked for a debate on what we call the six-month hoist. We heard the leader of the opposition last night give what I would have to say was one of the most magnificent speeches that I have ever heard in this chamber. It probably qualifies as one of the most magnificent speeches ever given in this chamber. He talked about the history of Canada and of the rights of people and of improvements to the lot in life for all Canadians that have been brought about over many years. He put the current situation in that context.

I want to talk a little bit about that. I am going to quote from a letter I received. It is a very moderate letter. I don't know where this individual lives in Canada, but he is a Canadian. He says:

Thank you for defending a fair settlement in the Canada Post Lock-out!

That sounds very bland, and it sounds like something we would expect to see happen. We would expect to see our government promote, and our laws designed to promote, a fair settlement of what is a dispute over a collective agreement. Collective agreement and collective bargaining rights are enshrined in our law. They are constitutionally protected rights. They are rights that are contained in the universal declaration of human rights. We brag about how we are a rights-based society under the rule of law. The rule of law includes the constitutional rules and constitutionally protected rights.

What he says here is,

Thank you so much for your strong stand in Parliament. It makes me proud to be a Canadian when I see that our politicians make personal sacrifices to protect workers in this country.

It makes me feel proud to be recognized that this indeed is what we are doing, protecting workers. From what? In this case from legislation that strips their rights to bargain collectively, that says to them, when they seek to improve by a bargaining position, “Here is what we would like and here is what you would like. Let's bargain. Let's talk about it. Let's trade proposals back and forth. Let's exercise our right to withdraw our labour.” In this case it was through a series of rotating strikes to bring attention to their circumstances and their demands.

What do we have? We have a government agency shut the doors. Now, within days, I think it was two days later, the government gave notice of this legislation. When the legislation comes, what does it do? It says, well, we do not really care about the bargaining that went on. We know that this company that produced a profit of \$186 million made an offer to the workers based on its bargaining stance and other conditions. What does the government do? It passes legislation that says, no, you are going back to work, and you are going back to work for less than the company had offered you during collective bargaining.

That cannot be other than taking away the constitutionally protected rights of workers to bargain collectively, because they were bargaining collectively and the government said, no, we are not going to allow this bargaining to take place; in fact, we are going to interfere with this and order them back to work and order an agreement to be put in place—I would not call it an agreement, because it is not an agreement, but order a contract to be put in place that is not agreed to by the parties involved and that in fact gives workers less.

This individual also says:

I must give special thanks to the members from Quebec who are giving up their National Holiday to stay and fight [the Prime Minister's] unjust legislation. *Bonne Fête nationale!*

I want to recognize as well the sacrifice that our members from *la belle province* are making to participate in this debate, to defend a fair settlement for Canada Post workers and to make these sacrifices.

• (4250)

We hear about the concerns that people had, about small businesses and others who needed cheques or mail. I am very sympathetic to that. So is this individual. He said:

One point...I understand that, on the first day that Canada Post locked out postal workers, only 23 workers from three very small communities (Smithers, B.C.; Sioux Lookout; and a third from NF) were scheduled to rotate on strike. Without the lock-out, the small businesses would now have their cheques, as the posties ensured with the rotating strike.

Then he asks us to stay strong and keep up the fight. I can assure everyone that we will do that.

What we have here today is a manufactured crisis. The same powers that manufactured that crisis have the ability to make it go away. Just take the locks off the doors. Encourage the collective bargaining process. Encourage a fair settlement.

Instead, the government has tilted the balance. It has made it impossible for there to be good faith bargaining between Canada Post and its workers.

I am saying “Canada Post and its workers” deliberately. I want to say that to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Prime Minister himself, who has unleashed in this House language that I do not think is deserving of this place.

If he is speaking for the Prime Minister when he gets up in this House and talks about “union bosses” and “thugs”, then he is delivering a message on behalf of the Prime Minister that this is his attitude toward workers’ representatives who were democratically elected and given a 97% mandate to negotiate an agreement on behalf of the workers. This member comes here on behalf of the Prime Minister and talks about union bosses and thugs. He hides behind a piece of paper that he says comes from one of his constituents.

That is not good enough. The bosses who shut down this operation are sitting over there. They are the ones whose agency locked the doors on Canada Post. They are the ones who are acting as bullies with legislation that takes away the rights of workers to bargain collectively. If there is any thuggery or any bullying going on, that is where it is coming from.

I want the government to tone down its talk and stop inflaming the situation.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Stop calling the kettle black.

Mr. Jack Harris: It is the kind of language that I am hearing from over there that is inflaming the situation.

I am objecting to that. It does not do them any credit whatsoever and it does not do this Parliament any credit to have a situation like this. Instead of solutions being reached, workers who are exercising their constitutionally protected rights are being vilified in this House. Their representatives are being vilified.

Members who want to understand could have listened carefully last night to the Leader of the Opposition when he talked about the advances made through struggles year after year, over many decades, to give us the kind of Canada that many of us share today.

However, this process and this approach is to say, no, we will not share the advances with the next generation. The benefits that have been won in terms of some security in retirement will not be shared by other people. The next generation that comes along will have to start off with lower wages. We will have a special policy where we will hire people on a non-discriminatory basis. We will bring all these people in on a non-discriminatory basis and give them an advantage in bringing them in. We will bring in aboriginal people, people of colour, disadvantaged people, and we will pay them half or three-quarters of what the current workers are being paid. That is how we will have equality in this country. That is the plan. New hires will get less than everybody else. We will adopt a very proactive policy that identifies and brings in people who are especially disadvantaged and we will pay them less.

That is wrong. However, that is what this leads to.

We need to have a fair settlement. That is what this individual is asking for. That is all we are asking for here. This legislation should be hoisted for six months. That is our motion, and we would like to see it implemented.

• (4255)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, picking up on what the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering was saying earlier, I have my undergraduate degree in Soviet studies and eastern bloc political

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philosophy and history. I fought with perestroika and I had no further use for it. However, it seems to be coming in very handy listening to the debate over this matter.

With recent polls stating that 70% of Canadians support back-to-work legislation to end this work stoppage at Canada Post, can the member explain why the official opposition is not on the same side with the majority of Canadians but is only repeating its rhetoric with respect to the union position?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I thought red-baiting as well had ended some time ago, but I guess not.

Let me talk about the 70% of Canadians. I would be willing to bet the hon. member that 70% of Canadians, if they were asked, would not support this legislation. They would not support legislation that said the government shall move inside the collective bargaining process and order people to go to work so that they would get less money than their employer had put on the table in collective bargaining. I will bet that 70% of Canadians would say that is unfair.

They might want to see the post office workers back at work. If they were asked if the government should take the locks off the post office to allow postal workers to deliver the mail, 90% would agree to that, too.

Let us not play with statistics here. I do not think that 70% of Canadians or any substantial percentage of Canadians would want the government to follow through with this legislation and to do what it is trying to do.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question to the hon. colleague is about the discriminatory movements I see with respect to this bill and the offer that has been tabled. For me as a young person, as a woman, and as a person who identifies as a person of colour, why is it that, in the opinion of this member, the government seems to be supporting this type of discriminatory behaviour?

I hear comments from across the way that says workers should have taken the first offer. That type of bullying tactic I do not understand. I would ask my hon. colleague to chime in and give his opinion on that.

• (4300)

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I guess the Conservatives have an agenda, and the agenda is to lower people's expectations. They think they can convince anybody to go along with that by saying we have to get the mail going so we will stop this from continuing, and saying that the workers are looking for too much. Members hide behind other people's quotes that say they are lucky to have jobs, et cetera.

This is all really part of an agenda that ends up dividing Canadians instead of all of us saying we should try to get everybody up with better benefits, better pensions, better rights, and better opportunities. Let us not divide people, one against the other. Let us improve everybody's lot in life.

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That is what the union movement is trying to do for its workers. As we have seen historically, this raises up everybody's benefits if it is allowed to happen. The government does not want that to happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned when I spoke previously, I am from a community which has historically distanced itself from political issues and from most of the Canadian dynamic. Growing up north of the 50th parallel on an isolated reserve conferred a certain number of advantages that I can gauge at their fair value in light of the situation we are dealing with today. The Innu have always made it a point of honour to oppose any kind of pernicious state interference in community management.

I want to emphasize the word “pernicious”, as it certainly applies here. State intervention in the form of social policy, to help people in need, is essential if we are to ensure that we do not let the neediest and most disadvantaged people fall through the cracks. The state has an important role to play in helping communities, be it through funding infrastructure or collecting data that allows it to determine the socio-economic profile of a community, and thus identify socio-economic problems as well as possible courses of action to solve those problems.

It is ironic to see this government, too often blinded by its ideology, seeking private subcontractors, at any price, to provide services to Canadians and fill the jobs associated with them. Although, in a labour conflict such as this one at Canada Post, market logic should dictate that the government allow both parties to find a solution to the conflict, the government's reflex has been the opposite: it has intervened although it did not need to. And what is worse, the government, by taking this action, has upset the natural equilibrium between the parties in question. The reason we are in this House today is to restore that balance and to ask the government to withdraw certain provisions in this bill, in particular the one that pertains to salaries.

We must allow the arbitrator and the two parties to arrive at a negotiated settlement that is acceptable to all. We can restore the balance and reach an agreement so that Canada Post lockout ends and service to the population resumes. In the final analysis, that is our goal here today.

I would like to get back to what I was talking about earlier, pernicious government interference in community management. When the message does not get through and the government takes measures compromising the independence of our management structures and the general self-government of my nation, the members of my community do not hesitate to act and express that independence in a radical way.

I want to make this perfectly clear: I would not want to urge the Canadian population to resort to roadblocks to make its voice heard, even though we are clearly faced with a situation involving government interference with the right to freedom of association and labour relations. I would advocate another approach, that of restoring the balance I was just referring to.

The government is attempting to create a precedent that clearly indicates the type of approach it is going to adopt with regard to the Canadian population during this mandate. As we can plainly see, this

approach is akin to the authoritarianism of certain regimes that are currently being criticized by international observers. It is not my intent to quote figures and authorities to support my statements in this House, as my position rests on the heartfelt conviction that is a hallmark of the Innu community.

It is that conviction that enables me to offer a human viewpoint on any situation that arises. We must never avoid the human aspect inherent in the situation that concerns us at this time. The government's interference in the human relations that are part of the dialogue between Canada Post employees and their employer opens the door to improper government intervention in labour relations between all employees and employers.

In this regard I want to come back to the imbalance created by the Conservative government with its special bill. We will recall that the postal workers had offered to extend the collective agreement while bargaining continued. That is what the bill provides, but the bill goes further by setting the parameters within which the arbitrator must operate.

Why do they want to substitute themselves in advance for what should be happening down the road? Why not let the negotiations take their course and give the parties involved room to bargain in good faith? Imposing special legislation is a draconian measure that should be considered only in situations where the Canadian public is at risk of serious harm. That is not the case here; we are not in a crisis. I would caution everyone, however, because a crisis point can be reached very rapidly.

● (4305)

The Canadian public has expressed its views on the role of government in the past, and the current situation in the House of Commons is setting the tone of the social dynamic that is imposing itself on the Canadian public.

The measures proposed by the Conservatives belong to a bygone day.

Labour relations are in a constant state of change, and I suspect that this progress lies at the root of the measures proposed by the Conservatives.

They will have to reassess their positions and policies if they are to keep abreast of the wishes expressed by Canadians.

Obstructing the exercise of the right of association and the flow of bargaining that happens in labour relations is direct repression and negation of the concept of free will.

We can be assured that the presence of the NDP in the House will influence the government's decisions. Therefore, opposition members have not hesitated to debate this essential question and will continue to do so tirelessly.

I therefore urge the *Mamit Innuat*, the *Pessamiunnuat*, the *Chimonnuat*, all Innu in general, as well as the Naskapi, to support the postal employees and to support them massively and visibly. Make yourselves seen, brothers and sisters.

We will see that when we pool our efforts, big things happen.

All Canadians need to heed the warning that this issue is very likely to herald a dark era. It is up to the public to take a position and make the decision-makers understand that they will not remain passive forever.

Quite apart from the interruption in postal services, these recent events will perpetuate the power struggle going on in the public and private sectors. It is essential that people mobilize to support the desire of Canadians to express themselves and to flourish.

If I must, I am prepared to sit until the royal couple arrives, so they can witness the dedication of the New Democratic Party members of this House.

In passing, I salute the superhuman effort made by the party's support staff, some of whom are sleeping only a few hours a night, to ensure that our efforts are coordinated.

Without them, we would not be able to sustain our opposition to the policies of the Conservative government. With their support, we are making history today.

And last, I send greetings to the people in my riding, people of all origins, and I wish them all a wonderful time at the festivities that have been organized throughout the region.

I would have liked to be with them, but my presence is more useful in Ottawa.

• (4310)

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to assure the member that while those members are prepared to sit here until the Duke and Duchess arrive, we are prepared to sit here until they are gone to ensure that Canadians get mail delivery returned to them.

For anybody watching this debate, there must be a confusion about the events that occurred. The fact is, and I am sure members will agree, the old contract expired last October. The union leaders were negotiating with Canada Post and failed to arrive at an agreement.

The old contract had expired. It is quite legitimate that once something has expired, one cannot operate under it any longer unless there is an agreement between the company and the workers. We had the situation where, because the union did not want to continue negotiations unless it could operate under the old contract, it started rotating strikes. Then there was the lockout, and now we have back to work legislation.

The bottom line is we want to get the postal workers back delivering mail across Canada to everyone who needs that mail delivery. We are asking the parties to work with us. Let us try and get the workers back to work and then we will negotiate from there. Hopefully, we will have a good settlement all the way around.

Let us get the mail going again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

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I would note that this kind of delay is inherent in the situation the workers and the employer are in. Events in that situation were fluid and that is how it should have continued: the parties involved had a responsibility to each other to sit down, and they would have reached an agreement, as has happened in the past. There was no urgency to intervene, let alone interfere, in that practice, which is proper and normal.

[*The member spoke in Innu-aimun.*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Manicouagan for not quoting letters. I think we have proved on both sides of the House that we could have letters stating opinions on either side. Quoting from letters is in fact simply a smokescreen to distract us from the real debate. It is an old trick that was known to the Greeks 2,500 years ago.

We will get back down to business, as the saying goes. Should we not leave the two parties free to bargain in good faith?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which follows on what I was saying.

That is correct, the ideal approach in this situation would be for the parties to sit down together, because in any event this is a power struggle and we are going to see this every day, whether we like it or not. So, it is better that the parties themselves be the ones who ultimately have to decide their fate. That is the normal way of doing things, and in this society it is how it should be done.

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's comments and contrary to what he said, some small businesses do find themselves in a crisis, people cannot pay their bills and they certainly cannot meet their payroll.

We have heard over and over again from our side of the House about the hardship being caused to Canadians and to our economy. We have heard from the other side of the House that government should not intervene. In any negotiations there are two sides, and that is why we have a dispute.

First, the union chose to implement a job action which the employer countered with its job action. Given that the situation has gone on for eight months, how long would the hon. member allow this dispute to drag on to the detriment of families, seniors, businesses and the economy in general? How long, two months, eight months, ten months?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I am well aware of the hardship being suffered on both sides. However, social imperatives must prevail in this case. The effort to make our points is truly worthwhile for Canadians. In fact, that applies not only to this situation, but also to situations that will arise in future. That is why we are here today and we are making these points.

Government Orders

●(4315)

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is the first time I have risen to speak in this debate. I would like to take the opportunity to wish my constituents in Montcalm a wonderful national holiday, in spite of the bad weather. Certainly, at present, the Conservative government does not seem to want to work in the interests of the Canada Post workers. In spite of this obstacle, I particularly want to mention Quebec's national holiday and say to my fellow Quebecers that it is great to be a Quebecer at this point in history. I want to assure them that I am with them in spirit and I sincerely hope to meet them in the near future. So I wish everyone a memorable national holiday full of music, stories and legends of our very own.

It is unfortunate that the Conservative government does not recognize Quebec's national holiday, but I can tell you that my constituents recognize the importance of the job I have to do here in Ottawa, supporting the Canada Post workers.

In negotiations, it is preferable for the two sides to find common ground and reach a consensus; unfortunately, I have the clear impression that, since the negotiations began, Canada Post Corporation never intended to bargain in good faith. Withdrawing from the negotiations and imposing a lockout shows its lack of respect for its workers.

A lockout is not a strike. A strike is a protest action taken by workers, while a lockout is the temporary shutdown of Canada Post. It is a decision initiated by the employer.

Canada Post Corporation preferred to wait for the government to intervene by trying to impose special legislation. That approach completely takes away any workers' right to strike, since they would always be afraid of legislation like that being imposed on them, and unfortunately sends a negative message not just to the Canada Post workers but, and most importantly, to all workers in Canada.

Right now, back-to-work legislation will create dissatisfaction and discontent among the workers. They will find it hard to swallow this kind of forced settlement and it will leave a bitter taste in their mouths. And that is without mentioning the poisonous atmosphere that will prevail between management and workers for months if not years to come.

We must not forget that several thousand workers are affected by this lockout. When will the government finally understand that Canada Post Corporation employees are people first—I repeat, people first—with families, obligations and responsibilities?

This bill will take power away from unions, whose primary role is to stand up for employees and look out for their interests. Second, the union must also make sure that information is conveyed to the employees. By doing that, it fulfils its function of communicating between Canada Post and the workers.

Canada Post Corporation is acting as if it is confused by the present situation. That is incomprehensible. They are the ones who brought on this situation. The position the government has taken is quite simply a slap in the face to democracy. What has become of common sense? The workers are locked out, and on top of that the government interferes by trying to pass legislation to force the

workers back to work. The Conservative government's true colours are showing.

The Canadian courts have recognized that workers have the right to negotiate their employment contract. The Canadian courts have recognized that workers have the right to form associations with other workers to enforce their rights and their employment contract.

The approach taken by the Conservative government has no basis. This procedure is going to create a precedent that no worker wants. Who is going to pay the cost, ultimately? Workers.

Instead of showing consideration and respect for our workers, the government wants to abuse its powers and give the back of its hand to workers' rights. This is unfair and oppressive.

●(4320)

I do not understand. The Conservatives form a majority government. Yes, they got the support they needed, but did they have the courage to really tell Canadians how they intended to go about governing the country?

Did they say they would come down on the side of the most powerful instead of helping workers? Did they say they would impose their legislation without considering the consequences for workers' lives? Did they say they would not give workers the opportunity to negotiate in the way that prevailing practices provide for union negotiations to take place? Did they say they would bring in a bill to take away workers' rights to be heard and cut their pension plans? Will they continue to impose draconian measures on Canadian workers who try to exercise their right to bargain for better working conditions?

I think that out of respect for the workers and their families the government should withdraw from these negotiations and not impose anything by special legislation, let alone take the employer's side. The Conservatives' way of doing things is clear to see here—it is easy to see who their friends are—and it is at the expense of Canadian workers

It is these same workers who day after day contribute to making Canada Post the postal service we know today. These workers have contributed to their pension plan, and like everyone living in Canada they are entitled to draw a pension when the time comes, and thus to be sure of a peaceful and serene retirement. I therefore believe it is reasonable to expect a little consideration from the employer, and also from the government.

Why not give the two parties a chance to bargain in good faith and encourage communication more?

At present, the employees cannot enter the distribution centres and have no access to the mail, so they cannot deliver it. The doors are barred, that is what a lockout is. Canada Post has to remove the locks from the doors and allow the workers to do rotating deliveries, as was the case at the beginning of the negotiations. Today, the government is attacking the postal workers at Canada Post Corporation; who will be the next victims of the government's extreme decisions? No one wants to have their wages cut and their retirement date pushed back five years.

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This special legislation is going to give all Canadian workers cause for concern and uncertainty, since they will always be wondering whether they will be the Conservative government's next scapegoats. This special legislation is going to create a gulf between two generations of workers. This special legislation is going to cause wage inequality and social inequality. This special legislation is going to weaken labour relations, not to mention the poisonous atmosphere the workers will have to endure.

The message the government is sending to workers is clear. It will not hesitate to side with employers, even if workers have a lot to lose. No matter what the situation, employers will be favoured over employees. That message tells workers they have no chance of bargaining fairly and equitably, because if they insist and push too hard to enforce their rights and their collective agreement, the government will not support them. Quite the contrary: it will interfere and force the workers back to work by special legislation. What year is this? These workers have paid union dues for years. The union is doing its best to represent them, but the workers did not expect that the government would use a special bill to try to prevent the union from doing its job properly and would fail to respect their right to bargain their working conditions freely.

● (4325)

I am afraid this approach is an attempt to create a gulf between workers in different generations, and also between employers and employees.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are approaching the 24th hour of this debate. We are coming very close to it. This is the first time in my almost 11 years as a member of Parliament that I have seen this type of exercise carried out in the House of Commons. In some respects I appreciate it. There is good debate between two polarized sides, it would seem. I want to congratulate the opposition member, a new member, on winning, and I commend her on her speech.

My question to the member is this. It seems the NDP's identity crisis is over. In the first couple of weeks of this new Parliament, the NDP came forward with a supply day motion asking us to lower taxes. That is the first time I have ever seen such a request from the NDP, but it was on small business. It seemed that most of the NDP members were uncomfortable with that supply day motion because it was new. It was as if they were trying to show us that they were ready to govern.

The past 24 hours have shown us that this party is not ready to govern. We can see that NDP members have taken every legal step there is, and they have attacked.

My question to the member for Montcalm is this. Over the past number of years we have seen how the NDP feels about replacement workers. It calls them derogatory names, such as "scabs". We know what they think about lockouts. We know what they think about back-to-work legislation, but apparently revolving strikes are all right.

Why does the NDP show that it is not ready to govern and that it will be forever in opposition by not recognizing what is going on in

our economy and by not recognizing the need to get the postal workers back to work?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, I am well aware that Canadians need their mail; we understand that and the postal workers understand it too; they are professionals. But I think we have to respect the workers, the workers in our communities, the workers who must work outside whatever the weather.

To come back to Canada Post's young workers, I think the new generation deserves the benefits that our parents and their parents fought so hard for.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would remind the hon. member for Montcalm, as well as the members of the opposition, that this debate is simply about whether or not we are going to resist the lobby pressure of those who wish to raid pension funds. That is what it boils down to. The pattern is always the same. Everyone makes mistakes, but the important thing is not to keep making them, especially after what happened in Walkerton, where people died because lobbyists took advantage of the opportunity to do their own laboratory testing.

I would simply ask the hon. member to answer the following question: should we always grant the wishes of lobbyists, yes or no?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, simply put, everything we do should be done in accordance with our conscience and to the best of our knowledge. Common sense always has a role to play.

[*English*]

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning around 4 a.m. I asked one of our NDP members for an opinion about the fact that seniors and small businesses in my riding were not getting their mail.

Yesterday I spoke with the executive director of the United Way of Leeds and Grenville, Judi Baril. She told me about the United Way. I know that they serve 27 agencies and have 92 programs, and one in person in three in my riding of Leeds—Grenville is served by the United Way. They are suffering serious cashflow issues brought about by this situation with Canada Post.

I ask the member: could her party move this debate along and let us vote on the bill so that we can help the charities, seniors and businesses in my riding?

● (4330)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Montcalm has only 30 seconds left.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, I get the sense they are trying to pin the blame for this situation on the members of the NDP and the workers. I would, however, remind the House that Canada Post employees opted for rotating strikes, in other words, employees in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, for instance, would take turns going on strike. That way, postal service would continue, albeit at a slower rate. So cheques would have been delivered and small businesses could have paid their suppliers and received payments from their customers.

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[English]

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I will comment on the previous member's comment about how one in three people in his community need help from the United Way. That certainly sounds like a prosperous community where so many people are still in need. If we do not stand up here to defend worker's rights, that will be two out of three and eventually three out of three. That is why we are here today and that is why none of us will go home until we can reach an equitable and fair solution.

We must always remember that any kind of negotiation between employees and their employer, whether they are involved in this kind of dispute where the employer has locked out its workers, is about the real lives of Canadians, their quality of life and the lives of their families.

My riding contains one of the largest postal sorting stations in Canada and I have been hearing from many of the workers, both at the plant and at other stations across the eastern GTA. All of these workers have spoken to me simply about fairness.

I have a lot of respect for the men and women across Canada who are responsible for delivering our mail. These very same people who, during the labour dispute, vowed to guarantee the delivery of social assistance and old age security cheques, are the people who offered to end strike action if Canada Post would simply agree to keep the old contract in force during negotiations. That is a pretty reasonable stand to take. However, Canada Post refused.

These are the kinds of people who make up the workforce at Canada Post: people who want fairness so they can support their families, pay their own bills, work in a safe environment and retire with dignity, which is a right that should exist for all Canadians, real Canadians doing a real job for all Canadians.

One of my constituents who is a postal worker summed up the attitude of the workers being locked out by Canada Post and now being forced back to work with this legislation. She wrote to me and said, "Remember, we want to work, we want to deliver, we love our jobs and we take pride in our jobs". This debate is not just about mail. It is about workers' rights to fairness and collective bargaining, and, for many years, Canadians have fought hard for fairness in the workplace.

In my own family, we have a long tradition of fighting for workers' rights dating back to my great-grandfather who served in both world wars and was a plasterer by trade. He understood that working conditions improve only when people stand up and fight for them. This struggle continued with my grandmother and my grandfather who met and fell in love while working together to improve the lives and conditions in their own workplace. My father was a teacher and an active member of Elementary Teachers of Toronto, and I am proud to carry on that mantle.

It is easier to understand the need for fairness when we talk to the workers on the front line. Michael Duquette, president of Local 602 of CUPW which represents over 2,000 workers in Scarborough and the eastern GTA, has been very generous with his time keeping me apprised of the concerns of his members.

Another member of the executive board of Local 602 sent me an email detailing some of the unpleasant things Canada Post has done to its employees since CUPW first gave its 72-hour notice to strike on May 31. I would like to share a few of those stories.

One employee, a motorized service courier, was off work on a work-related back injury. As soon as the 72-hour notice was given, his health benefits and sick leave were terminated by Canada Post. At that point, it was discovered that he had a cancerous growth. Now he has no sick leave, no benefits, no income and must apply for employment insurance.

One employee who was diagnosed with terminal cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy was stunned to find out that his benefits were cut off as of May 31. Now he has to pay for his own treatment. This violates the collective agreement and it is inhumane. Of course, he can go through the grieving process, but who, when dying of a terminal disease, would put off treatment to await the outcome of a grievance procedure?

Another motorized service courier who was off work on WSIB-approved leave at the time the 72-hour notice was given, received his pay statement which said that he had received a full paycheque. However, when he went to pay some of his bills he was denied for being overdrawn. At this point, he discovered that Canada Post had only paid him one-third of his total pay, despite that his paycheque said that he was paid in full. I wonder what kind of games are going on there.

● (4335)

Imagine people who are off work on a work-related injury or on sick leave with cancer or leukemia being cut, and finding out that not only do they have no benefits but also no money, even though a pay stub was received in the mail saying they had received the full funds. In the federal sector we have the unfortunate record of having the second highest injury rate next to longshoremen. Now the corporation wants the members of CUPW to give up the top-ups to WSIB. It wants members to accept substandard short-term disability. This is unconscionable.

Canada Post is also trying to take credit for initializing the government cheque delivery program which I referred to earlier, which took place on June 20. This is something which the union had to doggedly pursue in order to get the corporation on board, and then the corporation took credit for it.

The CUPW member I referred to earlier, wanted me to know that the support from the public has been very positive. She wrote, "While on the picket lines outside our facility, members of the public and other businesses dropped off food, hamburgers, hot dogs, cases of water and pop, giant containers of firewood. Even Tim Hortons came over and gave everyone \$2 Tim Hortons cards. Vehicles were driving by and honking their horns at all hours of the day and night in support. They also had, in Pickering, numerous people bringing ice cream in the heat. Even McDonald's came by and brought cases of water and ice".

It seems they are losing support on all sides and they should be aware of that.

Government Orders

People old and young have approached the CUPW member offering their support. They understand this is not just an attack on the workers of Canada Post, but it is an attack on all Canadians and their rights as citizens. People are appalled at the fact that Canada Post would lock out its workforce and then would collaborate with the government on legislation to force the workers back to work with a worse settlement than the corporation was willing to offer at the bargaining table. Also, the corporation is preventing them from going back to work by not unlocking the doors.

These are real stories from real people. They are the people being affected by this draconian back to work legislation the Conservative government is trying to ram through this House and which all of us on this side are proud to oppose.

I fear that the government is out of touch with real people. I fear it does not understand the effect its legislation will have on working people. I also fear, like others here, that this is just the beginning, that we will see further legislation from the government that will hurt working families in the country, making it harder for them to make ends meet and to live with the dignity and security for which they have worked and deserve.

It is important to remember that it was the management at Canada Post that decided to lock out the workers and shut down the mail service.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard members relate the personal stories that have been told to them by different people giving different points of view.

In my case, it is actually my two nephews and niece who are letter carriers in our community. As they look at the total remuneration package they get with Canada Post, they say it is quite generous. They say that it provides them with a great living. It is a great job that is highly sought after. There are people who would love to become letter carriers and would love to have that type of job. That is not to say it is over the top and not to say they would not want more remuneration for what they do, but they are very happy.

I have also received emails from individuals who have told me that they had no choice as letter carriers to decide on the four offers that were made by Canada Post. They were closed out of saying whether or not they would approve of those offers.

When members hear those stories, what is their reaction to the people who would love to be letter carriers, who would love to have such a job in this country? All I have been listening to from the other side of the floor is how downtrodden the letter carriers are.

• (4340)

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is true the workers at Canada Post are happy with their jobs by and large. That is why they want to go back to work. Why will the government not unlock the doors?

More importantly, with respect to all the people who would like jobs like those, the government has been negligent over the last five years in not creating those well-paying jobs so people can get them and support their families.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest for his speech.

We are going to raise the level of the debate even further, instead of keeping it at the lowest level. J.P. Morgan, the famous American banker who prevented an economic crisis in 1907, said that a company's most senior leader should not earn more than 20 times the salary of its lowest paid employee.

So should we not let postal workers negotiate better working conditions more in line with those enjoyed by Canada Post's CEO?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

There would not be enough money if all the letter carriers were paid as much as Canada Post's CEO. We might agree that the latter should perhaps not be paid until he negotiates a collective agreement that is fair for all employees.

[*English*]

It is unconscionable that people are making insane amounts of money when compared to the workers who are doing all the work.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend I met with a local postal union representative. He was very respectful in his communications with me. He was very open and kind. He invited union leaders from three or four other unions in the area. They were all very reasonable and respectful.

One of the things that is really impressive about the strike from the union side is that it did not do a general strike. It did a rotating strike because it did not want to do any damage that would hurt Canadian people.

I would urge members of the NDP to have the same respect for their fellow Canadians and let the postal workers go back to work by ending their self-serving political stunt. It does not serve the general public nor the postal workers. They should let this legislation go through.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear a member opposite finally acknowledge how respectful union members and leaders are.

Were it not for the Conservative government and for Canada Post and the Minister of Labour locking the workers out, they would still be doing their jobs.

I also spoke to many managers at the postal sorting stations, people who are not protected by the union. They are all behind the union members. They know if the members get a better deal, they will have better job protection. I will not mention their names because they are fearful for their jobs. They are not protected by a union.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I would first like to wish a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to Quebeckers, as well as to francophones outside Quebec.

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Why are we here? It is simple. We are here because senior management at Canada Post declared a lockout. Had there not been a lockout, we would not be here debating a special bill. So, if we want to find a simple solution to this problem right now—because everyone here agrees that service must resume—the easiest thing to do is to simply end the lockout. It is as simple as that. Everyone must return to the negotiating table so that everyone can benefit from the service—the workers, the public and small businesses. That is what everyone wants.

However, I am wondering about something. Initially, when this subject started to come up in the House, the Prime Minister spoke about the best interests of the economy. I am wondering whether Canada Post's senior managers were concerned about the best interests of the economy; I am not really convinced that they were.

I would like to get to the root of the problem. It has often been said that the negotiations had been going on for a long time, but it is important to look at why they were going on for so long and are still going on. If they are still going on, it is because this is no ordinary negotiation.

When concessions are being demanded with regard to pension plans or orphan clauses, for example, it usually mean one of two things: the company wants to improve the return for shareholders, no matter who they are, or there is a problem. Canada Post is generating several hundred million dollars in profit, so perhaps the crown corporation anticipates problems in the future. However, if such is the case, perhaps these significant problems should be put on the table. We have yet to see this happen. What is certain is that, given communication technology, Canada Post will one day have to examine its way of doing things and change the services it offers. That is undeniable.

One thing is truly harmful: the orphan clauses. This is a type of discrimination that I find completely unacceptable in the 21st century. People who do equal work should always be paid an equal salary. Period. That is it. That is all. This approach should never be called into question.

I would also like to point out something else. Given the fact that this is no ordinary negotiation, it will clearly take longer than a more ordinary negotiation process. As a result, I would really have liked to have seen the ministers exercise a certain degree of leadership with regard to the challenge posed by this negotiation. I would have liked the minister to recognize the fact that this collective bargaining process was unusual and to make a special effort to invite the parties to put more effort into the negotiations. I would have liked the ministers to have reassured the public by announcing publicly that, despite the rotating strike, services would continue to be provided.

I would like to remind you that, at the start of the Air Canada strike, the first thing management did was take out advertising informing the public that the company would continue to provide service to its customers. I do not understand why the ministers did not stand up and declare that Canada Post would still be delivering the mail. That was not done and I find that leadership was lacking. They could have reduced the losses sustained by Canada Post subsequently. All they did was create panic everywhere and, as we know, when there is market panic, sales drop. There is no question about that.

● (4345)

Before I conclude, I will speak about respect for the employees. We want service to resume and everything to get back to normal, and businesses to have what they need to operate. It is important to look beyond this, to consider the work environment. We must think of Canada Post's productivity. In looking for solutions, it is vital that we consider this aspect as well. We cannot just tell these employees to return to work and forget about it. We must consider that labour relations will be difficult in the next few years. We must ensure that the service everyone is proud of today will continue to make us proud in coming years.

Thus, I would like to avoid dividing people and creating an environment where people are pitted against one another, that is, unionized workers against other workers, or public servants against private sector workers. That is no way to live in a society. I believe that is a rather unhealthy attitude. We should instead focus on what is not working, namely the challenges that Canada Post will face in future, and find solutions to maintain this service and to provide it at a reasonable cost. Like everyone else, I have received emails indicating that, compared to those of their competitors, Canada Post's services are provided at a reasonable cost.

In closing, I believe that public and private enterprises cannot be managed in the same way. The decision to lock out employees cannot be made without taking into account the repercussions on society. I find it unfortunate that this was done. The reason for the lockout was very limited and based on issues particular to Canada Post. That is regrettable. There is more than one way to achieve the same end: there is confrontation, but there is also conciliation and negotiation. This situation should be managed with this in mind.

● (4350)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, opposition members are repeatedly saying that the government chose to declare a lockout. That is absolutely untrue. It was the Canada Post administration that made that decision, just as the union decided to go ahead with a strike. The Leader of the Opposition and all of the opposition members have been insisting for hours now that the government should make a decision that would violate the Canada Post Corporation Act. We cannot decide when to end the lockout. That is up to Canada Post, but they have not yet made that decision. The only way to end the lockout and avoid a new strike is to pass this bill. Can the member for Louis-Hébert finally accept the logic of this proposal, which respects the Canada Post Corporation Act?

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that the government declared the lockout. Rather, I said that Canada Post had. To respond to the question, if the House unanimously declares that it wants Canada Post to end the lockout, management would take that suggestion into consideration. This decision does not have to be forced on them.

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• (4355)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Fundamentally, Mr. Speaker, this issue is about process. It is about how we, as a Parliament, adopt a policy that results in a process that allows parties to actually come to agreements together, which I think everybody on all sides of the House advocates is the best solution to any labour dispute.

It is quite right that there were rotating strikes and then Canada Post responded by a lockout. The problem, and why we are here today and tonight and over the next few days and weeks, if necessary, is because the government has chosen to respond by interfering in that process, by not only proposing legislation that orders one side back to work, but in that legislation prescribes wages lower than what management had offered.

What that does is provide a disincentive to one side coming back to the bargaining table. They have tilted the balance. Now one side knows that if they do nothing and stay away from the bargaining table, they may end up with a deal that gives a better wage package than they would be forced to accept at the table.

I would like to ask my friend to comment on that and ask how he views the government's involvement in this.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comment.

My thoughts on this are very straightforward. I find it unfortunate that this bill does not give the arbitrator the freedom to resolve the situation. It imposes parameters.

The last speaker said that the government should not intervene with Canada Post, but that it would intervene when it came time to set wages. A decision needs to be made: either it can intervene or it cannot. There needs to be some coherence here.

[English]

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments, and I listened with interest. I do not know how long he has been a member of the NDP, maybe a long time, maybe not. I know some of his colleagues have not been a part of the party for a long time.

I wonder if he is aware that the NDP has quite a long and distinguished history of strike breaking. For example, in 1966, the federal NDP supported legislation to break a railway workers' strike. In the same year there was a longshoremen's strike and they supported that legislation. In 1973 they supported legislation to end a railway strike. Perhaps most troubling, in 1975 the federal NDP and the provincial NDP governments in both B.C. and Saskatchewan supported Bill C-73, that famous bill that had wage control measures that not only limited wage increases but rolled wages back. The NDP supported that.

Is he aware of these things? To hear them speak today, that would never be acceptable, yet it was acceptable in their history. Does he think there might be some situations where the government does have to take a role as we have done today?

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I believe that one of our first principles, on this side of the House, is to be responsible. When public interest is at stake, we know how to react.

However, what is important to understand in this case is that Canada Post has declared a lockout and has sped things up.

I feel that the public interest should always come first, with respect for everyone.

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to wish all Quebecers a happy Saint-Jean Baptiste day on this June 24, although it is technically still the June 23. I especially want to wish a happy Saint-Jean to my Brome—Missisquoi constituents. I am thinking of you, and my heart is with you.

I am in the House today to defend the rights of not only the 55,000 postal workers, but also all workers, including those from my riding. This fight to uphold the rights of workers will affect all workers in the riding of Brome—Missisquoi, in Quebec and across Canada. We are standing up for our vision of a fair society. Minimum labour standards exist because workers fought to further the cause of those who were most vulnerable. Young people, women and seniors have rights because people fought to further their cause.

We in the NDP want to stand up for ordinary middle-class people so as to make things easier for families and improve the quality of life for Canadians. Whether we are talking about health care, education or the environment, we in the NDP are defending the public system because we truly believe in it. Letting the free market regulate everything does not work. Some people are left by the wayside, and only a minority is growing richer at the expense of the middle class, which is struggling more and more because of measures such as the intention of our friends opposite to impose a lockout followed by special legislation.

The appropriate solution is to stop the lockout, which is a bullying tactic, and to bring the employees and the employer together. There is no silver bullet. Everyone must contribute in good faith to move this issue forward, since the special legislation planned by our friends opposite is too hasty. Canada Post is a profitable corporation. Over the last 15 years, Canada Post has generated \$1.7 billion in profits, and its postal rates remain among the lowest in the industrialized world. In addition, Canada Post has paid the federal government \$1.2 billion in dividends and taxes over the last 15 years.

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So why lower wages? I do not understand. We are asking the government to remove that unwarranted clause. The union is looking for nothing more than a fair redistribution of wealth. The union raises the quality of life of every member of society, not just postal workers. In particular, the union helps safeguard fair working conditions and drive the overall economy. What is more, better working conditions for postal workers mean better working conditions for all workers. Through their work, letter carriers actually provide a reassuring presence in the neighbourhoods they serve. I am thinking particularly of the poorest members of society, the elderly. Not only do postal workers provide efficient service, but they also build ties with the public.

No, the government's measures will not go through as easily as the mail arrives at its destination. The government must take the locks off the doors and let postal workers do their wonderful work.

• (4400)

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the member who just spoke and I have listened to other members of the New Democratic Party. It is all about the union. They have all boasted about how they have done such and such with the union. I understand that. That is part of their platform. That is part of their life.

However, there are other people in this country who are having great problems as a result of what is going on.

A small-business owner from Orangeville by the name of Jeff left a telephone message with my Orangeville office. He said most of his customers' payments are sent by mail and that because of the strike he will not receive payments for orders he has already fulfilled, which will cause grave problems to his business. He may even go under as a result.

My question for the member is this: does he care about the Jeffs of Orangeville, those types of people who are in that situation, the small-business person as an individual or an organization?

• (4405)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member across the way that the locks were put on by the government across the way. Let the parties involved work together and negotiate, and they will find a solution. That would be a tangible step towards protecting all workers, both postal workers and those in the hon. member's riding.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member just said something that is patently false. He said the lockout was imposed by the government. I think he is—

The Speaker: We have been dealing with this for some time now. Statements of this nature are points of debate, not points of order.

Are there questions and comments?

The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi, and I commend him for his very worthwhile remarks.

It is very clear that a government agency has imposed a lockout. This bill is totally draconian and unacceptable. The government is trying to impose a settlement on the workers, and we do not support that, plain and simple. It is an affront to their dignity.

Could the hon. member comment further on this draconian bill? I would like to know whether he thinks the government's bill is warranted or whether he feels both parties should be able to negotiate a collective agreement in due course and on an equal footing.

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

He knows that, when two parties engage in honest and open negotiations, they move toward a solution that benefits everyone. I think that is the type of solution needed in the Canada Post situation.

We should remove the unjustified wage reduction clause and remove the locks from the doors. The employees want to work. They want to serve the public. We should let them do their work and create the conditions required for the two parties to negotiate in good faith.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my colleague across the aisle very intently. I would just say that one of the problems with socialism, which I understood his party embraced last week, is that once the socialists have spent everybody else's money, then they are out of business.

However, my real concern has to do with the fact that he said that this was imposed to soon.

Is his problem that it is just early days?

Why do we not get this signed and get people back to work, get businesses back in business? That is what this is about.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi has only 30 seconds left.

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Mr. Speaker, when we put a gun to the head of one party, the chances of finding a win-win solution are slim. I support the negotiation process, and it should be the preferred option. However, we should have a negotiating context where both sides act in good faith and are prepared to make compromises.

• (4410)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I love your haircut.

[*English*]

This is my first opportunity to deliver a speech in the 41st Parliament, and I would like to begin by thanking the voters of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking for the vote of confidence I received in my re-election. No one can say we did not notice.

I remain humbled by their decision and hope to meet and exceed the expectations placed on me by the good people I am fortunate to represent. I also want to thank all those who staffed and volunteered in my campaign. I am extremely grateful to all of them, and of course, my ability to stand in this House would not be possible without the wholehearted support of my family and my friends, and especially the support of my husband Keith, my children Mindy and Shawn and their partners and of course my mother Simone.

As many of you may know, Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing is one of the largest ridings in Canada at 103,264 square kilometres to be exact. Culturally we are very representative of Canada. There is a significant Franco-Ontarian population and, yes, in my constituency, many communities celebrate St-Jean-Baptiste Day. As a matter of fact, Kapuskasing hosts the biggest St-Jean-Baptiste festival in Ontario. Hence, we are disappointed with the Conservatives for not allowing the House to rise in respect of Quebec's national holiday.

Should we be surprised? I think not, given recent elections called by the Prime Minister for which we saw Elections Canada offices open on Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday. It is obvious that the Prime Minister is not respectful of holidays that allow for quality family time together. While workers have fought to achieve days off, this government has continuously blatantly refused to respect even religious holidays.

We also have a strong first nations presence in my constituency and both Ojibway and Cree are spoken. There are 17 reserves in the constituency populated by hard-working people.

While I am talking about the first nations, I want to inform the House of something that came to my attention this week with respect to the arbitrary decisions that this government actually makes, the reason we are here today.

Chief Shining Turtle from Whitefish River First Nation wrote to me and indicated that INAC has given notice to one of the bands in my riding that they now have roughly three months to wrap up a major land claim. Their work plan, which was approved by INAC, calls for wrap-up by next year but not in the next three months. However, that is what INAC wants. The band needs 12 months to properly negotiate the details of this 1850 claim. This is a complicated history to evaluate, and they are concerned and want to ensure that they get it right in order—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Brant is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this debate is about Bill C-6, not about land claims in this country and who is on the right side of land claims.

This is totally inappropriate.

The Speaker: I urge the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing to bring her remarks to the substance of Bill C-6 as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): I will do just that. As I indicated, this is about arbitrary decisions. The chief goes on to say, “My council and I much favour co-operation and collaboration over unilateralism and arbitrary

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government action which inevitably result in frustration and confrontation.”

That is where my remarks link to Bill C-6.

Most of the work in my riding has traditionally been resource-related, especially in the forestry and mining sectors. There are many farms, including a significant stretch along the strip of land near Lake Huron, and a great many small businesses as well. More and more we are seeing the small businesses pick up the slack created by job losses in traditional resource sectors, which have been devastated by short-sighted government policies over the last few decades.

As I said, we are hard-working people, but it is not all work all the time by any stretch. Visitors to our riding this summer will have no end of opportunities to join in our community's celebrations and cultural events. As you can imagine, with two Great Lakes and thousands of inland lakes, streams and rivers, we have fantastic fishing in the constituency as well. In fact, Chapleau has just won the title of Canada's Ultimate Fishing Town in the World Fishing Network—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member has been speaking for a little over four minutes and I have heard the words Bill C-6 only once. Maybe she can bring the rest of her remarks to the substance of the bill. I think the House would appreciate it.

• (4415)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: It all comes back, Mr. Speaker, to the first part when I was offering congratulations about being elected.

Usually when I stand in this House to offer some remarks on a piece of legislation, I say that I am happy to speak to the bill. Today nothing could be further from the case.

There is nothing happy about back-to-work legislation, and the piece we have before us now is among the worst this place has ever seen.

It is a blatant attack on workers and pensions and is emblematic of the contempt that the Conservatives display for hard-working Canadians. As I indicated before, this is exactly what the chief had mentioned.

We understand how this government feels about workers. When it comes to picking sides and using legislation to end strikes and lockouts, the government has one gear: overdrive. We have seen this with workers, and we have seen this with first nations as well.

Even Lorne Gunter, a columnist friendly to the Conservative government, stated on Wednesday that they are acting like bullies in the Canada Post lockout. It's not that I agree one bit with his prescription for privatization. He manages to completely ignore Canada Post's mandate when he asserts that the private sector can do the same job as the Crown corporation. I will speak to that in a moment.

What concerns us on this side of the House is that not only is this government choosing winners and losers in this dispute, they are forcing a lower wage on Canada Post employees than the corporation was offering, and the logic behind that has gone missing.

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It would seem that Conservatives feel workers do not deserve to make a good living wage in Canada, that only management deserve defined-benefit pensions, and that the interests of the elite far outweigh the interests of the general public. How does driving down wages help the economy? It does not. It lowers the buying capacity of individuals. That much is certain. It makes it harder to buy a house, which in turn affects housing starts. It makes it difficult for children to pay for increasingly expensive post-secondary education, which makes it harder for those children to get better-paying jobs themselves. It increases the divide between the wealthiest and the poorest Canadians, a trend that has gone on for a 25-year run now in the wrong direction. It is another nail in the coffin of the middle class in Canada. It is not a prescription for a robust economy either.

We have to ask ourselves then, if this move does not help the economy, what purpose it serves. Could it be ideological? It would seem so.

Let us take a moment then to look at the main point in Mr. Gunter's article that I spoke about earlier. He suggests that the private sector could easily deliver the same services Canada Post offers, at which point he needs to take a look at the mandate of Canada Post which is to guarantee postal service to all Canadians. When people call for Canada Post to be privatized, many are looking at the \$281 million the corporation made last year, and they are licking their chops.

If we privatize it, will all Canadians still receive postal services? I do not think so. I have already spoken about Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing. It is a vast rural riding and is exactly the kind of place that would suffer the most if Canada Post were to be replaced by the private sector. In rural and remote areas, postal service is arguably more important than it may be in larger centres.

Many people in my constituency have limited or no Internet options and they still write and receive letters. They cannot go online to do their banking or pay their bills. For them postal service is an integral part of day-to-day life. This is the actual postal service that this government, under another government agency, has locked out.

If we imagine what might happen if we privatize postal service in Canada, we can look at two different scenarios for places like Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing. Under one scenario there would not be postal service at all. Let us face it: there are postal routes in Canada that are not contributing to the \$281 million Canada Post made last year. Most of those are rural and remote. If we allow for the private delivery of mail in Canada, I cannot imagine many people busting down doors to get their hands on the rights to deliver mail in places like Hearst.

Speaking of Hearst, right next to it is Constance Lake. It took us a year to finally get a post office there or at least some postal service there after there was no postal service delivered to that area. They had to travel over 40 kilometres. This is how we know that if Canada Post were privatized, we certainly would not see the services in those areas.

• (4420)

What we would likely see is a profitable portion of postal deliveries scooped up in a heartbeat and quite possibly the end of mail delivery in many parts of Canada.

The second scenario is one that sees rural and remote delivery continued but at a dramatically higher cost to the consumer. If we allow the real price of delivery to govern the cost of each piece of mail, the delivery of rural and remote mail will become exorbitantly expensive. It will add to the already high cost of living in these places, which has been exacerbated in recent years by the high cost of basic items, such as heating, and tax grabs like the HST.

We just went through a campaign during which there was a huge response to the message the leader of the NDP brought to Canadians. It was a message of hope based on making life more affordable, and it obviously resounded with the Canadian public, as we now sit as the official opposition. The NDP believes in the need to address the inequities in Canada's rural and remote communities.

Let me speak about Elliott Lake.

I see that the Speaker is getting up.

The Speaker: I am anxious to hear about Elliott Lake, but now we will have to move on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Essex.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hopefully we can actually talk about the bill in the next couple of minutes.

There has been a lot of discussion today, and members opposite on several occasions have raised the prospect of making amendments to Bill C-6. There has been a lot of talk about one of them being about wages. The member's colleague, the member for York South—Weston, suggested that 11.5% over four years, which is what he said the Toronto police received in a settlement, would be considered a fair wage. The member for Trinity—Spadina suggested 3.3% per year, which would be 13.2% over four years.

Can the member tell us whether the New Democrats will be moving an amendment to stipulate wage increases that are somewhere between 11.5% and 13.3%?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, as we indicated before during this debate, we are not going to show the government all of our cards at this point. We have indicated what we are willing—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, as we have indicated, we have actually provided some information with respect to a hoist motion. If the government is willing to really negotiate and look at the wage rates, then we are certainly open to its suggestions and will continue down that road. Obviously the government is not willing to move at this point, and that is why we are still here today.

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Let me tell you about Elliott Lake, which reinvented itself, as a response to the loss of mining jobs, as an affordable place for pensioners and seniors to retire. For many of those seniors, the incremental increases in the cost of living ate away at the advantage they sought when they moved to Elliott Lake.

What does all this have to do with the debate? It has to do with pensions, which are part of Bill C-6. Price increases to everyday items, such as groceries, are hard enough to budget for. When the Conservative government conspired with the Ontario government to slap an additional 8% on home heating bills, it was a significant shock.

The Speaker: I have to stop the hon. member there to allow for more questions and comments.

The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really want to thank my colleague for her very passionate and well-thought-out presentation.

I have a question for my colleague, and it specifically relates to the legislation. The legislation the government has introduced would actually give postal workers a lower salary increase than was offered by Canada Post. I would like my colleague to comment on that and on what kind of impact that has on free collective bargaining.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague, and she is absolutely right. The government is trying to impose a lower wage rate than what Canada Post actually wanted to give them, while the CEOs are actually making a pile of money. In 2010 it was \$497,100, plus a 33% bonus. Is that fair? No.

When we think of this, we think of J. S. Woodsworth's famous line: "What we desire for ourselves we wish for all". Would it not be great, whether we are in collective bargaining or not, to ensure that all Canadians have a decent pension so that they have a good quality of life? We also want to make sure that every worker has a good wage, and a living wage at that.

• (4425)

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, finally the hidden agenda of the NDP is revealed. Not only are they socialists and anti-small business, but now we find out that they are simply a party of large-union members.

I come from a rural riding. I would like to ask the member about a small businessman I talked to in the last week who has been drastically affected. Rochester Hatchery has been drastically affected not only by the situation that is now ongoing but also by the rotating strikes. He said that the rotating strikes were as devastating for his small business, with the uncertainty they provided, as what is going on today. The only thing that will help him is if we move forward and get this legislation passed quickly. It has cost his business \$70,000 to this point in time.

I ask the member what she would say to my small businesses in rural Alberta that are being affected.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): What I would say is that this government can come to its senses and remove that wage from its bill, and we will talk.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night we heard a phenomenal speech by the leader of the official opposition. He raised the bar and raised the tone of civility of this debate. He also focused our attention on some of the really important things that matter and that mattered in the last election.

I want to remind those in the chamber of another speech made last night. It might have been this morning; I can't quite remember. It was by the member for Acadie—Bathurst, the official opposition labour critic. He talked a lot about the history and culture of working people. He reminded the House and Canadians of the battles that have gotten us to a place where so many people in this country take having a weekend off for granted. He talked about his father, who was a lumberjack. He himself was a miner. I thought it was a really powerful speech, because we forget that nothing comes without a fight.

The government has repeatedly asked why we are here. We are here because we want to bring it to the government's attention that we want to speak for all workers, not just unionized workers.

I want to speak to the fact that I have been a self-employed small-business person. My father was as well.

I represent a riding where there are a multitude of different kinds of small businesses and self-employed people, and they are workers too. They want pensions. They want benefits. They want job security. They would like to have access to EI. If their children get sick, they would like to take a couple of days off to look after their loved ones. This is not an option for many Canadians.

We are here tonight, and for as long as it takes, to focus the government's attention on the fact that workers in this country are hurting. A win for a trade union is a win for all workers, and a loss is a loss for all workers.

There are people in my riding who worked for companies for 23 years, were let go, and now have no workplace pensions. They have none. Do members know what they are doing now? They are competing with their grandkids for jobs at KFC.

The government asks what we are doing here. When we in the NDP see legislation like Bill C-6, which offers workers less than what management was offering in the first place, we have to say that this is not right. The leader of the official opposition, the member for Toronto—Danforth, drew a very clear and respectful line in the sand.

I too have received e-mails and phone calls from small-business people in my riding. For example, I received an e-mail from a member in my riding who publishes two magazines, not one but two. He is dependent on postal service. He e-mailed me to say that we have to stand with the workers at Canada Post and that the principle of collective bargaining is a principle that our grandparents and great grandparents fought for.

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● (4430)

Last night I listened to many of the members opposite talk about how their fathers were in the trade union movement. I thought that was interesting. If it were not for the hard work and dedication of men and women over decades and decades, many of us would not have had the opportunity to end up where we are right now. That is very important for us to consider.

Another thing I respectfully ask the members opposite to consider is this. In 1995 a CEO's salary was 85 times the average worker's. That seems a little high. Most reasonable people would think there was something out of whack with that kind of equation.

I know some of our friends across the aisle like to characterize some of us on the official opposition side as some kind of wild-eyed folks that they do not want around their money.

However, today a CEO's salary is 220 times the average worker's pay. Whether one is a small business owner, a medium-sized business owner or a big business owner, or a worker, something is wrong with that.

That brings me back to Bill C-6. If we allow pensions to be chipped away at for workers who have fought for so long to achieve and to protect this benefit, then we will not help workers across the country who have no pension in the first place. If we let this happen, it moves the marker back for everybody else.

I was elected in the riding of Davenport on the promise that I would advocate for, speak up for and fight for, among other things, those who had no pensions, benefits or access to a safety net like employment insurance.

If we look at the data, we see a large-scale migration from the unemployed line of the ledger over to the self-employed line of the ledger. The problem is that for so many people who are self-employed, they are not really making enough money. They are trying to get businesses off the ground.

The government likes to trumpet the fact that it has supposedly created hundreds of thousands of jobs, but it never says whether these are full-time jobs. It never says whether these are jobs on which one can raise a family. We need a means test because one cannot raise a family on a \$10 an hour or \$12 an hour job. One cannot raise a family on a job where at the whim of the employer he or she loses a couple of days of work. That is happening all across the country.

At the same time, housing affordability has plummeted. It is almost impossible for most young families to afford to live in the city of Toronto.

We have postal workers who are key to our communities, to our economy and we have been asked to agree with the government to chip away at their living wage. We will not do that.

We have many workers in the country who are looking for leadership from the official opposition—

● (4435)

The Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have not yet engaged in this discussion or debate in this place. I have listened to the hon. member's comments quite closely, and I there are a few small corrections that need to be made.

First, with respect to the hon. member, he is not simply elected by some constituents. He is here to represent all of his constituents. This is not a closed shop. This is not a union organization. This is not a non-union organization. Our job, as members of Parliament, is to represent everyone as fairly as possible.

The issue is quite simple. We have a group of workers that failed to negotiate. What the workers could not negotiate, they will now try to get through intimidation, and the tactics with which to intimidate are the official opposition.

I cannot understand for the life of me why those members would not agree to put the postal service back to work so all Canadians can get back to work.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, representing all Canadians is exactly what we are trying to do on this side of the House.

When we have one-third of all income gains in the last 20 years going to the top 1%, who is representing whom? We are very clear on this.

In my riding of Davenport we have real estate agents buying pizzas and donuts for CUPW workers because they recognize they are partners.

I am talking about every day Canadians, whether they are in a union, or they are a dishwasher, a cab driver, a web designer or a small entrepreneur, we are all in this boat together. It is the government that is trying to hive off a certain part of the Canadian community and play that one part off against the rest.

We will not stand for that and we have drawn that line in the sand.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member speaking clearly from his heart with very commendable comments. I know he and my other colleagues feel clearly in our hearts that we are here to represent all of our constituents.

While I have been here, I have not heard members on the other side debate their reasons. They will stand and ask questions, but I have not heard debate. It is very rich that they criticize the postal workers who are locked out and say that it is their fault.

There has been a record rate of bankruptcy in my province of small businesses. Rural post offices have been shut down. The services in the cities have been limited. Where have the Conservatives been for the small business people for the last three years?

● (4440)

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, many of us who come from Ontario have seen this movie before. It is called manufacturing a crisis in order to justify draconian measures. We are now seeing it again.

Small entrepreneurs, small business people, self-employed people are not buying it. They see that their interests are very similar, if not exactly the same, as CUPW workers because they need the same thing. They need a living wage. They need an income that can support their families. They need pensions so they can retire in dignity. These are Canadian values and that is what we are fighting for.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this House today. On May 2, I received one of the best presents of my life from the people of Shefford. A total of 27,575 voters put their confidence in me. This is not merely a number. I am talking about people who took time during their day to go and put an *X* on a ballot. I am taking this opportunity to wish them a happy national holiday. I regret that I cannot be there to celebrate with them.

When it comes to my constituents, my priority is to respect them. "Respect" means to "understand", and to "understand" means to "listen". The problem with this government is precisely its inability to listen, to understand and to respect. That inability is illustrated by the fact that it refused to suspend our proceedings during Quebecers' national holiday.

What do Canada Post workers tell us? I met with them last Friday. They told me they want the government to help them negotiate an agreement, rather than imposing one.

I am going to explain to the government what the term "negotiate" means. It means to listen, to discuss and to exchange views. Canada Post workers have been asking the other side to negotiate to reach an agreement, not to protest on a sidewalk because of a lockout. Postal workers want to deliver the mail. They want to provide that service to the public. They want to help Canada Post fulfill its mandate, which is to serve all Canadians, whether they live in urban or rural areas.

Eight months later, the government has still not figured out how to encourage the two sides to negotiate. The best that it could come up with was to impose unacceptable conditions, within which an arbitrator must try to do his job. The government has imposed salaries increases that are lower than what the two parties had agreed upon, before negotiations broke down.

Instead of ending the lockout, the government gave legitimacy to it. In fact, this is a measure which it has itself used on several occasions to shut down Parliament. The government knows full well what it means. It means that people cannot work and provide the service for which they were hired or elected.

My grey hair speaks volumes about my age. I belong to the generation which wrote its first love letters on paper, not on the Internet. In fact, I still do so. If I am sharing this information with hon. members here today, it is so that they understand the importance of mail in people's lives. To illustrate that importance, I should mention that ever since people began to write, the exchange of letters has played a critical role in discoveries and in the understanding process in a society.

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Letters are not only important to people like me and my colleagues. They also play a key role in the creativity of many artists. Georges Dor used to sing:

If you knew how lonely we are at the Manic
 You would write to me much more often at the Manicouagan
 If you do not have much to tell me
 Write the words "I love you" one hundred times
 It will be the nicest of poems
 I will read it one hundred times
 One hundred times a hundred is not much
 For those who love one another.

As the words of that song tell us, in remote areas such as the Manicouagan, where workers built a new part of Quebec, letters have always played a critical role and they still do. They have also inspired our artists. That is why we cannot understand Canada Post's decision to impose a lockout.

● (4445)

People in love can no longer write to each other since Canada Post imposed its lockout. The workers could continue to deliver these letters, but they can no longer do so.

Letters bring joy. There are love letters, friendship letters, postcards, and birthday cards. There are also pension cheques, child support payments, tax refunds and so on.

Sometimes, letters are also associated with sad events, such as condolences when our thoughts are with dear ones who are experiencing a difficult time.

As hon. members may have noticed since the beginning of my speech, I am a sensitive man, and I am proud of that. I want to preserve this sensitivity, because to me it is an essential quality in human relations.

All jobs have pros and cons. In the case of a letter carrier, it is to carry one's bag on a rainy day, in a heat wave, or when it is freezing, which happens a lot in our northern country, and also when the snow falls relentlessly, forcing those who deliver our mail to zigzag their way along the sidewalks and streets of our cities and towns that are buried in snow. But, no matter what, these men and women are always there to do their job.

I was able to see it for myself on numerous occasions, because I worked flexible hours. I had the opportunity to see my letter carrier when he would bring the mail to my house.

After my election, while I was waiting for my riding office to open, he took the time to come and explain the procedure to follow regarding all correspondence with my constituents.

This brings me back to the beginning of my speech. What exactly are Canada Post employees asking? The answer is simple. They want both sides to negotiate in good faith. They want the clause setting salaries for postal workers to be withdrawn. They want the lockout to end immediately, so that they can start delivering mail again and serve the public, since that is the reason they were hired. Finally, they want the previous collective agreement to remain in effect until the negotiations end and an agreement is reached.

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Canada Post is not a bankrupt corporation that must urgently restructure itself at the expense of workers, as too many companies have done in the past.

No, Canada Post is a profitable business that has a duty to listen to the public and to its employees.

In closing, I wish a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to all francophones across Canada.

• (4450)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments of the member opposite, and I do believe that there are a lot of love letters going around: between the big union bosses and the ex-union bosses on the NDP front bench. That is where the love letters are being sent this week.

Earlier it was said that our government has never stood up and said that it has created full-time jobs. It was asked what percentage of jobs have been created. The Minister of Finance said in question period that we have created 560,000 new jobs. We are the only country other than Germany that has already replaced all of the economic output that was lost during the recession. I think our government can stand on firm economic ground. Canada has had a great recovery from the recession, led by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance.

I have a question for the member. We have heard from a lot of NDP members who are standing up here and questioning the fact that we brought in back to work legislation. I would like know, if the NDP ever were fortunate enough to form government, would there ever be a situation when that particular party would bring in back to work legislation, if not in the Canada Post situation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

It is important to understand that, in this case, Canada Post employees did not choose the situation they find themselves in right now. It is Canada Post that decided to impose a lockout.

Canada Post decided that Canadians would no longer receive their mail. It is preventing letter carriers from working. The Government of Canada went one step further by setting lower salaries. The workers did not need that. They make the economy run. They are the engines of the economy—

The Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member so that we can hear other questions.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank the hon. member for Shefford for quoting the great poet and songwriter Georges Dor, who put into words the situation that was experienced by thousands of Quebec workers during the 1960s, on the remote job sites of Manicouagan. That project is a great achievement. It is a major part of our heritage and also an expression of our culture.

Speaking about expression, let us not forget that, in this House, we can express our opinions and ideas freely. Members opposite are free to make up causes for this dispute, just as they have the right to say they believe in Santa Claus. However, they also have the responsibility to look at the reality, and the reality is that a lockout was imposed.

I want to ask my colleague what he thinks of the behaviour of this government, which prevents the two sides from negotiating in good faith and coming to an agreement.

Mr. Réjean Genest: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely believe that we have a government that does not know how to listen and that does as it pleases.

[*English*]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues on this side for their passionate presentations, and I am appalled by the old socialist doctrines expressed over and over again by the NDP, with clear Marxist-Leninist overtones. We have heard that 97.7% voted for a strike. That is very close to 99.9% of some failed socialist administrations.

Until when will the NDP keep Parliament hostage instead of serving the interests of Canadians? Let Canadians have their mail.

Could the member please explain to the House how he can justify his party turning its back on the rest of Canadians and so clearly taking sides with the union bosses and not with the workers and Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Genest: Mr. Speaker, I could turn the question back to the hon. member. That is precisely what we are asking. Why does the government not end this dispute by simply ending the lockout and reopening the doors for business?

• (4455)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on my own behalf, and as the critic on francophonie, allow me to first wish a happy national holiday to all Quebecers. This day has been called the national holiday for the past few years to be more inclusive of all minorities in Quebec. My age is betraying me here. I am sometimes a little nostalgic and I miss what used to be called Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Today, I feel a great deal of empathy for all the francophones of this wonderful country who are celebrating Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Happy celebrations to them also.

It is no secret that, before May 2, my life was totally different. I wore two hats: I was a teacher in a Trois-Rivières high school, and I was the union rep for the teachers at that institution. Therefore, I have some experience in collective bargaining. I negotiated at least four collective agreements, each with a term of five years. They were referred to as “institutional peace”. At the end of each of those negotiations, and despite the clashes and the differences of opinion, we always managed to find a win-win solution and both sides could come out of the process with their heads held high. They may not have obtained all that they wanted, but they had improved their lot.

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On May 2, a majority of voters in my riding elected to me to represent them in this House. I was perhaps a little idealistic in thinking that I was coming here to help create and draft legislation that would ensure the well-being of all Canadians. In the few minutes that I have, I am going to show how Bill C-6, now before us, contains major flaws that make it unacceptable. Since yesterday, there is broad consensus if not unanimity in the House on the importance of getting postal workers back to work. The Conservative Party, the NDP, the third party in the House and postal workers themselves all hope that the workers can return to work. Everyone hopes they will go back to work. Why is that not happening? Probably because this specific dispute involves a lot more than just the conflict at Canada Post.

Canada Post is a very large corporation. Yesterday, I listened with great interest when the Minister of Labour described this corporation. It became clear to me that what we have been debating for hours will set a precedent. Indeed, whether it is another crown corporation, a private venture, a small, medium or large business, or any type of business in this country, what is going on right now is setting a precedent. The government is setting the rules for future negotiations.

While I was preparing these notes, I put my history teacher hat back on, to see when these mean unions were born. Of course, I am being ironic when I use the term “mean”, because that word was used in reference to me during many years. I suppose it will be used again against me in the next few minutes, in addition to the term “socialist”, but I have no problem with that.

At the beginning of the industrial revolution, at a time when those who had money were creating businesses, workers were not listened to by owners. Their working conditions were harsh, their living conditions were miserable and they did not have any access to the sharing of wealth. Whenever they would, individually, try to meet their boss to improve their plight, the door would be shut, or they would just be ignored. So, the solution came naturally. The only way for workers to have a balance of power was to get together and create unions. And how did the employers of the day—at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century—react? Their initial action was to try to pass legislation to prevent unionization.

● (4500)

Thank goodness, they did not succeed in that respect and the union movement was able to continue to develop. A second attempt was made to pass legislation preventing the right to strike. It seems to me that, 200 years later, we are not very far from those actions in the current dispute, since the strike at Canada Post was a very modest one. We are talking about rotating strikes designed to stop mail delivery for one day in one region of the country, and then in another one, so that the whole economy would keep running and businesses would continue to get postal services. At the same time, it allowed employees to show to the public what their working conditions are, while also putting some pressure to support their demands.

Fortunately, unions have made a lot of ground since the industrial revolution, with the result that working conditions are now much better. The work week is reasonable—with the exception of the current one—, living conditions are much improved and wages are

decent. As regards salaries, Bill C-6 includes a despicable discriminatory measure whereby young workers would not enjoy the same treatment as more senior workers. It is strange that the government would propose, here in the House of Commons, a bill containing measures that members of Parliament would not accept.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke, who is not here right now but who is the youngest member in this House, the hon. member representing the neighbouring riding of Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who is the dean of this House, and I, who am somewhere in the middle, all receive the same salary, because here we have understood that, regardless of age and experience, the ideas, the values and the work of each member are of equal value and deserve equal remuneration. I cannot figure out why we would not provide for others what we are providing for ourselves. Yet, such is the nature of Bill C-6.

Who benefits from a fair and equitable negotiation process and a win-win solution? Everyone can benefit. Canada Post employees of course, but also management. It would benefit from having a positive working environment for many years and from objective management practices based on a mutually accepted agreement. Moreover, the employees of other corporations in Canada would also benefit, because that successful process would serve as a model.

Let us not also forget the whole category of precarious jobs and self-employed workers, whose numbers are constantly growing because of technological progress. Since these people are alone, they can hardly make demands. However, they are affected positively or negatively by the outcome of the collective bargaining process carried out by major unions.

And here is the icing on the cake. Labour standards provide that the union has the right to strike, while the employer has the right to impose a lockout. In principle, these are the two ultimate negotiation tools. However, these negotiations have been going on for eight months. We have been told for the past two days that it is terrible to have negotiations that have been going on for eight months. Discussions and negotiations are two very different things. One does not have to have been very involved in negotiations to know that the first few months are spent getting to know each other, developing a rapport and putting the demands on the table. Eight months is a very short period to negotiate a collective agreement.

In the escalation process, the biggest pressure tactic used by the union was to begin a rotating strike. The reaction was swift: not only a lockout, but the suspension of the collective agreement, which includes workers' rights and benefits. And they would have us believe that this reaction is fair.

Unfortunately, I am going to stop here, because time flies. However, I will be pleased to reply to the questions and comments of hon. members.

● (4505)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his election and I thank him for his comments.

Government Orders

As the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, I am concerned about the thousands of important documents for immigrants and Canadian citizens that are blocked because of the strike, because of the action taken by the big bosses at CUPW, that radical union.

[English]

I am hearing the New Democrats laughing. Maybe they were involved in encouraging the CUPW bosses to block the office of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Sydney, Nova Scotia, today, barring 700 public servants who have nothing to do with this dispute from going in and doing their work on behalf of Canadians. As a result, there will be further delays.

There are Canadians who desperately need their proof of citizenship, permanent residency cards and citizenship grants. They are waiting to go overseas with these documents. All of that is being held up by the big union bosses in the radical CUPW union, which is being defended by the NDP for narrow ideological reasons.

[Translation]

I want to ask the hon. member how he can justify an illegal action that prevents public servants in my department from doing their job on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his question.

I simply want to point out to him that the day after my election I was invited to meet with the Picazo family, which was dealing with an immigration issue that needed to be settled very urgently. That family was threatened with deportation within four or five days. With the NDP team, I managed to reach the minister's office to try to obtain a stay. I did that without postal services. I used the telephone, the car, the computer and, particularly the useful help provided by MPs in each riding.

If an immigrant needs help, I think that every member of this House, regardless of party affiliation, will provide that help.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like many members in this House, I have received emails describing that even though there were no rolling strikes in Toronto, Canada Post was not staffing stations. Consequently small businesses along Dundas West were not receiving their mail.

It is unbelievable to hear the hon. minister say that somehow we are thwarting small businesses when Canada Post has not been staffing sorting stations and small businesses were not getting their mail before the lockout. Now there is a lockout, and that lockout is up to the government to deal with.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I will answer by quoting a short statement made by Claude Mercier, who is the president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for the Mauricie. He provides a small sample of how Canada Post works in my riding. In his letter, he says that, as regards service to the public, the mail was not delivered in some areas of Trois-Rivières last Friday, because it stayed in the letter carriers' sorting cases and the management had decided not to use replacement personnel.

[English]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too have been involved with a union for a number of years. I was a school teacher for 34 years. I was also involved with a political liaison between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Government of Alberta. There are a lot of things that can happen when one gets people together and one gets them to work.

One of our concerns is that Red Deer was one of the places that did have rotating strikes, and we have felt all of the ramifications of that particular action. We have also had a lot of people inform us that they have considerable concerns as well.

But we have had people on both sides of this issue. I have had some communication from a fellow by the name of Cam who is concerned. He disagrees with some of the things we are saying. He does not like the "winner take all" arbitration, but he is also saying that we should be ordering the employees back to work. These are the kinds of things that we see. We see a lot of different concerns.

A lot of people are trying to get communications out. They put ads and so on into newspapers, but the only way that gets to the community is through Canada Post. They go through the effort of producing the papers, collecting the ads and everything else, but they are having difficulty getting the communications out.

I would also like to talk about one of the events that will be happening in—

• (4510)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I regret that we are running very narrow on time.

The member for Trois-Rivières has 30 seconds left in his response.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, even though I did not find the question in there, I am pleased to be part of this brotherhood of teachers with my learned colleague. What seems most important in what he said is that when we are part of a union, we can bring people together, closer, and we can create winning conditions.

It seems to me that we, in this House, should set an example. Being unable, after two hours of debate, to put forward a motion or an amendment that would get the support of all parties sends a very bad message to the public.

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to wish all Quebeckers a happy national holiday, in particular the people of the riding of Laval—Les Îles, with whom I would really have liked to celebrate tonight, but since the government has prohibited this—we know what is going on, we understand—it will not be possible. They will understand the reason for my absence.

The government decided to extend the work of the House without regard for Quebec MPs or their constituents. It preferred to interfere in the negotiations between the postal workers and Canada Post, by forcing the workers back to work under unacceptable conditions, rather than allowing us to go and celebrate with our constituents.

Government Orders

I am here tonight in order to stand up for the workers of Canada Post who are fighting in good faith to obtain sound working conditions and a negotiated collective agreement. They are faced with the possibility of seeing the government impose salaries that are lower than those that were offered by the employer. I am also here to stand up for all workers who could be facing the same fate because of a government that has no values and does not want to amend its bill.

Before continuing, I would like to specify that unlike Canada Post, which has locked out its employees and deprived the public of an essential service, postal workers never took Canadians hostage. The rotating strikes they held delayed postal delivery by one day at the most. Their goal was to force Canada Post to negotiate. But the employer's reaction was to close the door to negotiation, impose a lockout on its employees and interrupt all mail delivery.

This is a manoeuvre that is putting the most vulnerable people in a difficult if not precarious situation. In spite of the lockout and the threat of legislation imposing a return to work with lower salaries than those proposed by Canada Post, postal workers are continuing to provide mail delivery in my riding. Pension cheques, social assistance cheques and child benefit cheques have been delivered so as to limit the damages. The postal workers are not doing this for money, but out of respect for Canadians who may well depend on those benefits for their subsistence.

I said “respect”, a word that seems to mean nothing to the Conservative government. Government interference and the prospect of special legislation to force postal employees back to work leave the door wide open for the employer, which realizes it no longer has to negotiate in good faith and can hand its dirty work over to the government.

The message to workers is clear: accept the offer of the employer, which is taking away the gains that employees have been able to achieve, not by forcing Canada Post's hand but by bargaining. Today, the government, on whom these workers should be able to rely to stand up and protect them, will impose an even worse settlement on them than Canada Post's offer. It is important to point out that Canada Post is not on the verge of bankruptcy, far from it. It generated nearly \$300 million in profits in 2009, and yet it is claiming that it cannot provide its employees with sound working conditions or new employees with fair wages. That is a tough pill to swallow when the corporation pays its CEO almost \$500,000, not to mention a performance bonus of more than \$150,000, which would climb even higher under this bill. I am certain, by the way, that he still collected his paycheque during the lockout.

Canada Post is a profitable, reliable and indispensable postal service, and contrary to what pro-privatization forces would have us believe, no alternative involving the private sector could ever be adequate.

● (4515)

In addition, the Canadian public does not agree with privatizing a low-cost, high-quality postal service.

I wonder what the government—which is supposed to serve the public and respect its will—does not understand about that.

Finally, I am concerned about the precedent that will be set by this interference. Who will pay the price next time? Unionized workers have every right to expect their contract to be respected. They have every right to expect their employer to negotiate fairly, justly and in good faith. By introducing this bill, the government is opening the door to a dangerous practice that would allow employers to gut worker's rights with the blessing of the House of Commons, or at least one side of the House of Commons.

The Canadian government must set an example in terms of equality, safety and respect for workers. This should be a country that makes its citizens proud and not a land that turns the clock back on the gains made by taxpayers for benefit of company CEOs who already profit from the current system.

Happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to all French Canadians.

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as time wears on it appears that the focus of the discourse is becoming increasingly confused. Let me try to bring us back to some important facts.

I would like to suggest that we also focus on the defining offer by Canada Post. Employees hired in the future would be offered wages and benefits that are superior to those offered by competing logistic and delivery companies.

There has been a lot of debate about whether this is a strike or a lockout. I just draw the attention of the hon. members to a June 12, 2011, media advisory from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. The union held a press conference saying that workers in a number of locations would be out on strike that night. It itemized a number of areas as well.

I also wanted to also address the definition of “strike”. A strike is the collective organized cessation or slowdown of work by employees to force acceptance of their demands by the employer. Most jurisdictions require that for a strike to be legal, it must be approved by a majority of the employees in a secret vote. I do not recall that this was ever done.

I believe it is the most vulnerable Canadians who are most affected by this stoppage. That includes those with disabilities, veterans, and new Canadians. Does the hon. member honestly believe his party is helping vulnerable Canadians and small business owners by dragging out the passage of this legislation?

● (4520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, we are working for all workers across Canada. We are not just doing this for the postal workers. And we are doing this because we thought that the government on the other side would act in good faith, take the wage clause out and take the lock off the door.

[*English*]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was just sitting here with my computer when I received an email. I would like to read it. It was sent by a letter carrier from the GTA.

Government Orders

She says: "I am working in Mississauga, Ontario, for Canada Post. I have been working in this company for almost 29 years, both inside the postal plant and as a letter carrier. I have been listening to the government channel and would like to comment on a few things that they are attacking."

She continues: "First of all, we did not want this lockout. We wanted to work and our high-paid upper management are making these decisions. As a letter carrier, I was in this week to deliver the cheques to our customers that the government is claiming were not delivered. Please report this to them."

She goes on to say: "Ask our government MPs and our upper management to sit in our shoes for a day or two. I think their opinions would change. We're happy with what the MPs are doing when they're saying 'unlock the doors for us to work and force Canada Post to negotiate in good faith!'"

This letter carrier from Mississauga says there is a need for Canada Post to unlock the doors and for the government to not interfere in this collective bargaining process. I am asking if my colleague can comment on that.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

As I said earlier, we are here to ensure that people can negotiate collective agreements, not have ones that are imposed by the government. All we are asking is that the government take the wage clause out and take the lock off the door.

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just got a message on my BlackBerry. The sender is wondering if this is a debate between members or a debate between BlackBerrys.

Seriously, the member talked about extending the work of the House. It seems to me we are debating a hoist motion and we are not even debating Bill C-6. If they want to stop extending the business of the House, let us get to Bill C-6. How about it?

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comment from the hon. member opposite.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to take this opportunity to wish the people in the Louis-Saint-Laurent riding, all Quebecers and all French Canadians across the country a very happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

Today, throughout my riding, thousands of people are celebrating their shared values and pride at living in the beautiful province of Quebec. I hope that today was everything they hoped for.

I cannot say the same for myself. Rather than celebrating with them and taking advantage of the festivities to meet more residents in my riding, I have to listen to the government repeatedly attack the rights of Canada Post employees and justify their anti-worker measures with very questionable arguments.

Like many of the hon. members, over the past few days, I have not stopped receiving phone calls and emails from concerned citizens,

from people who are wondering what this government is getting us into.

On one side of this dispute, I see people who are fighting for better job security and, on the other, I see a government with irresponsible policies that is seeking to impose an unfair contract on workers and do everything in its power to lower workers' wages.

Last year, in 2009, Canada Post made a profit of approximately \$281 million. Its President and CEO earns almost half a million dollars a year with a 33% bonus. And what is being asked? Workers are being asked to make sacrifices that will impact their families.

This government must understand that it is not its role to act as management for Canada Post. It should not have even become involved in this situation since the workers have the right to negotiate with their employer and are able to come up with solutions.

After workers have fought for decades for a fair and equitable work environment, I am wondering whether this government wanted to get involved in the dispute just to create a precedent and move us backwards.

We are lucky to have one of the best postal services in the world. Canada Post employees would like nothing more than to return to work. They have always been there for Canadians across the country, from coast to coast, in summer and in winter. Today, we must be there for them. It is a duty.

We want to work with the government to find solutions but we will not play its game. The workers deserve respect and they have the right to negotiate with their employer as equals.

The reason I am standing here today is that the thousands of men and women who every day brave all kinds of weather deserve better than this special bill. They deserve better than a watered-down pension plan, which will from one day to the next force them to change their retirement date, a date they had been looking forward to for years. After providing decades of good and loyal service, thousands of Canadians must make radical changes to their plans.

What about the promises management made to them year after year? The commitments made in successive collective agreements? Poof! Gone up in smoke. It is not fair to change the rules of the game in such a fashion.

Canada Post workers deserve better than a government that does not hesitate to separate them into two camps according to their age. In other cases, we have heard government members insist that the same rules should apply to everyone. But in this case they have taken the opposite position: they are unabashedly advocating a two-tier system, a position that tells the workers of my generation that their contribution is not up to par and will never be truly recognized.

By imposing these vastly inferior conditions on new employees, this government is digging a wide trench between the generations. It is creating serious divisions between young and older workers and will have created a more troubled work atmosphere when the mail starts to move again throughout the country.

And above all, these workers deserve better than a government that treats them the way they have been treated over the last few days, that is, as second-class citizens. What has struck me most from the beginning of this debate has been the contempt that certain members of the other side of the House have not hesitated to show towards thousands of Canadians who have devoted their lives to their community for years.

The government did not hesitate to depict them as people who are refusing to work, when the opposite is true—it is management that has put a lock on the door and brought all postal service in this country to a sudden standstill.

The government did not hesitate to attempt to turn the public against the postal workers, presenting them as the killers of the Canadian economy, a privileged caste profiting from the cost of stamps, when the opposite is true: they are productive members of the Canadian economy who generate substantial revenues for the government.

● (4525)

These citizens who wanted to continue working are involved in their communities and proudly serve their fellow Canadians, rain or shine.

The government did not hesitate to twist the knife with its special bill that imposes wages that are lower than those in management's last offer. This just does not make sense. The workers kept the postal system going despite their frustration with the slow pace of negotiations, and restricted themselves to rotating strikes that minimally impacted the public. The employer initiated a lockout, depriving millions of Canadians of their postal services and, as my colleagues opposite like to say, that really hurts the Canadian economy.

What does the government do in this situation? It punishes the workers and rewards Canada Post management by reducing the offer that was on the table.

If this government really believed that this lockout was adversely affecting the economy, it would not act this way. It would end the lockout instead of punishing the workers, who acted in good faith throughout this situation.

At present, everyone wants this conflict to be resolved. That is all the employees want. They want the lockout to end so they can go back to work and continue to serve the public.

This bill, however, is not about resuming mail delivery or protecting the economic recovery, or any other reason given by the government. No, Bill C-6 is about eroding some of the most fundamental rights of Canadian workers. This bill is about sending a message to workers across Canada; they are being told to keep quiet because this government will not hesitate to interfere if they want to exercise their rights.

Government Orders

Today, I would like to remind this government that it must support families and help them pay their bills. That is not a favour, it is its job. It is a duty. Unfortunately, the government seems to have forgotten this.

Today, it is attacking the postal workers. Who will be next? Who will be the next victims to have their rights violated in this way?

● (4530)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech.

As the member well knows, our government is concerned about the effect that the Canada Post work stoppage is having on the Canadian economy and the economic recovery.

A number of emails and BlackBerry messages have been shared. I have had numerous messages, but I think it is important that I share this one with the member and would ask for her response.

This is from a constituent who owns and operates two helicopter companies, and therefore pays corporate taxes as well as personal taxes. She asks me to speak on her behalf in Parliament with regard to the current postal strike. She wants them sent back to work, as this is seriously affecting her business in terms of receiving payments from her customers and sending payments to her vendors. She should not have to incur more costs to do business, like paying FedEx or Greyhound bills, just to be able to keep operating.

Why is the NDP trying to block the process of back to work legislation? They are basically closing the doors on this opportunity. Why are they doing that and hurting the Canadian economy? Why are they disrespecting the majority of Canadians who want this settled?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to respond to the constituent who wrote to you. In fact, this is not a strike; unfortunately, this is a lockout. The workers should not have to pay for this decision, which was made by management. Canada Post just has to unlock the doors and end the lockout and the situation will work itself out.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to ask the last person who spoke to briefly explain what the future could hold if a two-tiered pension system is implemented, or what it would mean in terms of employee relations within a union where some workers, because of their age, would clearly be discriminated against and condemned to a certain life of poverty when they retire.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. Clearly, as a young woman, I cannot help but feel terrified by the idea that this type of precedent could be set at Canada Post. Frankly, young people have the right to their place, the right to jobs with good working conditions and decent salaries. I am truly terrified at the idea that a decision could be made that would create such a gap between the generations and that would have such a negative effect on working relations between employees.

Government Orders

● (4535)

[English]

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not blame the unions. We do not blame the postal workers. There is one sole organization that has the ability to let the postal workers go back to work and that is the NDP.

I have a letter from Roy Wood, a small businessman. He says:

As of right now I have 4000 "Spring Special" post cards, stamped and addressed.....and just sitting on the shelf.

We have to be very careful and calculating with our marketing dollars.... We are losing revenue every day those cards sit. ...will it do me any good to cross out spring and write summer on 4000 cards?

When they do not have business, it is not just he who is losing money, but his employees who do not work are losing money too. We want to ask the NDP to please stop this political stunt and let the post get mailed.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I can only respond in the same way as I did earlier. It is not the workers' fault. This is a lockout. The only thing that is currently preventing these employees from working and contributing to the Canadian economy is the locks on the doors. Unlock the doors and the mail will continue to be delivered and the situation will resolve itself. Let the parties negotiate.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is obviously a sad Saint-Jean-Baptiste for us, and I also find it pathetic that the government has failed to listen to our requests in this matter.

A few seconds ago, I heard the hon. member opposite ask why. One of the reasons we have embarked on this marathon is to show everyone this government's true nature. People will hear about it in the news, 20, 30 or 40 times, and in the end they will understand the government's hidden agenda to privatize the postal system. I say hidden agenda because the government is trying to make us believe it is intervening for the sake of efficiency in the interest of the workers and average citizens. In reality, however, the government's sole motivation is to make Canada more appealing to its friends in big business, on whom it bestows all kinds of tax credits.

Bill C-6 is a disgrace. It is not complicated: the bill is an abuse of power, plain and simple. Now we are seeing the Prime Minister's true colours. I urge all Canadians and Quebecers to stand together in solidarity instead of fear, because we can all ask ourselves who will be next. Which workers will the government muzzle next?

The Conservatives would not have introduced this bill in the days leading up to the election, because there is no question that the vast majority of Canadians respect the rights of workers. This kind of bill would not go through on the eve of an election, only at the beginning of a government's mandate. The Conservatives have no hesitation perpetrating this kind of abuse. Instead of bringing the parties together, the government is taking an adversarial position against the workers. I remember a statement the Prime Minister made on election night about wanting to govern in the interests of all Canadians. I remember him saying that.

[English]

A strong, stable majority government, please.

[Translation]

The government is setting out to shatter our society. Does the government have a hidden agenda to sell off all our resources and the workforce? Are we facing a government that objects to public postal services for purely ideological reasons?

The government is looking to dismantle Canada Post, that is quite clear. It would prefer to privatize postal services, which would have disastrous consequences for Canadians. There is no private replacement option that could fulfill Canada Post's mandate. On the contrary, service levels would diminish but would cost more.

With a crown corporation that makes more than \$280 million in profit, how can they be talking about profitability concerns and costs that would be too high for Canadians to bear? Postal services are efficient and affordable, and I think that all Canadians hold these services dear.

While more and more Canadians are using email physical mail remains an essential service and one that Canadians hold dear. But the Conservatives seem to believe differently. I use email all the time but my real mailbox is quite often filled to the brim. I easily receive about 20 pieces of mail a week, which amounts to about four pieces being sent through the mail every working day. I do not believe it is a dying service.

Postal workers are aware of future challenges and they have amply demonstrated that. Rotating strikes were respectful of the public. Pension cheques were being delivered.

On June 3, Canada Post workers started a rotating strike. They are fighting for better job security and fair wages. They refuse to be the victims of tactics to unfairly take back their money. They refuse to allow the rights of 48,000 employees to be violated and have their families suffer the consequences. Canada Post belongs to us all, to all Canadians.

We are lucky to have one of the best postal services in the world. Seniors need to receive their pension cheques and small businesses need to send their bills.

The government needs to take the damned locks off the doors. We are supposed to defend the people who make this essential service work. That is why we are here. Hearing the Conservatives talk about the businesses that are suffering from the lack of service, I would like to remind them that SMEs are run by ordinary citizens and that they also have collective and civic consciences. They are sometimes able to be patient. I would be curious to poll them.

Government Orders

In any case, we do have to bear in mind that the Conservatives look out for rather big businesses like oil companies and big banks, which do not have a social conscience. With its attitude, the government is trying to create an environment appreciated by the big business lobbies. We all know this. Let us stop fooling ourselves. It has been very clear from the start. This is why I became interested in politics three years ago. When I became a card-carrying member of the NDP, I said to myself that this could not be, that we had to stop it. This government takes its orders from big business, and is out of touch with ordinary people. That is why we are here.

I would like to remind members that the CEO of Canada Post earned \$497,000 last year and, in addition, he is up for a 33% performance bonus. That is obscene.

● (4540)

How can we ask people to make sacrifices when others are paid that kind of money? That is mind-boggling. That is the right word. We often use that term. We say about everything and anything, that it is mind-boggling. That sure is incredibly mind-boggling. This was put to us seriously, no kidding.

Postal workers do not drive luxury cars or live in mansions. They are ordinary people who have good working conditions because they are well represented. Today, the government wants to break them. That is what they want to do.

Obviously, the government sees nothing wrong with this and it even wants to give more money to the workers' managers, who are asking for a bit of help with this special bill.

The Conservatives cannot see past the end of their noses. In fact, they do not see past their wallets. Short-sightedness is their speciality. For example, last night at around 10:20 p.m., I heard someone blaming the NDP for creating a carbon exchange because it was going to increase gas prices. That is like dancing on the deck of the *Titanic* or pretending that there are no problems, that there is no pollution. They have been short-sighted from the outset. Their current desire to privatize the postal system is short-sighted. They claim that it will save money. Come on. Why do they not just admit that they want to go play golf with their friends?

Underestimating the magnitude and scope of the measures against postal workers will create an atmosphere in which all workers will feel as though their rights are threatened. It will create a Canada where, one of these nights, a server at Tim Hortons will hesitate to complain about her working conditions. Yes, she has less protection than letter carriers and other postal workers. However, because the government is trying to break letter carriers and postal workers, this server will feel threatened. She will sell donuts and never ask for a pay raise. I guarantee it.

This is also the case for a cashier at a service station just off the 417 where we go to fill up at 3 a.m. Is he protected? How will he feel if this is done to the postal workers? And what about Raoul, who works on the 18th floor of the office building next door and who vacuums with his earphones on? He must also be telling himself that, if this is being done to letter carriers and postal workers, things will soon not be so rosy for him either.

These workers are not unionized. They are already in a corner. Imagine how these citizens, who are often new immigrants, will

gradually lose hope. It would be different if we were at least telling everyone that we need to pull together in difficult economic times. But, no. The government is going to buy F-35s because it is cool. It is true. I imagine that going to dinner with the directors of large aerospace and military equipment companies must be much more exciting than eating Timbits with Huguette or a sandwich with Raoul.

I hear the members opposite talk about the people being held hostage and suffering from this postal situation. But let us be clear: this is not a strike, it is a lockout. I will say it again. This is like a game of table tennis: strike, lockout, strike, lockout. We all know the truth—there were rotating strikes, these guys got impatient and said, “No, we will create special legislation,” and that was that.

● (4545)

[*English*]

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the longer this work stoppage continues, the more economic losses are incurred.

Would the member opposite please explain to Canadians why his party does not care about the economic recovery. Would he please also tell Canadians how long he would like to see this work stoppage go on before the losses are too great?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I can only applaud the member's dedication to her party. Honestly, it is admirable that she continues to repeat these comments. It is a real act of faith.

But we all know that is not the situation. Let us stop there, since that is not the situation. If there is anyone who truly cares about their constituents' future and the economy in general and wants everyone to be able to make ends meet, it is us. It is not true that we do not care.

The reality is that there was a power grab on the other side, and we challenged it. That is what this is all about.

If the member would like to ask me her second question again, she should go ahead. I seem to have forgotten it.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with CUPW last week in Guelph and every single member said they just wanted to go back to work. They wanted to go through normal negotiations, mediation, arbitration if necessary, but they were not allowed to.

I wonder if the member would speculate as to why Canada Post has refused to do that. Does he think there might have been any collusion with the government in maintaining this position?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would love to tell the member that I know exactly about this, but the reality is that even my mother knows. Everyone knows that something obviously happened somewhere.

Government Orders

I do not want to sound too candid about this but it was a candid strike. People know they are on strike, but they did all they could so that the strike would not affect everyone too much. We all know how it was. It was great and then out of the blue, suddenly, bang, bang, it became a lockout. Was something organized behind it? I would say so. Obviously it is the case. I am not that experienced in politics, but my mother and my daughter know too.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the theme that my hon. colleague just raised. There are other ways to make sure that the mail gets moving and that would be to pick up on the union's request to Canada Post to end the lockout, let the workers go back to work under the current collective agreement and then continue bargaining a collective agreement. Government members seem to be suggesting that there is only one way to resolve this matter with that effect and that is to pass this draconian legislation.

I want to point out again that this legislation is not legislation from a government that is interested in a fair result. A government interested in doing that would not have prescribed in the legislation a lower wage rate than management was prepared to offer at the table. I have not yet heard a cogent explanation from the government side as to why it would see fit to interfere in that process.

I wonder if my hon. colleague could comment on those concepts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question and I would also like to thank the other two members who asked questions. I am still not familiar with the procedures and customs here.

It is clear that if the government were to agree to take the threat out of this bill, the workers have already said that they are ready to work with the previous collective agreement to come to a negotiated settlement.

• (4550)

[*English*]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in solidarity with the thousands of postal workers who have been locked out by Canada Post. There are three postal depots in my riding, one in New Westminster, one in Coquitlam and another in Port Moody. I would like to thank all of the workers in those depots. I have talked to many of them and know their good work. I know how hard they have been working and how much this affects them and what it means to them.

Now we have proposed legislation by the government that, if adopted, will force those workers back to work. The legislation put forward by the Conservative government basically makes a mockery of the fair collective bargaining processes that thousands of Canadian men and women have fought so hard for.

I have had the honour and privilege to rise in the House many times to speak on critical issues facing our country, but few issues have motivated me more than the issue of pension protection. I believe everyone has the right to retire with dignity. As a society, we not only accept this but have also worked hard to ensure it by legislating public pension plans.

Working families are not looking for a free ride. They have bargained their pensions in good faith with their employers, diverting their wages into pension plans to have some measure of security upon retirement. This legislation denies those workers the fruits of their labour.

We should be bringing employment and the standard of living up, not tearing them down. We should be supporting family-sustaining jobs, not promoting a race to the bottom. We should be building a better world for our parents and our children, not pulling the rug out from underneath them. This legislation is the first volley of what, no doubt, will be a long and sustained attack on public pensions across our country.

However, do not take it from me. My office has heard from many in my riding who would be affected by this legislation. Here is what they say.

Kerisma, a full-time letter carrier in Coquitlam, notes that since the last contract had expired, she, along with her colleagues, has worked to help Canada Post meet and exceed target goals for performance and revenue. She believes that Canada Post has not negotiated in good faith and that this legislation rewards the corporation, one, for refusing to address health and safety concerns; two, for refusing to negotiate; and, three, for locking out its workers and creating this unnecessary halt to the mail.

Kerry is a 17-year employee at Canada Post, who says that his pension is his only hope of living above the poverty line when he retires. He says that they have been subject to large cutbacks in every agreement since he joined the postal service and that if they lose any more, we will have one of the world's worst in the public service. All they are asking for is fair treatment.

Another postal worker in my riding expressed her frustration with the time value system through which workers' current pay is established. Parcels on mobile routes and withheld mail are not included in the calculation, giving postal workers more mail to carry and forcing them to work through lunch to complete their routes on time and to avoid discipline for working overtime. She wants to know why the government is attacking postal workers. Government jobs should be good, respectable jobs that we can be proud of.

Michelle has been a letter carrier for 20 years in New Westminster. She loves her job. She is a single mom with two children who struggles to make ends meet. Her route has 1,233 points of call. After starting at 6:30 a.m. every morning, she is often not finished her route until 5 p.m. when her children arrive home from school. She delivers more mail now than she did 10 years ago, and that does not include the pounds of flyers. She worries about the next generation of postal workers and whether her job will even be viable employment for future workers. She has generously invited the Minister of Labour to accompany her on her route some time, and I would be happy to facilitate such a visit.

Shannon, a nine-year employee, is concerned about her sick benefits and pension plan. She says that the physical impact of doing her job takes its toll on her body. She knows many co-workers who require surgery from work-related injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome and knee and hip degeneration.

• (4555)

William, a letter carrier in New West, has worked for Canada Post for several years. He supports a wife and two children. He would like to retire with Canada Post but fears that a forced collective agreement would make that difficult.

Mirko is a 16-year postal worker veteran. He has two kids and a mortgage. He has seen many changes since he began as a letter carrier. He says his route would take an average mortal 10 hours to complete, for which he receives 8 hours of pay. Three years ago, ten and a half routes were eliminated from the area and everyone's route was lengthened. Injuries went up. Sixteen years ago he delivered two trays of about 1,000 letters on his route. Today, he delivers an average of three or four trays.

Leanne is a letter carrier in New Westminster. She has been employed by Canada Post for 19 years. She is 39 years old. She was just re-elected as the secretary-treasurer of the Royal City Local for a third term. This means that she works in the union office at least 10 days a month, doing the financials and the many other office duties specified in her local bylaws. She fully believes that the only reason she is not severely injured from her duties as a letter carrier is the simple fact she gets a break from the physical aspect of delivering mail when she works for the union.

New Westminster, B.C., part of my riding, is a quickly growing community. Indeed, she mentioned that she was looking out the window on East Columbia Street and watching the high-rises go up at the old brewery site as she was typing her email to me. She says that even though they are delivering to many more points of call in the city and to all others in her local, Canada Post has restructured their routes and cut the number of routes in every office for the last several years.

In September 2009, the New West depot was restructured. The end result was that 86 routes became 75, with a wave of management's magic wand. They lost 11 full-time employees, plus one relief carrier, in their depot. Every route suddenly had hundreds more points of call. This meant they were spending hours more every day on the street. They were carrying more pounds of mail every day. They were working 10, 12, even 14 hours a day. They were delivering in the dark, in the snow and on steep hills.

How did Canada Post react? It gave them ice cleats and headlamps.

Through the winter season, approximately one-third of the letter carriers were injured on the job and were either completely off or unable to do their full duties. Canada Post responded by forcing those who still happened to be able-bodied to do compulsory overtime on other routes after they had finished their own.

Canada Post challenged every WCB and WorkSafe claim put in by the members. Many were denied. Many members stopped reporting the injuries; they simply gave up.

Government Orders

Leanne reports that she has been left with plantar fasciitis and wakes up with foot pain every day. She says she can handle all of this, but what she cannot tolerate is the fact that she did not see her five-year-old son during the first week of their new routes.

She goes on to talk about her son and the impacts on him, the fact that she does not see him, that her parents and grandparents are involved in raising her son because she has to work overtime. She talks about being sick and getting hurt on the job. She talks about how Manulife, the third-party disability management provider, is involved in every case and questions every single claim workers put in.

The point here is that the physical and mental health effects of their jobs are affecting them and their families.

The biggest issue she faces now is being legislated back to work. Having that crammed down her throat is something she is appalled by.

These are moments that will define a generation. How will we look workers in the eye when we leave this chamber? This draconian legislation tears down decades of collective bargaining legislation that people in this country have worked so hard to put in place. We have an obligation to honour the agreements we make with workers.

• (4600)

We have an obligation to honour the agreements that we make with workers. We have an obligation to protect pensions. It is the right thing to do. Along with our concerns about protecting pensions, we must act to protect good wages for all workers.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a couple of comments.

As I had mentioned earlier, I was a union political liaison person with the ATA in the province of Alberta, so I do understand a lot of the different things that go on between negotiating parties.

I would like to read something I have just received. It says:

Hello Earl, I am a Canada Post employee here in Red Deer, and I have been watching the debate on resuming postal services very closely.

I, and my colleagues are very disappointed that this bill is taking so long to pass, and that the NDP is holding things up as they are. I am sure you are all getting very weary of this debate by now.

I constantly speak to my colleagues at Canada Post and we all want to go back to work—

—If members will recall, Red Deer was part of the rotating strikes

—we are all waiting patiently for this bill to pass so our lives can go back to normal. The fact is, even though CUPW says they cannot come to a deal with Canada Post, the truth is the vast majority of us are happy with Canada Post's last offer and would have happily accepted it. We are at the mercy of CUPW and feel we are caught in the middle of this vicious time.

As part of my daily mail route is delivering mail to many small businesses, there is no doubt in my mind that business is suffering because of the postal stoppage. It is very frustrating times when the all of us 'little people' want to do is to get back to work and take care of our customers, and try to win back the business that is no doubt been lost because of this disruption.

Any further delay on this bill passing by the official opposition is irresponsible, and all it will do is continue to hurt small businesses, citizens, and thousands of Canada Post workers who rely on the mail system flow.

Government Orders

Speaking on behalf of myself and my fellow posties, we wish you luck and speed in getting our postal service flowing again.

I ask—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, that was quite the question. It seemed like a fairly long statement.

I can certainly empathize. I have heard a number of comments. I have had a number of emails and letters from constituents, from carriers, from postal workers. They have also expressed their frustration. They simply want to have a negotiated settlement that is fair. They do not want the government to impose a deal. They do not want the government involved in this, but want to let the two parties have a negotiated settlement.

I received an email from Barry, who visited my constituency office just the other day to express his frustration with this legislation. He is a 36-year employee of Canada Post in Coquitlam. He said he had tried to contact the Prime Minister's Office to discuss this bill, but when he phoned the office hung up on him. That is how a 36-year veteran of the postal service is treated. When tries to get through, they hang up on him when he mentions that he is a postal worker. Barry is extremely frustrated, just as I have heard from some of these others.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant flaws in the back to work legislation is the fact that the government is taking the position that the postal workers are not worth the amount of money previously agreed with the Canada Post Corporation. In fact, a salary has been set within the legislation that is actually less than what Canada Post offered.

When I listened to the email response from the Conservative member, the first thought that ran across my mind was the employee referring to the fact he was receiving a better offer from Canada Post than in this back to work legislation.

I ask the member to comment on that aspect of the legislation, which we ultimately believe could be questionable in terms of whether or not it is against our Constitution and free bargaining rights.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, this deal is worse than what they would even get at the table from Canada Post. The government is offering wage rates lower than what Canada Post offered.

It tramples on collective bargaining rights in our country.

As well, it supports a tax on the postal workers' defined pension benefits plan.

Also, it promotes a two-tier wage and benefits system.

This legislation is an attack not just on postal workers but also on wages, benefits and pensions of all Canadian workers. That is why we are making a stand. That is why I will continue to be in the House every day, as long as it takes, to get a fair negotiated settlement not only for our postal workers but for all our Canadian workers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by apologizing to my constituents in the riding of Laval for missing

the various Saint-Jean-Baptiste festivities taking place throughout the community. I am here today to stand up for workers' rights.

On June 3, postal workers began rotating strikes. They are fighting for safer working conditions and decent wages. They offered to stop the rotating strikes if Canada Post would agree to abide by the old contract while negotiations were ongoing. Canada Post refused to do so. The employer instead decided to lock the workers out and to shut down postal service. That is why Canadians and small businesses are no longer receiving their mail.

It is important to keep in mind that this is not a workers' strike but a lockout imposed by the employer, Canada Post. Workers have the right to negotiate with their employer in good faith. But that is not the case here. The government wants to impose a labour contract on employees. What the government is doing does not give both sides an opportunity to reach an agreement. Furthermore, the government is proposing an agreement with even lower wages than Canada Post's offer.

What type of message are they sending? This debate is not only about mail, it is above all about the workers' right to negotiate a collective agreement. Who will be the next group of workers to see their rights trampled underfoot in this way?

Which leads me to ask the Conservative caucus and more precisely the Minister of Labour if the ultimate objective, the government's true objective, is not simply to create a precedent, a very dangerous one in fact, in order to destroy and annihilate the union movement in Canada.

Canada Post workers want a very simple thing: they want to deliver the mail, to work, quite simply. For the moment, they cannot provide the services they were hired to provide. This raises the following question: why can they not go to work? The answer is very simple: there is a lock on their employer's door. There are locks on all the mailboxes throughout the country.

Canada Post has a mandate to fulfill for the entire population, including people in large cities like Laval and Montreal. Laval residents are already dealing with big problems, because it is difficult these days to get around on the island of Montreal where many Laval residents work. Since the government is not investing enough in infrastructure in the greater Montreal area, the residents of both the south and north shores are suffering.

It would be possible to prevent further problems for the people of Laval, Montreal and the south shore. The government could encourage negotiations and work with the opposition to make the bill acceptable to all sides in this labour dispute.

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Canada Post has decided that the Canadian population would no longer receive its mail. In addition to Canada Post preventing the letter carriers from working, the Government of Canada has decided to add insult to injury by setting lower salary levels. These workers did not need that. These workers make the economy go round. These workers are the engine of the economy. They are consumers and taxpayers. They contribute to society, as opposed to the big corporations that are always getting bigger and better gifts from the government.

The time has come to show some flexibility and withdraw the unfair provision regarding workers' salaries.

We understand that the government is in no hurry to remove the locks from the doors, because it likes locks. It locked up Parliament several times because it did not like the way things were going.

The solution to this deadlock is simple. We are asking the government to work with us to encourage negotiation in good faith between the parties in this conflict. We are asking the government to withdraw the clause that sets the salaries for postal workers, and to put an immediate end to the lockout so that mail carriers can resume delivering the mail and providing service to the population. That is what they were hired to do. We are also asking the government to allow the negotiations to continue until a new collective agreement has been signed.

Canada Post is not bankrupt. No urgent restructuring is required. Canada Post is a profitable undertaking with a responsibility to negotiate with its workers. The time has come to put an end to the lockout.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note there have been a few people reading emails from constituents into the record. I have a few from people who are very upset. I will read one. It states, "We are very upset with the Canada Post work stoppage. This is affecting communication with our senior parents. My mother does everything by mail. She cannot use a computer. My father will not receive a gift for Father's Day. My child will not get graduation photos to family and friends, let alone gifts for graduation. We, the little people, affected by this strike are very upset. We appreciate the efforts of the Government of Canada in this matter. We will support you and the Government of Canada in this matter. I was a federal and provincial employee, but I understand, enough is enough. It costs and hurts us".

I have another one here that reads, "I hope you are taking the message to Ottawa that Canada Post has to get workers back on the job. As small business owners with an online retail business, we rely very heavily on the delivery services of our products to customers via Canada Post".

They are asking that we work to get Canada Post back to work. I have also received a number of tweets. I want to share a couple of those as well. One is from a constituent in Carstairs who says, "Keep up the good work. My family has very important mail that we cannot get right now. Very disappointing for our son".

I have another one that I want to share. It reads, "Thank you for your work. I might not use Canada Post much, but my clients do and, therefore, that means the cheques are in the mail".

I just want to point out that that would be a hashtag NDP fail. What do the NDP say to these individuals who need to have postal service so they can get their businesses working and get their families' mail?

[*Translation*]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member across the way would be surprised to know how many emails I have received from all over Canada, from workers who are demanding that the government put an end to the lockout so that they can receive their mail. That is the only solution: if the government puts an end to the lockout, the negotiations can resume properly and everything will get settled.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a question I have been wanting to put for quite some time and I would be interested to hear the hon. member's response.

Earlier in the evening, the Associate Minister of National Defence raised a very interesting point which I am not sure really came home to everyone in the chamber. He suggested that the salaries that had been negotiated for the postal workers should be clawed back to the level proposed in the legislation because they would be more comparable to private couriers. Perhaps he showed his hand out of turn from what the PMO would have wanted. It leads me to believe that this is the first step. Maybe the Conservatives are setting the salary range for a sell-off and to privatize Canada Post.

We have been informed in this House that it is a mere \$857.50 per postal worker that they are seeking. I have just learned that the government, along with the Government of Alberta, have just gifted almost \$1 billion to Shell for one project to try to meet its carbon target.

The government can give \$1 billion to Shell, but it cannot give \$857.50 to a postal worker? Would the member like to comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and honourable member from our side of the House.

You should know that I come from a union background and that I have some experience in this, as I lived through the imposition of a law by the provincial government of Quebec. Let me say this at the outset: when salaries are being negotiated, it is not advisable for one party to have the upper hand. We went back to work dragging our heels.

Their ultimate objective here is to put an end to the union movement, privatize the business and offer ridiculous salaries.

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[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we continue with debate, I will give a helpful hint for some members. There are often a lot of members who would like to get up on questions and comments and, with only five minutes, it is good to keep your question at around a minute and that gives the respondent about the same time. We might be able to get three questions in on questions and comments.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Joliette.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers held a rotating strike so as not to prevent Canadians from receiving their mail. The union offered to end the strike if the company would agree to keep the former collective agreement in effect during the negotiation process; however, Canada Post refused. Why did it refuse?

Employees are locked out; they are not on strike. Their right to strike has been taken away, and this is unacceptable in 2011. Locking out employees does not seem like a good idea when negotiations are underway. We must not forget that Canada Post belongs to all Canadians. Why is the government imposing legislation that will give the workers lower salaries than what was offered by Canada Post? Why decrease their purchasing power when we know that the cost of living never stops increasing? You can see it at the grocery store each week.

We are asking the Conservative government to respect the rights of workers. We are hoping that what is happening at Canada Post is not a prelude or a severe warning to all Canadian workers. We must allow both parties to come to an agreement for everyone's well-being. Will the Conservative government allow this to happen?

We know that a lower salary means a lower pension. After I was elected, employees in my riding asked me to protect their jobs and to ensure that Canada Post was not privatized. They explained to me what they are experiencing and told me about their concerns. They said that they have been feeling the pressure for a long time already. My role as a member of Parliament is to listen to them and bring their message to Ottawa.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who do the hon. member and the NDP think they are helping by causing this delay in getting our postal workers back to work? Because they are not helping Canadians. In fact, 70% of Canadians are against this. They also are not helping postal workers.

I have done the math, and 25% of the annual increase is lost every day that the NDP delays the postal workers getting back to work. That means that, in four days, the entire annual increase for the postal workers is gone as a result of the NDP's delay in getting our postal workers back to work.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, the mail may be late, but we must protect the rights of workers. I know that a large part of the

population agrees with us and wants the workers to be able to negotiate a real contract and not have one imposed.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know there are many people watching this debate with curiosity. We are looking for ideas. I understand there was some movement, in that the New Democratic caucus has provided some potential amendments to the government caucus. I think there seems to be an appetite to find out what kinds of ideas might be flowing. The leader of the Liberal Party talked about constitutionality, and we have talked about the wage factor and other aspects of the legislation.

Is there any way the member could share with the House ideas the New Democrats have that they would like to see in the current legislation?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that I have participated in a debate in the House. It is quite interesting. In light of what we are going through and what our employees are currently going through—because they are our employees—I believe that we absolutely must support their actions. They want a contract that is signed in good faith. We have to support them in this.

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is simple.

All members agree that workers have the right to draw a pension and to live comfortably and safely. They are entitled to that because they have worked for their retirement pension. My question is as follows: What will be the impact of such legislation on workers' pensions?

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, reducing their wages will mean that their pensions will be smaller, and thus they will have less money when they reach retirement age. This week, we spoke several times throughout almost an entire day about the poverty of seniors. Therefore, I do not believe that we should decrease workers' salaries because they will then retire in poverty.

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my hon. colleague realizes that we are not even debating Bill C-6; we are debating the hoist amendment.

I also wonder if all the speeches we have heard for the last two days will be repeated again when we actually debate Bill C-6.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will repeat what we have said: it is to protect workers.

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Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to try to take advantage of the few minutes I have to try to explain the concepts that some of my Conservative colleagues have obviously not understood, even after several hours of debate.

We are here today to vote on a bill forcing workers to abandon their right to bargain, forcing them to return to inadequate health and safety conditions at work, conditions that need to be improved, and forcing them to be quiet.

This back-to-work legislation means that workers are losing ground and that their rights are being rolled back. We have said this repeatedly in the House, but apparently the words have not made it to the other side of the chamber.

Because of this bill, workers will be deprived of the right to negotiate their working conditions, a right they acquired decades ago. Please note the word “negotiation”, a word the leader of the government needs to examine more closely.

We have to discuss and debate to arrive at an agreement that will satisfy both parties and be fair to both of them, because even if one of two parties has more power, for instance if it is in majority at the bargaining table, the spirit of democracy and justice should dictate that it listens to what the other side has to say, to learn from the experience that informs each of their statements. But this government clearly has nothing but contempt for the word “negotiation”.

For several months now postal workers have negotiated to obtain better working conditions. They made concessions and they agreed to listen to what their employer had to say. They were willing to accept the collective agreement that was in force. They were ready to live with it so that things could move forward.

They demonstrated more commitment to their work and dedication to their fellow citizens than their legal obligations required. And what did the government do in light of these concessions? What did the government do in return for their dedication to public service and the citizens of this country? It treated them with contempt, ignored them and gave them short shrift. And what is even worse, it is offering postal workers even less than what they had obtained in their negotiations with Canada Post. It is proposing a lower salary and poorer working conditions. Why impose worse conditions on the workers than those Canada Post had agreed to?

Let us come back to the reason Canada Post is giving for refusing the union's demands: the argument that agreeing to these demands would supposedly render the company financially non-viable.

Given how broadly Canada Post defines its financial viability, we can therefore assume that the provisions agreed to by management did not directly or indirectly jeopardize Canada's or Canada Post's finances.

And yet, the government decided to retract these provisions. Why? The answer is simple: for profit. This bill trades the security, health and quality of life of devoted workers and their families for profits larger than the \$281 million Canada Post made last year. The government is trading the dignity of our workers for a few million

dollars extra. Does the Prime Minister think that this is in the best interest of our country?

Has he perhaps forgotten that a country is not a bank? This country is not a pile of money; it is people who work and dedicate themselves to this country, people who have already made concessions.

Where are this government's concessions? Where is this government's dignity? I do not know. I do not see them in this bill. All I see here is a supreme insult to all the workers in this country who get up every morning to keep this country running, to make sure the mail gets delivered, to take care of the sick, to manufacture goods, to teach our children and to ensure that our society and economy do as well as possible. The truth is that the workers we are talking about have shown more concern and respect for Canadians than this government has.

But contempt is common on the other side of the House. Take, for example, the fact that this government was found in contempt of Parliament. We have not forgotten. The contempt this government has for postal workers who did everything they could to continue to provide service to the public even while they were on strike is unacceptable.

Who will be next? Who will be the next to be humiliated and sacrificed in the supposed best interest of the economy, an interest that we clearly do not define in the same way at all?

Who else will be silenced in the name of these supposed economic interests? Or, should I say, who else will be silenced in the name of this government's interests?

Here is one email I received:

[*English*]

It has been a long haul with Bill C-6, and it's with pride that I see men and women standing in defence of what is right, not only for postal workers but for all workers who don't have a voice.

[*Translation*]

I would prefer not to repeat yet again what this government has been denying for hours now, but we have no choice. It authorized a worker lockout. It prevented workers from doing their jobs, even though they were willing to continue doing work that no essential service legislation required them to do.

Then the government proposed legislation forcing employees back to work, to do a job they did not want to stop doing in the first place. Incidentally, the government took away some of their rights. The right to collective bargaining, the right to a safe working environment, the right to retire at a deserving age, the right to sick leave, the right to retirement benefits pensioners can live on and not just get by on, all of which are and should remain fundamental rights in this country.

Since this debate began yesterday, all of my NDP colleagues and I have been receiving constant emails of encouragement and appreciation. Emails asking us to fight, to continue standing up for the rights of those who live and work in this country.

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Now it is my turn to take this opportunity to thank all those people for their support. They serve as constant reminders of why we are here, why we rise in this House one after another and why we are prepared to stay here as long as necessary.

We have repeatedly heard the Conservatives argue that Canadians gave them a clear mandate to justify their behaviour in this House. I think they are sadly mistaken. I see no clear message. Thirty-eight percent of Canadians voted for the Conservatives. But, as I see it, the clear message and the message that should be obvious to anyone who can add or subtract is that 62% of Canadians voted against the government.

Since the hon. members do not seem inclined to hear the voices of those Canadians, I will make their voices heard here. This morning, I got an email from a woman telling me how proud she was for voting NDP, how heartwarming it was to see all of us, here in the House, standing up for principles that she holds dear, such as the right to free collective bargaining, equal wages for equal work, decent pension plans, public services for all Canadians and fighting back against this unfair attack on the working class. She urged us to keep up the fight against this right-wing government, which, in her words, has shown nothing but contempt for the working class and ordinary people.

And there are others.

[*English*]

It says, “My family has watched the debates and we are all amazed and grateful that you will stand up for us, to not be bullied by Canada Post and the government into accepting an unfair contract. Thank you for standing up for who has a right under the law to free bargaining.”

Another says, “Keep on speaking out. Keep up the fight. Keep making clear how the crisis is one which has been manufactured by the Conservative government.”

[*Translation*]

Please listen carefully to these words. We have heard many Conservative members refer to a strike. Once again, there seems to be a misunderstanding here. As my colleagues have repeatedly pointed out, there was a rotating strike. It had a very moderate impact on mail delivery.

However, the lockout is having more than a moderate impact; it has paralyzed mail delivery. This lockout was not chosen by postal workers; it was a choice made by the executives at Canada Post, under the authority of the state, the authority of our government.

The constant use of the word “strike” rather than “lockout” by my government colleagues shows their obvious and dishonest intent to mislead citizens, to have the responsibility for this situation rest with the workers rather than the government.

The Conservatives have often talked about their concern for small business. All of us here in this House are concerned about small businesses that are being adversely affected by the absence of mail delivery.

My Conservative colleagues have been reading emails from small businesses demanding that mail service resume. But no one asked for this lockout at the outset, no one besides this government. Why

not let them know once again who is really responsible for this situation, who supported the lockout, who is really adversely affecting small businesses, who is damaging our country's economy now? The answer is simple: it is the government.

Our hon. Prime Minister is doing harm to small businesses. Our hon. Prime Minister is doing harm to this country's economy. Our hon. Prime Minister is doing harm to this country with a pointless lockout he has the power to end and an unfair piece of legislation. He is not trying to find a solution that would resolve this matter, which would be to take the locks off the doors.

● (4635)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that close to 70% of Canadians support this legislation. They support seeing Canada Post back at work. They support getting their mail delivered.

I have a question for the member opposite. It was only a few short months ago that we saw the Liberal Party of Canada totally ignore Canadians and remain out of touch with Canadians, and we saw what happened to that party. It is a shame to see the NDP members so quickly turn their backs on what Canadians want, refuse to be in touch with Canadians, and instead follow their own left-wing ideology.

When will they look at what Canadians want, put aside their political rhetoric and what their union bosses are asking for, and actually work for Canadians? That's my question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that many people hope to start receiving their mail again. That is why I would very much like to ask the parliamentary secretary, even though it is not her turn to respond, why she does not call on her leader to remove the locks. That would resolve the problem and mail service would resume.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have never been part of a union, but in my past life I negotiated plenty of collective agreements, usually acting on behalf of management. We always entered those negotiations with goodwill, with the intention of there being a win-win scenario at the end, realizing that good faith had to be maintained between the parties because they had to live together and work together afterwards.

I am wondering if there is value in letting the workers go back to work and enter into regular mediation-arbitration negotiations, and I am wondering whether that kind of relationship, that good relationship, is retrievable or not, as opposed to forcing this draconian legislation on CUPW right now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely true. It would be much more acceptable to remove the locks and to ask the parties to resume negotiations to preserve a good working relationship. I had working conditions imposed on me in 2006 and I can tell you it creates an abysmal working environment. If the locks were removed and negotiations resumed, I think the working environment at Canada Post could be salvaged.

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Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague what the link is between workers who negotiate and make gains and the rest of the Canadian population.

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that this bill is very significant. We are debating what will happen to Canada Post workers, but the underlying debate is about the future of all Canadian workers.

If we agree to let workers' rights be violated even once, we open the door to the government intervening in these issues and imposing working conditions on workers whenever there is a strike or other problem. We are fighting here to preserve all workers' right to negotiate, not the just the right of Canada Post workers.

[English]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member if she has in her riding any local insurance offices and small businesses, the type that the NDP campaigned on representing. A concerned constituent in my riding of Blackstrap wrote me today, saying that:

...we look out for all types of people; seniors, farmers, students, families, small business, churches...We rely on Canada Post to send our clients their insurance policies and other necessary communications. For many younger individuals and urban families we can send any correspondence by email. However, for those such as seniors, farmers, rural businesses and rural families they do not have such a luxury. These individuals rely on the communications sent through the mail via Canada Post...These seniors and rural individuals are now without the documents that would confirm that their interests are protected or are without notice of potential risks they should be aware of.

Does the member have in her riding such small businesses as the NDP claims to be representing? I would be interested to know.

● (4640)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, of course there are small businesses in my riding that are affected by this situation. That is why I feel that Conservative members should ask their leader to end the lockout and take the locks off the doors so that Canada Post workers can get back to work, deliver the mail and resume negotiations.

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Québec, I would first like to address the 500 Canada Post workers who demonstrated in Quebec City last Wednesday after they were locked out. I understand their frustration and I would like to say to them that I am here in the House of Commons to stand up for them and to pull out all the stops to oppose this special bill, which would deprive them of their legitimate right to negotiate their working conditions.

I was unable to celebrate Quebec's national holiday with them this year. Although I am not present in body, I am with them in spirit. The NDP has promised change. We have promised the people that we will do politics differently. It is for that reason that we are here. We take our duty to represent them seriously and, in the face of injustice, we must stand up for their rights tirelessly, day and night.

I am proud to stand up for the rights of workers and the interests of Quebecers and all Canadians. What is happening right now is very important. We must take action to defend the middle class and fight the disparity between rich and poor. We must defend the

progressive values of this country. We must defend the right to negotiate. This is a lockout, not a strike. Postal workers opted for rotating strikes. They chose a moderate means of securing better working conditions. That is to their credit because it had a minimal effect on services. Postal workers cared about their fellow Canadians.

Then, management decided to declare a lockout and put a complete stop to services. That is why Canadians and small businesses are no longer receiving their mail. The postal workers did not want a general strike but they never imagined that the employer would declare a lockout.

To add insult to injury, the Conservative government staged an unprecedented intervention by introducing this special bill to force employees back to work under harsher conditions than those that were on the table. I would like to give an example. It is as though someone was earning \$12 an hour and asked his employer for \$15. Then, the government stepped in and now the person is making \$10 an hour. Is this acceptable? Is it normal to be concerned about such a situation? I think so. I think it is frightening.

People do not just want minimum wage jobs. They do not want to worry themselves sick because they cannot make ends meet week after week, month after month. They want jobs with fitting wages. Families want to be able to count on an income that allows them to pay for a few hours of leisure time and, thus, actively participate in the local economy. They want to have quality time to spend with their loved ones. Canada Post employees deserve to have a decent salary and acceptable working conditions. They are not the only ones, and that is only natural.

I also checked the blogs and other types of social media to see what the public thinks about this. I would like to share some of what I read:

With this lockout, the government is showing that it can do absolutely anything it wants with us. For now, only Canada Post is affected but, one day, they may decide that you were very kind to contribute to your retirement fund but that the money would be more useful to them than to you, and you will be left with nothing. That is what happened in the United States and is likely to happen in Europe and Quebec. If we do nothing now, we are opening the door to other excesses.

And it is a member of the public who said that. Another person wrote:

The postal workers want to deliver the mail. They are demonstrating against this bill that takes away their right to negotiate their next collective agreement.

Yet another person added the following:

The Conservatives are again demonstrating their Machiavellian talent, this time by exploiting people's ignorance. Let us put aside the conditions and demands of the postal union. Mail carriers decide to hold rotating strikes in order to protest and put a bit of pressure on the employer. What is good about these strikes is that they get the employer's attention without the public noticing much of a disruption in service. That is to the credit of the postal workers. What does Canada Post do? It locks them out almost immediately. It is the employer, and only the employer, that has caused the total shutdown of the postal service in Canada. However, the average person still does not understand what a lockout is, or maybe has only a vague idea of what it is. He only knows that his cheque is not being delivered. The public blames the messenger and that is a mistake.

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● (4645)

I completely agree with what people are writing in blogs, and I urge them to continue their posts. I invite everyone to continue feeding us with such information. We will continue to fight for them.

As I was saying, we knew that, with a majority, the Conservatives would only obey one law: their own. By taking this action, the Conservatives are showing that all they have to do is pass laws. They do not even care about the Supreme Court, which, in 2007, reaffirmed that the right to negotiate is a fundamental right.

It is shameful. What we must not lose sight of is that this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what this government plans on doing. It will continue to give bonuses to Canada Post's CEO and to others who are already earning a more than acceptable salary. However, in the case of the far larger number of workers at the next level down, it will make massive cuts, widening the already great divide between rich and poor. In fact, the swift and heavy-handed means it is currently using with this special law may be used in all cases. What is happening to postal workers may happen to a good number of public servants and other workers.

Those who might be tempted to applaud the government because it is supposedly fiscally responsible might want to think again. The government is not fiscally responsible, not in the least. This government and this measure are not about fiscal responsibility. Canada Post is a very productive crown corporation. Unlike many businesses, it has dramatically increased its productivity over the past two years. In addition to being able to offer decent jobs, this strong productivity has also generated profits and contributed substantial amounts to the public coffers in dividends and taxes.

People who are thinking about privatizing or deregulating Canada Post are on the wrong track. Multinationals calling for that only want to increase their profits and their market share. What do the people want? A report commissioned by the federal government in 2009 was very clear that people do not want Canada Post to be privatized or deregulated. In a democracy, the people should prevail and that is that.

I would like to remind the members that when this government violates workers' rights, when it flouts the country's laws and institutions, and when it does not honour its commitments to the people, the NDP will be there to keep it in line. We are a united opposition of people who know what it means to work to make ends meet.

That is why I am asking the government to listen to the people. I am asking it to respect workers, who also want to benefit from this country's wealth. I suggest it see reason and not impose this special legislation.

I hope to return to my wonderful riding of Québec with good news. I continue to have hope, because hope springs eternal. I know one thing: more than 60% of Canadians did not vote for the Conservative Party. I know that the people support me and that they are likely disgusted by what the government is doing right now. I want them to know that we will not give up the fight.

● (4650)

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the more this protracted debate goes on, the more obvious it is becoming to me and I believe to many others that this is just a failed attempt for the NDP to demonize Canada Post, an organization that was chosen as one of the national capital region's top employers for 2011. Some of the reasons for that award are that it starts employees at three weeks' vacation and that it even offers a five-day marriage leave for newlyweds, as well as five days to take care of family. There are a whole lot of other benefits. On it goes.

On the other hand, we have significant hardship being caused to Canadians generally. I just want to mention one, if I may. OneMatch uses Canada Post to send buccal swabs to do the typing for people who submit online applications to join OneMatch. These are for tissue and organ replacements and blood typing for people who are desperately in need of this.

I wonder if the hon. member could indicate whether she agrees that the work stoppage at Canada Post is directly affecting the life of every Canadian. Why are this member and her party continuing to stall the passage of this legislation? Why do she and her party not want Canadians to receive their mail?

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

Like all other members on this side of the House, I would like the minister to make a call and have the locks taken off the doors at Canada Post. Then service could resume and people could stop going on about how terrible this is. That is what needs to happen. We need to continue to defend the working conditions of these people, who work tirelessly and who are being wrongly blamed for this. It is terrible that the work of these people is not being recognized. They have the right to negotiate their collective agreement. But they are being denied that right and then people are saying that it is their fault the mail is not being delivered. That is what is so terrible.

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government side of the House keeps claiming that Bill C-6 is in response to a strike. This side of the House and in fact the entire national media say it is a lockout. Until we get this basic fact straightened out we are not going to move very far forward on this debate.

I encourage members of the government and my hon. colleague to review the stories in the national media. CBC, CTV, the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, all the newspapers and media outlets of note say it is a lockout. Even the *New York Times* reported, "the lockout effectively shut down the country's postal system." The foreign press is watching us and agrees that this is a lockout.

I wonder if my hon. would comment on this.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for pressing that point because it is the most important one.

In fact, we want the Conservative government to say that this is a lockout and not a strike. If it could at least acknowledge that—as the media, the public and the members on this side of the House have—perhaps we would not need to spend the entire weekend here in the House debating this issue. That would allow for some progress. The government clearly has a mental block. It is refusing to listen to us, and we cannot even imagine how it is treating the people that it is ignoring on this issue.

● (4655)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish all Quebeckers a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. I would also like to thank the people of the Châteauguay—Saint-Constant riding for organizing festivities for this wonderful holiday. Clearly, I would have liked to have participated but the situation we are addressing here today prevents me from doing so. I hope that my constituents will understand and will not mind my absence.

We have been here since June 23 to hold an important debate on the government's bill to force the Canada Post employees on lockout back to work. We are here on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, which is celebrated by all Quebeckers, because the government did not want to take a break on this day that is so important to nearly a quarter of the members of Parliament. This government continues to show its contempt for the people of Quebec.

There is a reason why most Quebeckers did not vote for the government party in power. The people of Quebec strongly disapprove of the Conservative's actions and values. They are not fools. The actions and values of the party on the other side of the House are light years away from the values shared by most Quebeckers. The results of the most recent election show that this is true. There are only six Conservative members left in Quebec. With the type of decisions, bills and other strategies announced in the Speech from the Throne, the Conservative party is at risk of being completely wiped out in Quebec.

The government claims to be the government of all Canadians but the people of Quebec have this strong feeling, if not the certainty, that the government is leaving them out in the cold. Perhaps it is because of the way the government invests in infrastructure in Conservative members' ridings and proves indifferent toward ridings that do not have a Conservative representative, such as the Montreal region, where aging infrastructure under the government's responsibility is not being adequately maintained. If, for example, the Champlain Bridge were in the riding of the current President of the Treasury Board, it would have been announced long ago that this bridge was going to be rebuilt. I am certain of this, and Quebeckers are too.

During the election campaign, some Conservative candidates openly stated that it is normal for Conservative-held ridings to receive more investments than the other ridings. This is scandalous. Thus, the current government has a long way to go to endear itself to Quebeckers. It is not going to do so with the policies it has announced: there is no significant action with regard to the environment; they want to dismantle the gun registry; they want to build prisons for young offenders; they are buying aircraft no one wants; they give subsidies to big business, banks and oil companies. In addition, they are reducing taxes for large businesses while small

Government Orders

and medium-sized businesses, which create almost half of all new jobs, receive no consideration. This government is clearly the government of the wealthy, the privileged and big business. Employees and workers are scorned by government. Bill C-6 is another fine example of this.

It is clear today that this government does not respect workers. If need be, we will forget about all other national holidays in the coming years in order to defend workers' interests. This government will ruthlessly advance its political agenda, even if they have to ignore MPs from Quebec again. But we will be there to block all similar bills. We have been blocking this scandalous bill since June 23 and we would continue to do so until the next Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, if we could. We will do everything to delay Bill C-6, which is completely unacceptable and disrespectful of employees in general. I said in general, because this is just the first step by the government to chip away at employees' working conditions. In this instance, it is attacking the working conditions of postal workers. But which group of workers will it attack next?

In terms of this labour dispute, the government is saying that it wants to end the strike so that the economy is not harmed. It is also saying that it is not biased and that it is imposing conditions that are fair and equitable. What about this is fair and equitable? Does the government believe it is fair to side with the employer and impose lesser conditions than the employer was willing to concede? Is it fair to propose two classes of workers and keep younger workers from having the same wages and benefits as the others?

People are not stupid. Despite the misleading language being used by government representatives, people understand that this government is clearly biased in favour of the wealthy and employers.

● (4700)

People know that the government has a single goal: to privatize crown corporations so that they can reduce services and make more profit. Then a handful of higher-ups can receive huge salaries at the expense of services and workers' rights.

Canada Post is a very profitable crown corporation. We have the impression that this lockout was a government scheme to impose a labour contract that would gut working conditions for Canada Post employees to begin with and then for other groups.

I would like to focus on this scheme to impose a labour contract without consideration for workers' rights by briefly reviewing the events that we are concerned with here today.

On June 3, postal workers began rotating strikes that did not interrupt mail delivery. They simply wanted to use a legitimate pressure tactic to force the employer to advance the negotiations that had been going on for months. The union acted responsibly and with due diligence. The employer responded initially with a two-day-a-week lockout, which was also legitimate.

Government Orders

However, it did act irresponsibly by imposing a permanent lockout a few days later with the blessing of the government. It was good timing for the government because the end of the parliamentary session was in sight. The government thought that it would take the opportunity, a little while later, to set conditions that would benefit the employer by imposing terms that were less favourable than those that management had been prepared to give its employees.

And the government would like us to quickly pass this special bill, the way it is? I have said it before and I will say it again: we will do everything in our power to stop this outrageous bill. We will not help the government resolve the impasse that it alone has created and has blamed on the union.

I find it unfortunate that the Conservative government is holding Canadians hostage by putting the blame for the impasse on the union and the official opposition.

How can what started as a rotating strike end by causing great harm to Canadians? The workers chose to hold rotating strikes in different cities so as not to block mail distribution. The rotating strikes did not have much impact on businesses or at least they had less of an impact than a general strike would have. Even the Minister of Labour admitted that the rotating strikes had little effect on mail delivery. A spokesperson for Canada Post said the same thing. It is Canada Post that imposed the lockout on workers who, today, can no longer report for work to deliver the mail.

Now, Canada Post wants to establish a strategy to reduce operating costs. The employer wants to decrease the wages of new employees, reduce sick leave coverage and decrease contributions to employees' retirement, health care and security plans.

Bill C-6 imposes a salary cut on young workers and a salary increase lower than the cost of living and lower than the offer made by the employer on all workers. It also seeks to impose a new pension plan. It is a threat to the working conditions that were hard earned over the past few years and to the negotiations of previous years, a time when negotiations were permitted. Today, the government is taking away the workers' fundamental right to negotiate their working conditions.

The special bill the Conservatives have tabled is unacceptable, that cannot be said often enough. Even if we repeated it a thousand times, that would still not be enough. This bill will set a precedent and will put all Canadian workers at risk. It will give complete power to employers, including the power to impose working conditions on their employees, all with the complicity of the government, and the employees will be unable to bargain their own terms. Workers and unions are being told to give in to unfavourable terms proposed by their employer, or they will have terms that are even worse than all the concessions the employer was demanding imposed on them. And worse still, they will be forced to bear the blame for the deadlock their employer has put them in. They are being told that the government will favour the employer and in fact will reward it, even if the employer is guilty of holding the public hostage. Workers are being told they will be sent back in with a special bill that comes down on the employer's side.

If we do not find a solution to the lockout that has been imposed, the terms of employment in the previous collective agreement could

still be continued. So let us allow the parties to negotiate without holding the public hostage as the employer and the government have done.

We are also very aware of the concern and worry that Canadians are feeling, and we understand that the lockout at Canada Post and the interruption of mail delivery is causing hardship. I repeat, however, that this is because of the lockout imposed by Canada Post, with the complicity of the government, that is preventing the workers from going back to delivering the mail. This situation could end tomorrow morning if the government lifted its imposed lockout and allowed the employees to go back to work on the terms in the previous collective agreement.

● (4705)

There was no urgency for imposing this special legislation. We can end the lockout by allowing the parties to bargain in good faith. The government will not succeed in making the workers bear the blame for this deadlock. The Canada Post Corporation is the one that locked the employees out, and it is the one that has caused these consequences. So why is this government rewarding the employer by coming down clearly on its side?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite spoke about holding Canadians hostage. Yet tonight we are debating an NDP-led motion that would significantly delay this very important piece of back-to-work legislation.

I have received many comments from constituents in my riding regarding the necessity and the importance of postal service. They speak of holding Canadians hostage. I wonder if the member opposite could please explain how delaying this important legislation would help get around that.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I will say to the member that we are trying to resolve the situation for the employees of Canada Post. How can we do that? We have said it dozens and thousands of times: open the doors, stop the lockout and allow the employees to go to work. That is how this deadlock can be broken.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the speech given by our colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant. Clearly we are in a situation where a crown corporation has imposed a lockout. That is undeniable. Everyone understands that, at least on this side of the House.

The government has supported the lockout with a draconian bill that is going to impose terms that are simply intolerable. These are terms that will not be negotiated. This is an affront to the dignity of the workers of Canada. That is not tolerated on this side of the House.

What does my colleague think of the idea that a collective agreement must be negotiated rather than imposed by a bill?

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Yes, negotiated terms always provide a better work atmosphere than a situation that is imposed. I was a union representative in recent years and I was acquainted with people who had had terms of employment imposed on them by special legislation, and the atmosphere that produced was simply unliveable. It created enormous tensions within the company and significantly hurt productivity. It is therefore important, and in fact essential, that there be a negotiated employment contract, not one imposed like this, particularly not by this method.

The employer was prepared to offer better terms and the government is imposing worse terms. That is outrageous.

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 90% of the union employees voted in favour of a strike. Because they felt that negotiations were going nowhere, they

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implemented rotating strikes. That is their right. Canada Post, as the employer, implemented a lockout. That is its right.

The federal government can implement back-to-work legislation. This is about representing the majority of Canadians. Who are the NDP representing?

● (4710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, we all represent Canadians. We represent large and small businesses, but also, and most importantly, the workers. We want justice in this country. We want favourable terms for workers, not terms that are imposed. We represent the workers. We represent the majority of the people, not the big businesses and the wealthy in this country.

[*For continuation of proceedings see Part D*]

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, June 23, 2011
(Part D)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 23, 2011

[Continuation of proceedings from part C]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (4710)

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in this conversation, having listened to so many of my colleagues illustrate not only the history of workers' rights in Canada but the clear and present danger the government, in its treatment of postal workers, represents to all working people across this country.

This is a proud moment, not only for me personally but for New Democrats across the country and for the four and a half million people who gave us a clear and solid mandate to stand up for working people. I invite the Conservative majority to see what it looks like when there is a stable, solid, dedicated New Democratic opposition when things go wrong. Gone are the days of having the red-flag-waving surrender monkeys sitting in these benches. One "boo" and they were gone to their weekends. We now have an opposition that is dedicated to standing up for what is right in this country.

I am also quite encouraged to join with many of my new colleagues, whom I have been most moved and inspired by. One would think that after many hours of debate, some of our newer members, and maybe some of our older members, might be feeling some fatigue. Yet every time I tune in, and every time I come by the House, not only are we not fatigued, we are gaining in our energy and enthusiasm.

This must be so difficult for my Conservative friends as we sit through this debate. I almost want to put quotation marks around the word debate, because debates are usually judged on the merits of logic and intelligence. This is not a fair fight we have going on here. Time and time again we have Conservative members standing up with so-called questions, which are more like diatribes. They ask why, if the economy is so important, we cannot get these workers back to work. They know full well that the power rests in their own hands. Rather than deal with the situation, the Prime Minister has gone off to barbecues.

If the economy were so important and so sacred, if it was so necessary, given all the quotations from their local citizens, business owners, pensioners, and charitable groups that are worried about not getting their mail, if all of that were so important to the government,

one would think that this government would bother to pick up the phone and tell the head of Canada Post that rather than lock out the workers, which has been done, the corporation should open the doors, get the mail moving, and return to the bargaining table for what has been established, in the highest court of the land, as a proper and fair collective bargaining agreement and arrangement. That has not been established by any measure of Parliament alone. It has been established by the blood, sweat, and tears of working people across this country, year after year, who have fought for the basic right to collectively come together and together rebalance the equation between employer and employee. When the employer does not offer a fair term of work, those people can come together and exercise a democratic right, have a vote, and bargain in what we call good faith.

Does this sound familiar to anybody else? A company comes into a negotiation for a new contract and begins an exaggeration process, a public posture, saying that things are not so good at the corporation. The company says that it is not making much money anymore. Times are tight. Things have changed. People are not, in this case, sending letters anymore. The company begins to amp up the rhetoric and begins to set the stage for what it knows is coming, which is a downgrade of the opportunity it will offer its employees, who are, ironically, the very employees who built the company to its current state of prosperity. The company knows that in its back pocket it has a very powerful and willing accomplice that is waiting for an opportunity as the company sits at the bargaining table, week after week and month after month, not bargaining in good faith or offering a give-and-take situation. It is more a take situation.

The company knows all that time that it has a hotline to the Prime Minister to say that it is going to lock these guys out and to get legislation ready, which is what was done. The legislation was ready before the lockout even started. When the company does not bargain with its employees in good faith, the government can come in and simply force them back to work under terms that are worse than the terms the company just offered.

Does that sound familiar or ironic at all? The reason it sounds familiar is that there is a sad and sordid tale of business relations with working people in this country. Businesses do this time and time again, but it only works if they have a willing accomplice in government.

• (4715)

It only works if they have a government in their pocket that is ready to operate on their behalf and is ready to side with them.

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As the Minister of Labour—that has to be in quotations—said the other day, “...there are in fact 45,000 members of the union and in reality there are 33 million Canadians”, as if somehow those Canada Post workers, when they went to work that day, gave up their rights as Canadian citizens. How dare a labour minister stand in the House of Commons and take one group of Canadians and exclude those people from our society because they are doing what? They are standing up for their rights.

We hear constantly from the government that it somehow believes that it has a majority mandate from Canadians, that 40% of the vote somehow equates to 100% of a tyrannical majority, and that this is justifiable in all cases. I welcome the Conservatives to a new reality. I hope this gives them pause the next time they try this, because believe me, my friends, there will be a next time. There will be another dispute. There will be another transgression the Conservatives do not like and their friends on Bay Street do not feel comfortable with. The Conservatives say, “Never mind. Never worry. We have a majority in Parliament. That gives us 100% of the power. We will just steamroll over any other democratic institutions we feel are in our way”.

Note that this is a pattern with the government. There are the so-called arm's-length watchdogs. My friends laugh, but we all remember the case of the nuclear safety watchdog in this country who raised concerns about a certain reactor nearby. When the government did not like what she was saying, it fired her. Lo and behold, a few months later, the reactor went offline. Why? It was because of the very things she pointed out.

The government must understand that when people stand in opposition to its ideas, that is not a bad thing. Those people do not need to be shut down, cut off, or fired. They do not need to be locked out or forced back to work. Their issues need to be debated and entertained in this place and in the broader dialogue in this country of Canada, because it is through that dialogue that we come to better resolutions.

New Democrats do not believe that we have all the answers, but we know that these guys do not. It is time for them to get a little humility.

It has been clearly said by many of my colleagues that this goes well beyond the particular interests of the workers of CUPW in the Canada Post dispute. This speaks to something much larger. It is a much larger struggle for people around the world and in this country who for many decades did not have any rights. It was okay for employers to send kids to work. It was okay for employees to die while on the job. It was okay for employers not to pay employees a fair wage for a fair day's work. Those things, through struggle and time and sometimes blood, were established as wrong. It was confirmed that an evolved and advanced society understands that for the good of the economy, for goodness' sake, you ought to pay your workers a fair wage. How radical an argument is that?

The NDP is saying that fair pensions are good for the Canadian economy, and the government argues otherwise. The NDP says that a fair wage and safe working conditions are good not just for the workers but for the Canadian economy. The government argues otherwise.

Time and again we see excuses thrown up by the government that suggest that Canadians are not on our side. A friend of mine sent me an e-mail from a person I don't know who lives in my riding that said,

Keep on with the good work on behalf of the workers at Canada Post. This proposed legislation punishes the workers for being locked out while they were exercising their right to strike (in a manner that provided minimal interruption of the postal service)...and strangely enough, rewards the employer for the action of locking their workers out (whereby the employer shut the whole postal service down)... SHAME!

That is absolutely right.

We are getting many e-mails from members in Conservative ridings, which I quite enjoy reading, that say that they have sent their members of Parliament, their voices in this place, much correspondence on this issue saying that they are wrong, but the members will not read them out. The government somehow will not express that there may be dissent in this country over the idea of locking out employees and bringing in a sledgehammer to force them back to work.

I ask my friends on the government benches to be amenable to the changes the NDP is proposing. Be amenable to the idea that it is not always right. Be very much open to the idea that the arrogance that can come with a majority government can be overplayed and overstated. If the Conservatives continue to do that, New Democrats will be in our seats day after day, pushing them back.

● (4720)

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noted the member talked a lot in his speech about a number of issues surrounding the work stoppage. I noticed the one thing missing in his comments was an indication about the Canadian public, about the small businesses, charities and other individuals who are adversely affected by this work stoppage. It is very unfortunate that was lacking in his speech.

I would like to share an email I received from a constituent, a small business owner, who wrote:

“We hope the government will stand up for Canadian small business owners and ensure that Canada Post, a national mail service meant to serve the Canadian public, needs to go back to work. Our business has dropped immensely since even the rotating strikes, and the uncertainty of delivery service is impacting small business across Canada in different ways. I appreciate your time and hope again that you will take this message to Ottawa and to Canada Post”.

These are the kinds of emails I am receiving. It is affecting businesses in this country. It is affecting individuals. It is having a detrimental effect. This government is trying to put them back to work so we can see the effect on the Canadian public stopped.

We are all here in this place. We should all be at our homes and with our constituents, visiting with them at meetings and functions over the course of this weekend where we would be hearing these kinds of things from constituents. A number of individuals contacted me in the last couple of days about those issues. They say the NDP members are acting like a bunch of pirates holding Canadians hostage.

I would ask—

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Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I was going to suggest that we check the sound equipment here because in fact I did mention charities and businesses were suffering from the lack of postal services in this country. I will then suggest that my exuberance hopefully carried my voice across to where the hon. member is sitting.

I would ask the member to do the following, because he has the power to do this, to walk five rows to his boss and tell him to take the locks off of Canada Post, get the mail moving for all those charities, small businesses and constituents he claims to care about because we know where the decision lies here.

We know that the Prime Minister appointed the fellow at Canada Post, who is doing this right now. The hon. member knows it was the head of Canada Post who locked the employees out and stopped the mail service entirely. We know where the decision lies for the government to have a little humility, understand there is reason for this debate, that the government does not have it perfect and the bill before Parliament is not exactly correct in every single syllable, period and comma. The government should put a little water in its wine, realize it is wrong in this case, step off the cliff and get the posties back to work.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my thoughts tonight are about our asset, Canada Post Corporation. The main asset of this corporation is its employees, the people who work there. That is the main asset that belongs to the people of Canada.

Is the government taking care of this asset? Is the government respecting this asset? Is the government taking the steps to ensure this asset, these human beings, are well protected and covered in the work they are doing? The profit from the company for the Government of Canada is fairly large and works out to about \$6,000 an employee. Why is the government treating these employees in this fashion when they are the main asset of our great corporation?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, conveniently the Conservatives would very much like to forget the human face in this conversation. It is somewhat ironic the government says that somehow these workers are the problem and yet postal services from around the globe come to Canada to study the efficiencies and the incredible steps that this postal service has made, year after year.

It also seems somehow that underneath all of this conversation and all of this debate lies an ideology within government that an entire institution can be privatized through starving it, that if it is driven deep enough into the ground so that people start to call out for something else, one would accomplish another thing that had been hoped for in the first place, which is a loathing within the current government for crown corporation and institutions in general. There is the idea that the government has a role to play in any of these places and that the government can do anything well.

It is strange and ironic to have a government-loathing government, but that is exactly what we have here with the Conservatives. They detest the idea and do not like the nature of this. The government

rebels very much even at the idea of debate and fair discussion here in Parliament, but New Democrats live on this stuff.

● (4725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night, at the end of his eloquent speech about workers' rights, the leader of the opposition proposed that we take a break in our consideration of the draconian legislation proposed by the Conservative government. That proposal took the form of a motion to postpone consideration of the bill for six months.

For several hours now, many of our colleagues on both sides of the House, either in their speeches or in their questions and comments, have contributed to our consideration of the advisability of postponing passage of this horrible and counterproductive bill. I myself believe more than ever that we must postpone all consideration of it, for the numerous reasons cited by all of our colleagues.

It is in fact the most enormous bad faith for the government to claim that it has to force the workers back to work when it is this very government, acting through a crown corporation, that is preventing them from working and putting them on lockout.

Apart from the bad faith that has characterized the approach taken by the Conservative government since the outset of the dispute, it is essential that we note the consistent manner in which the courts have sanctioned and penalized the bad faith and misconduct of this same Conservative government in labour relations cases.

The most recent example is a decision handed down only two days ago by the Federal Court, and in a moment I will read several passages from it. The case involved a situation very similar to the one before us tonight. It did not involve postal employees; rather, it was all members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The case is entitled Robert Meredith and Brian Roach, representing all members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, v. the Attorney General of Canada. The decision was given on June 21, 2011, by the Federal Court. Justice Heneghan wrote the decision.

In that case, we are reminded that in late December 2008, the Conservative government engaged in a series of fraudulent manoeuvres that it is difficult to distinguish from the situation before us tonight. This same government had legislated to flout the process provided by the legislation, and imposed its own bill to cut back the terms of employment that had in fact been legally agreed to with RCMP members. One crucial point is that the courts found that what the Conservative government had done, in terms of labour relations, was illegal under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is a fundamental law.

Pages 27 to 29 of the judgment specifically are where we find the references that are most relevant to our work tonight. For those who are interested, I will note that the passages I am about to read are taken from paragraphs 86, 89 and 92 of this very recent judgment, as I mentioned. The judge reviews the terms of what the Conservative government tried to withdraw, by flouting the rights of the members of the RCMP, and concludes as follows, and I am going to read it in English since the judgment is written in that language.

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[English]

So the Treasury Board withdrew the issue from consideration of the entity that it had created and refused to negotiate on a good-faith basis.

I repeat, “refused to negotiate on a good-faith basis”. That is the pattern of this Conservative government.

It continues: “The unilateral cancellation of a previous agreement also constitutes interference with subsection 2(d) rights”.

Now those section 2(d) rights are, in particular, these.

• (4730)

[Translation]

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:
 - (d) freedom of association.

For those who follow these issues, I note that this is referring in particular to two leading cases, two decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada: Health Services and Support and Fraser.

But this very recent decision sets a precedent. The Federal Court of Canada has assigned blame to this government and ruled against it. So this is a pattern of behaviour that we are seeing here tonight.

A little farther on, the judge writes:

[English]

The financial impact of the ERA was not relevant. In both B.C. Health Services and Fraser the Supreme Court focused not on the significance of the financial impact of the legislation, but of the significance of the impact of the interference on the bargaining process.

Finally, in paragraph 92, the Treasury Board's decision in the ERA made it effectively impossible for the pay council, that was the entity that had been created, to make representations on behalf of the members of the RCMP and have those representations, wait for it, here it comes again, considered in good faith. The judge goes on to say that in her opinion this is a substantial interference which constitutes a violation of section 2(d) of the charter.

That is repeat behaviour. That is putting oneself above the law.

[Translation]

It is sometimes said, in common language, that they think they know best. That is what the Conservatives think. They believe they can be the judges, they can be the jury, and they can also be executioners. They show contempt for the most fundamental laws. But as my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley put it so well just now, therein lies the rub; the Minister of Labour let the cat out of the bag when she said, as she did yesterday, that there are 50,000 postal workers on one side and 33 million Canadians on the other. I have news for her.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms applies to all citizens of Canada, including postal workers. We already knew whom and what we were dealing with when this Conservative government became the first government in the history of the British Commonwealth to be thrown out for breaking all the rules and being in contempt of the institutions of this Parliament: the right of parliamentarians to have fiscal and financial information before making decisions, the right to

be given documents relating to foreign affairs, our rights to carry out the fundamental democratic mandate we were given when we were elected to this place.

Tonight, we are considering a bill that they are trying to persuade people is essential to force the workers back to work, hoping that the public would be so easily duped that they would forget they are the ones who have prevented and continue to prevent the workers from doing their jobs. On this side, we will support the motion presented yesterday by the leader of the opposition. We believe it is obvious that this bill, draconian or worse as it is, must not be considered, particularly given that it is clear from the decision handed down by the Federal Court of Canada this week, again, that behaviour that is contrary to the basic rules proves the government's bad faith. Yesterday, in fact, I witnessed this bad faith for myself. To be so presumptuous as to say that the workers are on strike, when they are the ones who have stopped them from working, defies all comprehension.

On this side, we will stand up, unanimous in our condemnation of this pattern of behaviour that flouts human rights in general and the rights of workers in particular.

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many times in the debate tonight New Democrats have talked about the possibility of making amendments to the bill. They have taken issue with, particularly, the wage increases that are legislated in the bill. They clearly do not like what the government has chosen. They do not like what Canada Post has put on the table.

However, two NDP members have mused openly tonight about what they think should be the wage increases. The member for York South—Weston thought that 11.5% over four years was probably a fair deal. The member for Trinity—Spadina mused that 3.3% a year for four years would be a fair deal.

Would the member confirm that the NDP members will be amending to increase the wage aspects either somewhere between 11.5% and 13.2% over four years?

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, good faith means quoting what people have said in the House properly. That is a pure fabrication and a twisted way of reporting what has been said by people here. On our side, we think the best thing to do, as I said at the beginning of my speech tonight, is to postpone all consideration of this draconian, horrible bill, this bill that is on its face contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for six months.

I have had the opportunity to speak with the member for Essex, who used to be an auto worker. He knows, as do I, that it was thanks to his union and to bargaining, in accordance with the legislation and his terms of employment, that he was able, in those days, to secure adequate wages and acceptable terms so he could raise his family. Why does he want to take those same benefits away from the postal workers?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, less than two weeks ago, in an interview during the Conservative convention, Stephen Taylor asked the Minister of Labour whether there would be special legislation. The Minister said there would not be because it was too soon.

[English]

“The two parties have to make real hard efforts to get a deal themselves”. Continuing, she said, “It’s about pensions, it’s about disabilities, so it is important issues and we have to have serious discussions around them”.

[Translation]

Does the hon. member think that the government took that seriously, or is the government more concerned about its ideology, which amounts to violating workers’ rights, regardless of the result for the economy?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I would venture to say that it is somewhat of both, but there is a third factor. Above all, the Conservatives want their Reform Party base to see that they are finally “delivering the goods”, bringing good news for the right wing in Canada.

Our right wing in Canada has a little problem of credibility. The Conservatives are the worst public administrators in the history of Canada. The biggest deficit in the history of Canada until this Conservative government arrived on the scene belonged to the last Conservative government. We are in the process of leaving enormous debts for future generations, while inflation has been running at about 2% per year since they came to office five and a half years ago. There has been a constant increase in spending, on the order of 6 to 7% per year. This means that their spending increases, for which they are unable to show anything concrete in return, are running at 300% higher than the rate of inflation. That is called negligence, mismanagement and incompetence.

● (4740)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

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And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

● (4815)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 25)

YEAS

Members

Ashton	Aubin
Ayala	Bellavance
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brosseau	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Donnelly
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Giguère	Godin
Gravelle	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Larose
Laverdière	Layton
Liu	Mai
Mathysen	May
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Nantel	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Ravignat
Raynault	Rousseau
Sandhu	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Toone
Tremblay— 73	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bezan	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Coderre
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Easter	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Fry	Galipeau

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Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauzon	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriote	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 160

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me. I can assure you that my comments will be brief. Brevity is the key here.

We have seen over the last 27 or 28 hours an attempt by the NDP opposition to obfuscate and delay this very important piece of legislation. As a result of its delaying tactics, millions of hard-working Canadians are concerned about their financial futures. In fact, they are concerned to the point that many seniors and many small business people have contacted us continuously over the last 27 hours imploring us to get this legislation passed.

We have a responsibility to protect those Canadians. We have a responsibility to protect the Canadian economy. We cannot afford any more undue delays.

Therefore, in order to expedite this legislation, I move:

That this question be now put.

• (4820)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise to speak on C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services.

As has been pointed out many times throughout this debate, this situation was created by the government and its crown corporation Canada Post. It was not created by the members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Now we have before us a bill that makes a complete mockery of the hard-fought democratic rights of workers in this country. I would like to make it absolutely clear one more time that I support the right to organize, the right to free collective bargaining, and the right to strike. When workers take a risk and stand up to be counted on issues like fair wages, working conditions, and pensions, all Canadians benefit.

This situation is the government's own doing. They interfered in a legal labour dispute. The dispute was having minimal impact on the delivery of mail from coast to coast until the Minister of Labour interfered.

After serving their 72 hours' notice, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers initiated limited rotating strikes. They did this because they knew it would send a message to the employer that they wanted to get serious at the bargaining table. At the same time, the rotating strikes minimized inconveniences to Canadians who rely on postal service across our country.

That is how the process works. The ability to withdraw their labour is the power that employees bring to the bargaining table. It is the counterweight to the tremendous power that the employer holds in the negotiating process.

When the Minister of Labour then intervened and said if mail service was interrupted she would take action, she sent a clear signal to Canada Post that all the corporation had to do was stop the mail from being delivered and she would give them the legislation they were waiting for. That very evening they locked out the hard-working members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and stopped disrupting mail service in its entirety.

It is outrageous. As the owner of Canada Post, the government should have told management to go back to the table and negotiate a lasting resolution to this dispute. Instead, the Conservatives introduced this draconian bill that arbitrarily imposes a settlement that is, unbelievably, less than what Canada Post was offering.

I want to quote an editorial from the *Globe and Mail* from June 15, 2011, about the effects of imposed settlements on labour relations. It said:

The decision to legislate will not make for a better deal between the companies and their workers. It will mean a sacrifice of labour peace in the longer run. And it will not solve the structural problems affecting either company or its bargaining units—pensions at Air Canada; pensions, and relevance, at Canada Post. The federal government should hold its fire.

I could not agree more. The government should have held its fire. It should have waited and let the negotiations work.

Let us be honest with ourselves and with all Canadians about what this lockout and this rollback of hard-earned wages and benefits are about. They are all about money for the government.

On June 10, 2011, the labour minister was chosen to sit on a committee that is mandated with finding savings in Ottawa to the tune of \$4 billion per year. Where do they expect to find all those savings? On the backs of public servants, of course.

Four days after being appointed to this review committee, the minister introduced a back-to-work bill that legislates wage increases that are even lower than those proposed by Canada Post in negotiations. It was not even a strike. It was a lockout.

Why did the minister not just introduce a bill that ordered Canada Post to unlock the doors and let the union continue its responsible job action of rotating strikes that had minimum impact on Canadians?

Even better, why not do as the union had offered: let them go back to work while negotiations continued? It is because the minister saw an opportunity to take advantage of the postal workers and score some points with the Prime Minister by legislating rollbacks. The wage piece alone in this bill represents \$35 million from postal workers and their families.

Canada Post corporation generated \$7.3 billion of revenues in 2009. It has remained profitable for 15 consecutive years. In the last 10 years alone it paid the Government of Canada almost \$400 million in income taxes and another \$350 million in dividends. Clearly the government wants even more.

• (4825)

Interventions of this type are particularly disturbing because not only do they deny workers their fundamental rights, but they send a message to the management in all sectors that serious negotiations are not necessary; the government will simply intervene and force employees back to work.

Workers' rights are enshrined in our Constitution, but this so-called law and order government continuously ignores Canadian laws and makes workers pay the price. In the Conservatives' Canada, the rights of workers are always secondary to the rights of corporations.

I cannot help but think of a similar situation in my hometown of Hamilton. At home, it is the courageous men and women of Steelworkers Local 1005 who are paying the price for the government's corporate ideology as we speak. Here is what happened in Hamilton. The Conservative government approved the foreign takeover of Stelco by U.S. Steel, a takeover that has devastated my hometown and left 900 workers, as well as more than 9,000 pensioners, fearing for their futures.

Let me remind members in the House of the details. U.S. Steel bought Stelco in 2007. The purchase included both Hilton Works in Hamilton and Lake Erie Works in Nanticoke. The Investment Canada Act required U.S. Steel to demonstrate that its investment would provide a net benefit to Canada. In order to do that, U.S. Steel made commitments with regard to job creation, production levels, and domestic investment. Once those commitments were purportedly secured, the federal government signed an agreement that

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committed U.S. Steel to 31 different promises. U.S. Steel started up its operations in 2007, but it was just a year later that the company began laying off its workers.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): In 2009 the government started to ask questions, and U.S. Steel responded with a number of different—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

I would ask all hon. members to keep their voices down. The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain has the floor and it is difficult to hear.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, in 2009 the government started to ask questions, and U.S. Steel responded with a number of different reasons why it should be excused from meeting its previously agreed to commitments. For once, the government did not buy the excuses and initiated court action in July of 2009.

By taking U.S. Steel to court, the federal government acknowledged that it does have a legal duty to ensure that foreign investments provide a net benefit to Canada, and therefore the government does have a role to play in the dispute. Now, production is all but shut down completely, and just like the members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, steel workers in Hamilton are now locked out. They are both fighting for fair wages, decent working conditions, benefits, and a defined pension plan. But unlike at Canada Post, the government is completely washing its hands of the lockout in Hamilton. So where is the real similarity between what is happening at Canada Post and at U.S. Steel? Well, this government is picking winners and losers and the price is being paid by workers in our country.

I am proud that union members are not taking that lying down. They are taking a stand for themselves and for future generations. They are fighting against the corporate impulse to race to the bottom, whatever the costs may be, and I am proud to stand with them in that battle.

This is about the future of work for our children and grandchildren, who deserve to earn a decent wage and earn decent pensions after a lifetime of work. Our parents and grandparents were proud to be part of the struggle for our future. Now it is our turn. I urge all members of the House to stand united against this heavy-handed bill for all workers and for future generations.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be here tonight.

I just wanted to make a comment about the vote. Fifteen minutes ago we stood and had a vote in the House, and if my addition is right, I think there were only 71 NDP members who were here to vote on the motion. I am just wondering if the member could tell us, after 27 hours of filibustering—

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• (4830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order.

The member knows that he cannot refer to who is or is not here. I appreciate that this is in reference to the vote, but I would ask the member to be cautious in terms of referring to who is or is not in the chamber.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I would never talk about individuals either being here or absent from their post, but I think the vote was 71 members of the NDP out of 103 who did choose to vote against the bill.

I would like to ask the chief opposition whip, who is actually in charge of making sure her members are here to vote, why, after 27 hours of filibustering, they had the kinds of numbers show up that they did. Is it because those folks do not want to do their work, or is it because they object to the extreme position taken by the party?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that NDP members are solidly united in opposition to this legislation.

As you can appreciate, Mr. Speaker, if you have a commitment to allow both sides to arrive at a negotiated settlement, it actually helps to occasionally talk to some of the other parties.

What New Democrats in this House are doing from coast to coast is connecting with the locals of CUPW in their ridings and talking to them about what is at stake in this dispute so their stories can be brought to this House. That is what this place is about. We are representing them in this House, and our members are taking every opportunity to have those conversations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair appreciates all the passion that members are bringing to this debate, but if the Chair cannot hear the member, I presume that other members cannot hear them.

We will continue with questions and comments. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the onset of the debate, the leader of the Liberal Party talked about the importance of amending this legislation.

This is an issue of critical importance, and we look to the government to demonstrate goodwill in terms of the whole collective bargaining process. It is something that we believe not only the workers but even the corporation should have a right to. It is something that this legislation is taking away.

We are all so anxious to hear about the possible amendments the New Democrats might have. I asked a question of one member who indicated that they have already shared some of those amendments with the Conservative government.

Is the NDP in a position to be more transparent and share those amendments with the viewing public and in fact all members of this chamber at this time?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the appropriate time for us to bring amendments forward is of course in committee of the whole, and we will be doing that.

It is a bit ironic that the member is talking about how the Liberals are all committed to bringing forward amendments and taking this

process seriously when in fact what just happened is that the Liberals voted in support of the government.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the members who have been here for a while should remember a certain Nisga'a debate we had in this House of Commons. There were 478 amendments brought by the Reform Party of Canada, which delayed this House for over 64 hours. I remember it very clearly. The members of that party said it was their democratic right to be able to do that. I wonder why they are not honouring the democratic right of the NDP to do something to help workers in this country.

I have a question for the hon. member. We have a new cabinet minister in the country now. It is a misnomer to call her the Minister of Labour, as she is now known as the Minister of Management. I wonder if my hon. colleague could tell us why the Prime Minister would change such an important portfolio.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, of course that question is very apropos, because as I said in my speech, this is all about making sure that the government's coffers are enriched on the backs of workers.

Canada Post has been paying dividends and income tax to the government. The more Canada Post can save, the richer the coffers of the government. It is completely outrageous that we are paying down the biggest deficit in Canadian history, which was accumulated by the Conservative government right across from us, and Canada Post workers are being asked to pay down that deficit. It is completely outrageous.

I agree with the member. The Minister for Management needs to take responsibility for her actions. I would encourage her to come back, become the Minister of Labour, and actually help negotiate a settlement to the labour dispute.

• (4835)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you have observed that this is June 25. You have observed that as a Quebecker, I am proud: I have not apologized like the NDP members who showed disrespect for Quebeckers and French Canadians by sitting in the House of Commons on June 24. I thought the celebrations for this June 24 were extraordinary. Mostly, I spent a lot of time listening to my constituents. That is one of the reasons I am proud today that I voted as I did, to move to second reading, and if there are amendments, to get to them.

One thing is certain: first, people want workers to have rights and want those rights to be respected. In Quebec, people want a negotiated agreement to be possible. What they do not want, for example, is for us to be dogmatic and filibuster for hours and hours when we know very well that the longer we wait, the more harm is going to be done to the postal workers and the public. Today, many in the public are sick of this. That is why there has to be some balance. When the Conservative government is dogmatic and the NDP is dogmatic, everyone loses. That is why the House should sit in committee of the whole post-haste so that amendments can be moved and solutions to the problem found.

Government Orders

I am noticing a lot of talking. We are in a parliament here. Everyone is standing up and talking. I would like to have a bit of order so we can hear. Or maybe you do not understand my French when I speak; that is probably what it is.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, hon. members are talking when I am talking. Is it okay? You are asking for decorum. I would ask you to please make them shut up so we can talk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order.

The chair would agree with the member for Bourassa. There is a dull roar in the place. I would ask all hon. members to give the hon. member for Bourassa all of the respect he deserves.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I do think it is unfortunate that you understood me better in English than in French. I am going to have to say nicer things in English next time.

One thing is certain: this is a bad bill. The Conservatives keep talking about a strike. It is not a strike, it is a lockout. Clearly the other side of the House does not respect the rights of workers, it does not accept that there is a right of association, and it does not want a negotiated agreement. A rotating strike is strictly a pressure tactic. It is the management of Canada Post that decided to cut mail delivery back from five days to three and then ordered the lockout. Then, as if by coincidence, the Minister of Labour wanted to impose legislation.

The Liberal government had to enact a back-to-work bill in the past, but at that time it was enacted after a general strike that had lasted two weeks. It was an essential service at the time. It must be understood that 14 years ago there was no Internet as there is today and there was no email and no ability to make payments electronically. The situation had therefore caused a huge number of problems, both for small and medium-sized businesses and for seniors, who wanted to get their mail. Today it is less serious, but a solution will still have to be found.

Certainly we hope to have a settlement and an agreement between management and the employees and we want workers' rights to be respected, but we also have to protect the public. The government has a majority. I understand that like us, the opposition is rising and presenting its views, but too much systematic obstruction is as bad as not enough. I will say to everyone who supports this opposition that when we stretch the elastic too far, it snaps back and hits us in the face. People are going to be thinking this is not right. That is the difference between dogmatism and pragmatism.

From the outset, we have said that if amendments were made to this bill, we could perhaps work to find a solution. It is unthinkable to tie the hands of an arbitrator, to require the arbitrator, as the bill specifies, to take either the side of the employer or the side of the workers. If that is the way in which we are going to proceed, we may well ask ourselves what arbitration is. Is it just choosing one side over the other?

Of course, we know full well how arbitrators work. They must be given every ability to work with both parties to reach a compromise. Arbitrators represent neither the union nor the employer. That is why

we cannot pass legislation that will tie an arbitrator's hands. That is unacceptable.

It is true that salary provisions were included in the bill in the past. But in the current negotiations between the employer and the workers, Canada Post had proposed a salary scale. Why does this bill propose lesser amounts? If the minister is already on the side of management, why did she include in the bill amounts less than Canada Post had proposed?

For all these reasons, we are voting against this bill. But we look forward to the House resolving into committee of the whole in order for us to discuss whether it is possible to come to an agreement.

We are voting against the six-month hoist because the lockout continues. There is no agreement between the employer and the union, yet we are telling the workers that we are going to wait another six months. What are we going to tell Canadians for all that time? This is why we have to find a compromise, and this is why the Liberal Party is the pragmatic party. We are practical people, and we feel that we must find a better way than to hold up Parliament.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst is waving at me. I suppose he is pleased to see me. So I will wave back. Of course, we can work to protect the interests of workers, but a filibuster just wastes time. We have just spent 35 hours on second reading. If we want to spend another 35, we can and they are going to, but they are in no way serving the workers or serving Canadians. That is why we have to find solutions together. As their slogan says, “Travaillons ensemble”. Let us work together.

● (4840)

[*English*]

Let us find a way together, during the committee of the whole, to see if there is a capacity for some amendments.

Of course I do not have a lot of trust in the government, for obvious reasons. However, I trust in people, and I believe that people deserve a service.

At the same time I want to ensure that people realize the workers are also Canadians. When I asked a question to the minister, she said she prefers to protect 33 million people rather than 45,000 workers. These 45,000 workers are Canadians, so I do not know why we have two tiers. Was she saying there are two kinds of citizens?

[*Translation*]

We must find a pragmatic solution, but night after night of filibustering is not the way to find a solution.

People are saying that there was an election. There is a majority government. We can urge, we can stall, but if we truly want to work together, we must get together in committee of the whole to propose amendments.

People were mad about this filibuster because June 24 is Quebec's national holiday. People were asking why Parliament avoided sitting on a Friday because of the NDP and Conservative Party conventions, but Quebec's national holiday was not important. Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day for French Canadians is not important. We can sit that day.

Government Orders

We must be responsible. We can exert pressure and discuss at length, but there must be an outcome. At the end of the day, we need to serve the public. We can find a compromise, a balanced solution. I hope that we will be able to discuss possible amendments.

• (4845)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, the member for Bourassa. This is the same question that his colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt asked in the House. I also asked the NDP the same thing. I think it is very important that we get an answer.

[*English*]

In this place we talk a lot. That's all we do in this place. It's important to match our talk with action.

We never got an answer about this very important question. The NDP talks a lot about the rights of workers, but as I understand it their own local 232 still doesn't have a collective bargaining agreement. This has been years in the making. As a result, many new hires in the OLO and other parts of the New Democratic caucus are being made as management in order to avoid the seniority that comes with being part of a local.

My question to the member is when will the NDP put in place a collective bargaining agreement for some staff and “walk the walk” as they “talk the talk”?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, the NDP will have to live with its own contradictions and will resolve its problems. What I am interested in today, at 12:45 in the morning, is not showing hyper-partisanship, but finding a solution so that we can first respect the collective constitutional rights recognized by the Supreme Court. And then Ms. Mailloux in my riding can receive her mail. I told Ms. Mailloux that it was a lockout that made no sense, but that I was going to make sure that she got her mail. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. At some point, we must realize that too much is just as bad as not enough.

I would like us to stop with the gobbledygook and set aside partisanship so that we can find a solution. We can stretch things out. The members just have to say the same thing all the time. They have been repeating the same thing for 36 hours. We know the arguments. They are always saying the same thing. It sounds good. The members from Quebec all apologized because they were unable to take part in Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, but they are still making the same arguments.

Can we move on? Let us bring forward amendments, and we will work hard. We want to work so that there is service, but we want the workers to be respected as well.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague, the member for Bourassa, how he can play petty politics by saying that it is the NDP's fault we were unable to attend Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day festivities. Our leader moved a motion so that we could take a break for Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day and return to our families. The Bloc Québécois also moved a motion on that. But both times, the Conservative government refused to let us go.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue must also know that before there are motions, there is Twitter. Some journalists have been tweeting everything we have been saying from the beginning. I said the same thing.

It is a collective problem. The Bloc started things off and moved the first motion. I believe the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour moved the motion. That is not petty politics; that is a fact. I heard a former nurse say that she has had to work on June 24 in the past and I commend her. We need to be consistent, as politicians and as members of Parliament. A resolution was passed in the House to recognize Quebec as a nation. So, if we can suspend for a political convention—which I understand, for we have all done it—we can also respect Quebecers, French Canadians, as a nation. So members felt that we should not sit on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, Quebec's national holiday. Both sides are to blame.

• (4850)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is actually June 25, but I will not apologize for not being in my riding to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. However, I would like to wish all Quebecers a wonderful national holiday. I am with them in spirit. I am so proud to be a Quebecker. Let us celebrate our culture and our beautiful language.

Now, to get back to the subject, namely, Bill C-6. I heard the speeches given by my hon. colleagues across the floor. I heard them say repeatedly that the complete shutdown of postal services is hurting the Canadian economy and SMEs and that this must absolutely be resolved. I understand that, because it is completely legitimate.

However, they forgot to mention one important detail in their speeches. The employees of Canada Post never called a general strike. They did not want to stop delivering the mail. Instead, they decided to stage rotating strikes, so that Canadians would still receive their mail. It was the employer, Canada Post, that decided to impose a lockout and shut down mail delivery.

It is even more shocking to see this government try to then blame the workers and the NDP to justify its policy. The employees want to return to work and we know that Canada Post never would have imposed a lockout without the approval of the government and the Minister of Labour, who is currently not here.

The shutdown of mail delivery is affecting the economy. The government has to end the lockout. I am truly shocked to see the government so readily blame every party except his own.

Yesterday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture said that millions of Canadians and small and medium-sized businesses were suffering because of the lockout and that the voters elected the Conservatives, who now have to represent the voters' interests. Are they forgetting that the Canada Post workers also voted for us? Are they forgetting that the workers' families and friends are counting on us? They too voted for us. Are they forgetting that their children are also counting on us? Those Canadians also have the right to have their interests represented in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

We are not talking about a right that is part of some act or regulation. We are talking about a right that is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a fundamental human right that is the key to balancing the power relationship between the employees and the employer, which already has a position of strength over its employees.

Why is the government so bent on denigrating the workers and bolstering that position? This disrupts the balance of the whole structure in the workplace. A society without labour rights, without collective bargaining, is not a free and democratic society. Talk to the many political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in countries condemned by Amnesty International because those countries do not respect these fundamental rights.

Thousands of activists have been imprisoned after devoting their lives to defending labour rights and fighting for the workers in their country. I have a good example. Mansour Ossanlou, president of the bus workers' union in Tehran, spent his whole life standing up for workers' rights. He is now in jail in his country, being tortured.

I know that the hon. members opposite will say that we are not in Iran here. I would tell them that indeed, in Canada, workers have the right to negotiate for better working conditions. They have the right to negotiate for better wages and stable pensions to avoid spending their retirement in poverty.

How dare the government talk about freedom and democracy when it now wants to use its majority—which represents only 40% of Canadians—to force workers to return to work for wages reduced by \$875 over four years and pensions that are less stable, with less vacation, less sick leave and fewer benefits? How dare the government use the economic recovery to justify these major cuts?

• (4855)

How can people living in uncertainty and with lower wages contribute to Canada's economic recovery? That makes no sense.

The young people of my generation are getting a terrible message. They are being told that they will not have good wages, good pensions, good benefits or good working conditions, and above all, that they will not have the right to negotiate for better conditions.

Canada Post, as a crown corporation, is well aware that it is not in its interest to negotiate with the employees because the government will take its side. The government will legislate in its favour. That is exactly why today, negotiations have come to a standstill. That is also why we are here today, since the employees have no other choice. We are their only way out in terms of defending their rights. In this situation, the government is not acting in good faith by offering less than what Canada Post had offered its own employees.

Canada Post employees are still mobilized in my riding. Despite the rain the day before yesterday, there were about 30 employees picketing in front of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Boulevard post office in Pointe-aux-Trembles. The vast majority of motorists taking that route showed their support by honking their horns or waving. Contrary to what the government is trying to make Canadians believe, the majority of people understand the reasons that pushed the Canada Post employees to go on a rotating strike, however they do not understand why this government locked the workers out.

A large number of constituents in my riding work in factories, small workshops and the construction sector. They are unionized workers who understand the importance of having good, safe working conditions. They sympathize therefore with the Canada Post mail carriers and employees whose mail preparation procedure will be modified.

The Canada Post Corporation has already started to change the mail assembly procedure. Some mail carriers in Laval now have to prepare their mail while they walk. The mail carriers will now be required to wear two mail pouches, one on each side of their body. Regardless of the rain, wind, hail, or snow, mail carriers tread the sidewalks with loads of tens of pounds, sometimes loads of up to 30 pounds. How will they be able to regain their balance in a wet staircase or on an icy sidewalk if they are carrying mail pouches hanging from each side of their body?

The number of on the job accidents will increase and these accidents will become more serious. Furthermore, the government wants to cut mail carriers' benefits and salaries. What will be the impact of this measure in areas with a lot of exterior staircases, as is the case in Tétreaultville, located in the western part of my riding?

“The worst negotiated agreement is better than the best imposed agreement,” according to a popular adage among collective labour contract negotiators.

In keeping with their right-wing ideas, the Conservatives want to punish workers who believe in labour relations laws and collective bargaining, and have resorted to entirely legal and legitimate job action in the form of rotating strikes. This government argues that the scale it wants to impose is the same as for federal government public servants. In addition to making a mockery of working conditions, the government has given an arbitrator—who will be intervening in relation to a particular issue—a mandate with no real flexibility. Given the constraints placed upon the arbitrator, his decision is almost predictable.

A responsible government only uses special back-to-work legislation as a last resort. This government from the new right wants things its way and is willing to scare government workers in the process. The special legislation will set a precedent in the history of labour relations despite there being no general strike, just a government-imposed lockout.

For the residents of Pointe-de-l'Île, Quebec and Canada, democracy is not simply about voting in general elections; it is something they experience daily, in the workplace. Unionized workers have the right to bargain and to organize, but also the right to engage in job action.

I was disgusted today to hear my government colleagues say that we have no respect for Canadians and SMEs, and that we do not care about Canada's best interests. I will not allow this government to blame us for its undemocratic practices, driven by the economic interests of companies and employers. I will not allow this government to try and tell Canadians that the NDP is not there for them. We are here not only for the workers at Canada Post, but for all Canadians.

Government Orders

• (4900)

We are here for them, for their families and their children.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two comments—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for some time now, the Conservatives have been acting very poorly in the House. I urge you as Speaker to control the Conservative members who are lacking respect in this Parliament.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is not a point of order. I would agree that there has been a lot more noise in the last few minutes, but I have been monitoring the debate in this place.

The hon. Minister of State for Science and Technology and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I want to make two comments on the member's speech.

One, she mentioned motorists honking at the strike initiative. She assumed the honking was in favour of the strikers. I suspect it was more likely small business owners going to work, simply honking at the strikers and saying, "Get the hell out of the way; I want to go to work".

The other thing is that I have emails from postal workers who tell me they were not allowed to vote by their union. They are disappointed with that and are demanding that the union allow them to vote on what they thought was a very good deal.

I would like to know from the member: How undemocratic is that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, it is surely not as undemocratic as what this government is doing today in this House.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing that the postal workers did not have a chance to vote on subsequent offers and yet they gave their union a 94.5% mandate to strike. The party opposite keeps insisting that was not enough.

Does the Conservative Party go to the electorate and have an election every time it introduces a new piece of legislation? Would that analogy not be comparable to the kind of nonsense the Conservatives are spouting about a strike mandate?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, we are here because we want to stand up on behalf of citizens against this bill that the government is trying to pass. They tried to blame us and told us that if we wanted to attend Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day celebrations in our ridings, we simply had to vote for a bill right away, without debating it. I do not think

that is how Canadians want us to do politics. That is why we are here today and why we will stay here until the government agrees to debate the amendments we want to propose.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that the member for Bourassa set the tone for this next round of debate. You will notice that with the way I speak, things will calm down a bit, we will take a deep breath and bring the debate back down to earth.

Does the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île share my concerns about the situation? I have been a negotiator and a union president. There is some give and take in any negotiation. But as it stands, the bill introduced by the Conservative government is so good for the employer and for the Canada Post Corporation that, even if there are some backroom deals—negotiations must take place, or at least I hope—I think that the employer side has no interest in moving and does not want to move, simply because the government handed it working conditions on a silver platter that clearly put the workers at a disadvantage.

Does she see the same problem I do in what went on on the government side when it introduced this bill that is unfair to the workers?

• (4905)

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that excellent question. There is no need for me to add anything about the government and the head of this crown corporation. We know very well that the corporation did not impose a lockout without the government's agreement. If that were not enough, it dares to offer inferior working conditions, lower wages and, above all, a wage increase that is less than inflation and less than the increase in the cost of living.

As I said in my remarks, it is normal to have no negotiations going on. The government tells us that it tried and tried again. No, it did not try; it just took the side of Canada Post, let it break off the negotiations and let the workers take the blame. We here have all agreed that it is a precedent. From now on, no employer—CBC/Radio-Canada or any other—will ever want to negotiate their collective agreements to a conclusion because they know that the government, which we are unfortunately going to have for four years, will be in their camp.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to be the next speaker. We are now into debate on the principles of Bill C-6 and I thought maybe some members on the other side who have so much to say in the question and comment period would like to stand up and explain the principles and philosophy behind the bill—

Hon. Denis Coderre: Is the member saying he does not have any principles?

Mr. Randall Garrison: —and defend what the government has brought forward in the House of Commons.

There have been some wild charges by the other side about what motivates New Democrats, what motivates trade unionists, so I am going to start by talking—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would ask all hon. members to refrain from yelling in the House. There are three or four members who continually interrupt.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my remarks on the debate in principle on Bill C-6 by talking about some of the motivations that lie behind my opposition to the bill.

I will do that by talking a little bit about what a great Canadian did when confronted with a society that was becoming increasingly unequal and was becoming a society where there was great hardship among ordinary working people. That Canadian was J.S. Woodsworth. He began his working life as a young minister. His motivation was not Marxism. It was not labour bosses. It was his great Christian faith which said that he should reach out to his brothers and sisters and his community and to help those in need.

When he was confronted with the depression that confronted all Canadians returning from World War I and the great deal of hardship, he got caught up in the response of workers in Canada, which led to the Winnipeg General Strike. His conclusion from that was that government, in order to prevent this kind of hardship in our society and in order to bring people together, had to step in and create social programs and labour policies that would lead to a more just and equal Canadian society. He ran for Parliament and sat as the member for Winnipeg North Centre from 1921 until his death in 1942.

His philosophy is one that can guide me in my response to Bill C-6. Some of the key issues raised in the bill are the issue of a living wage and the issue of intergenerational equity. Woodsworth's philosophy was very well expressed in what is known as the Woodsworth grace, and, with the House's indulgence, I will read that grace. It states:

We are thankful for these and all the good things of life. We recognize that they are a part of our common heritage and come to us through the efforts of our brothers and sisters the world over. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. To this end, may we take our share in the world's work and the world's struggles.

What is most important to me is the line, "What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all". I know that is what motivates trade unions in this country. It is not to take from others but to build a society where we all have the same ability to raise a family in dignity and in honour and to save for our retirement. What trade unions wish for themselves, they wish for all Canadians. This is the spirit in which trade unions fight, not for union bosses but for their members, not just for their members but for all working people.

Today, the Conservative government tells us that the recession is over and yet we have the largest number of Canadians in our history using food banks, including many families with children and many families where one parent is working. The Canadian Association of Food Banks says that now there are 870,000 Canadians per month are assisted by a food bank.

Some on the other side would ask me what that has to do with Bill C-6. Bill C-6 would result in a rollback of wages to levels that would not allow a family to avoid food banks. In the case of Air Canada, where the government first suggested intervention, the two-tier wages that were on the table at that time would have started workers

at Air Canada at \$11.35 per hour. That is not enough in my community for a person with one dependant to pay for the basics of food, clothing and shelter.

What is on the table in the agreement to be enforced by Bill C-6 is an 18% reduction for new workers, lower than the existing Canada Post rate. What will that bring their wages down to? It will be \$19 an hour. I heard many members on the other side say that there are many people who would be happy to work for \$19 an hour. I can tell the members that in my community \$19 an hour will not support a family. It will not buy housing. It will not pay all the bills at the end of the month for a family.

What is wrong with Bill C-6, from my point of view, is that it violates the principle and philosophy that was set out by Woodsworth, which is that we all are brothers and sisters in this community. We all deserve the same good standard of living in this country. That is my vision of Canada, that was Woodsworth's vision of Canada and, I hope, that is the vision of all members in the House.

When it comes to the two-tier wage system, it is clearly inspired by some other model and some other vision where some Canadians who do the same work will be paid less and will not have enough at the end of the month to take care of their families.

● (4910)

The second part of the legislation is the attack on pensions. One of the great problems that was faced in the 1920s and through the 1930s was the absolute destitution of the elderly in our society. We went to great lengths to create the Canada pension plan but, in parallel with that, also private pension plans.

This attack on pensions will leave workers without the security that they need for their retirement. We will have many seniors, as we do today, who do not have pensions and who will need to choose at the end of the month between shelter, prescription drugs and food. When they make those hard choices, they often end up ill and often end up becoming a greater cost to our society as a whole. Many of them are too proud to ask for help. Many of their families provide that help without them actually asking. We end up with those very families we are suggesting should have a lower wage to start, having to help out their senior parents and having to pay the high cost of child care all at the same time. This is that new term we are talking about, the sandwich generation. What is being suggested in Bill C-6 is that we give those people even lower wages to try to meet those multiple demands in their lives.

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Perhaps what is most pernicious for me in Bill C-6 is its effect on intergenerational inequality. My generation has a lot to answer for. Our emphasis on consumerism, excess and privilege for a few has left a society that I am much less proud of than I would like to be. What we are doing is also leaving future generations with an environment in crisis and with debt racked up by the Liberal and Conservative federal governments that failed to make those who have wealth and resources pay their fair share in this country. They are the ones who benefited from the work that all Canadians do and they have had relentless programs of tax reduction in their favour, which has driven up our debt that we will leave to our children and their children. The Conservative government's corporate tax reductions that we have seen go ahead now will only add to that problem in the future.

Bill C-6 again compounds that problem. We are now saying to the new generation of workers that not only are we leaving them these greater problems to deal with, but we will give them lower wages and fewer resources to actually deal with those problems.

What we are back to at the end of Bill C-6 is a difference in philosophy, and that philosophy is not based on Marxism or union bossism on this side. It is based on a wide variety of philosophies, some taking their inspiration from faith and religion, some taking theirs from humanitarianism and some taking theirs from socialist and social democratic traditions. However, what we share on this side of the House is that statement that was included in the grace that I read earlier, "What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all". We will take our part in that struggle and work very hard to ensure Canada is and always will be a more equal society.

We have now reached a position, 90 years after Woodsworth was first elected to the House of Commons, where inequality is once again as big as it was when he began his career. The great shame of the last 20 years of Canadian society is that we have slipped back to the 1920s. We have slipped back so that ordinary working families have lost those opportunities for a safe and secure future for them and their children.

That is why I am very proud to stand here with my brothers and sisters in the NDP caucus. We will be forcing this debate as long as we can to try to make members on the other side come to their senses and see that there is a better way to build a prosperous Canada and a better future for all Canadians.

● (4915)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with some of the numbers the member has just cited with regard to the 1920s, comparing the standard of living with today, he would do well to recheck his statistics.

He would also do well not to pretend that \$19 an hour, close to \$40,000 a year, is enough to live on in this country. There are many hard-working, unionized and non-unionized people, people, I would hazard, who work in our very offices in this House, who work on that amount or less than that amount and do not have recourse to food banks. We should not take their effort, their sacrifice and the discipline of their lives lightly.

What concerns this member and many on our side is the emphasis on fighting. Why do we need to fight? We were all impressed by the

revolutionary fervour of the previous speaker, the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, but, honestly, Canadians have not sent us here to fight. They have sent us here to find solutions.

Will the member opposite not agree that the solution is to vote for this law and put the workers of Canada Post back to work to help their company become the competitive corporation that its management and its workers want it to be, and that the best way to do that is to end this debate, end this filibuster and vote for Bill C-6 now.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, it is good to see the member here in the House. He may not remember but we did actually meet when I was working in Afghanistan and he was also working there. I respect the work he did there.

However, with respect, he is absolutely wrong about who has picked this fight here in the House of Commons.

Canada Post is a profitable corporation and that profit was made by the co-operation and hard work of all those people who go to work everyday to help deliver the mail in Canada. What did Canada Post do? It sought to roll back the wages and pensions of those workers when it was making \$281 million a year in profits. When things did not go easily for Canada Post, the government stepped in and imposed even worse conditions than those that were put forward at the beginning.

To me, the blame for who picked the fight here, who locked out the workers and who caused us to stand here in opposition belongs to the other side of this House and not to this side.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I have a great deal of respect for the member. I know he is sincere in what he is saying. I accept everything he said and I agree with much of what he said.

The last questioner asked something that was pertinent. I did not agree with his conclusion of why we are fighting. I feel that we need to fight for certain things here. However, at the end of the day I wonder if the hon. member could explain the worth of this fight of who started it, who did not start it, who will finish it and who will continue it. Is it not about finding a resolution? Is that not what we should be doing?

I do not understand. I wonder if the member could explain to me how, after 29 hours of speaking in this House to a motion to hoist the bill and wait six months, who that benefits. It does not benefit the worker, in my book. It does not benefit the public interest. Who does it benefit? Let us stop the fighting and get to resolutions. Let us get to committee of the whole.

● (4920)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that in my speech I did not talk about who picked the fight. The question of who picked the fight came from the other side of the House and I felt obligated to respond to that.

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The other part I did not get a chance to respond to was where the \$19 an hour not being enough come from. In my community, that figure that was produced by the community social services council that surveyed the costs that a family faces in the community for the very basics of housing, food, clothing and education for their kids. It is not an amount that includes holidays or saving for retirement. It is a very modest income in the major cities of this country. Therefore, that is not a figure that was picked out of the air.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, here we are in the second day of our debate. What comes to my mind today is this is not about this particular dispute. It is not about postal workers being locked out. It is not about union bosses not giving union members the vote. Those are all red herrings. This dispute and the legislation are about the kind of Canada we want.

We must look at this debate in that context. Each and every one of us in this room, as well as those who are sleeping or sitting in the lobbies, should take the time to reflect on that. It is not just the kind of Canada we want for ourselves, as my colleague mentioned, but it is the kind of Canada we want for our children, grandchildren, neighbours and people right across the country.

It is about a living wage. I am not talking about a minimum wage. I am talking about a living wage, the amount of money it takes to support a family, to enable a family to pay the rent, to buy food, to pay for transportation and clothing, and to have a bit of money left over so the family can take the occasional vacation. I am not talking about going to Hawaii or Timbuktu; most families would be grateful just to go camping.

Those are the kinds of issues we are dealing with. When we look at the challenges being faced by the post office workers, that is the attack the government is making on their right to a living wage.

I have heard hon. members say that some of their constituents make \$12 an hour and are very happy with that. Someone who had been unemployed and was able to get a job for \$12 an hour would be very happy with that, but would that be enough to pay the rent, to pay for food, clothing and basic needs? I would answer no because I know many people who make that kind of money and they have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet.

It is very easy for all us who sit in these hallowed halls. We make a decent income, I would say a more than comfortable income. It is very easy for us to say that \$18 an hour is extravagant. We have to ask ourselves, would we be willing to take \$18 an hour?

Canada Post is telling new workers that they can work for Canada Post but it is going to pay them even less than it used to pay. That does not make any economic sense and I will explain why. Workers who are happy, who are not depressed, who are not feeling persecuted or hard done by the government or their employer, are far more productive.

• (4925)

What signal are we sending to our youth, to new workers? We are telling them that they are not worth as much, that they can work for much longer, that they are younger and they can do it.

I ask my colleagues across the aisle, are there special grocery stores for the young? Young people have to pay the bills and have to support their families just like the rest of us. We cannot, in our society, buy into differentiated salaries for the same work.

I absolutely believe in employment equity. Past governments, some that did not have a majority at the time but were supported by others, did away with the employment equity program. We saw the impact that had on the civil service, and we saw the greater impact it had on women.

When I look at what is coming for the postal workers, it is not only a differentiated salary, but now the government is exercising its majority and is being punitive. It is being a bully in trying to impose an agreement. It is setting the salary. It is imposing a salary on workers instead of giving them the freedom to negotiate. That is just wrong.

I also want to talk about benefits. What attracted me to Canada back in 1975 when I chose to make Canada my home was Canada's wonderful health care system. When I was hired as a teacher, I was really pleased with the benefits I had, just as I am sure the postal workers were very happy when they fought for and earned those benefits.

Now, the postal workers are being told that their sick leave benefits are going to be changed and are going to be taken away. That is just wrong. I cannot see how a corporation that is making a huge profit can take away more from the very people who helped it make that profit. Those two things do not coincide. Good corporations know that when they do well the first thing they should do is reward their employees.

A state corporation is under the control of the Conservative majority. Its employees are being told that while the corporation has this huge profit in the hundreds of millions of dollars, their wages are going to be lowered. They are not going to get as much as Canada Post wanted to give them. Also, their benefits, and for good luck, their pensions are going to be worse.

What kind of government does that? The kind of government that hid its real agenda from Canadians when it said it was going to be a kinder and gentler government that would not attack pensions, that would not attack working people. I heard those speeches over and over again, and like any bully, once it got a majority, the cloak came off. Here we are, hardly a couple of months into this new Parliament and the cloak has come off.

What is this really about? This is about the corporate agenda to privatize public services and public corporations, absolutely. Why else would a government make it impossible for workers to go back to work? The doors are locked and the government is not opening them.

There is no way the Prime Minister could persuade me, or any Canadian, that the government did not lock the doors. The government is responsible for close to 50,000 people not making a living right now. They are outside because they are locked out. Those people do not have health care benefits. There have been strikes even in the public sector that have gone on for months, but the employer did not cut off benefits.

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• (4930)

In an email one of my constituents told me that when she went to get her drug prescription, she was told that she had to pay \$111, because she did not have that benefit anymore—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the passionate and sincere conviction expressed by the member.

Earlier this evening I mentioned that today members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers surrounded the largest office in the world of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in Sydney, Nova Scotia. That is where we process hundreds of thousands of citizenship proofs and citizenship grants and permanent residency cards and other essential products for new Canadians.

The member has a large population of new Canadians in her constituency. Many of her constituents are waiting for products mailed by my ministry, including proofs of permanent residency and citizenship, which they essentially need to travel overseas. They are contacting us desperate because of the work action provoked by CUPW. Union bosses have prevented them from getting those essential documents.

Today the CUPW workers, unqualifiedly supported by their allies in the NDP, would not allow 700 public servants from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to enter their offices to do work on behalf of Canadians, on behalf of new Canadians in particular.

Does the member condone these illegal activities that are making life more difficult for new Canadians? Will she not stand up for her constituents and call on CUPW to respect our laws?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across the aisle for his wonderful question. Let us remember—

An hon. member: Answer it.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I will answer it if the hon. member will let me. That is what I am trying to do. Nobody has ever accused me of evading a question.

When a government supports a crown corporation's lockout of its employees, those employees have very few options left to them. What they are doing right now is trying to draw attention to what is going on. They are trying to get some action.

I am perfectly prepared to go back into my riding and explain to my constituents what the issues are about. They are working people. People come to this country and work hard at two or three jobs. They are the ones who are telling me, "Do not let them take away our pensions. Do not let them take away our decent paying jobs".

I know they are being inconvenienced, but when it comes to rights, it is not about what is important for me, it is what is important for each and every one of us. This is their new home. This is why—

• (4935)

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Bourassa.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a former immigration minister, I cannot accept a reply like that. I hope that the hon. member will be much less evasive. She should have answered the question from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. There are limits. This is not about taking one side or the other, but there is a certain reality, and services provided to Canadians must be protected.

My question is not complicated. At the moment, we are either blaming each other or talking about principles. We would rather find solutions. Does the hon. member not agree that we should immediately move into a committee of the whole and come to grips with this? We can drag out the time, but we could be working together on amendments instead of dragging out the time. Everyone is losing now, to tell the truth. If we really want to help the workers, let us get into a committee of the whole and find solutions instead of simply holding forth with grand principles.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): First of all, it would be very easy to stop all of this today. It could stop in the next 30 seconds. Open the doors.

Secondly, I will say this to my colleague over on the far side: immigrants understand. They know they are being inconvenienced, but I can tell you they will understand once we explain to them. These new Canadians will understand that this is about fighting for rights. They understand that.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I stand here just a few hours after I first rose in the House to speak of this crossroads we are at, previously on the hoist motion and now on Bill C-6.

In these last 24 hours I have received messages from people in my constituency in northern Manitoba. I have received messages from people across the country. I have received messages from postal workers and from ordinary Canadians.

Many of these messages are thanking the NDP for standing up for them. They thank us for standing up for the postal workers and for what is rightly theirs as working people: their right to collective bargaining. They thank us for standing up in the House of Commons and raising the fact that what is being talked about here is a fair wage, a stable pension, and a recognition that no matter the age of the worker, or whether they have been with Canada Post for years or are a new hire, they ought to have the same right to a decent living.

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In these last 24 hours I have also had the chance to hear from members across. I had the chance to hear humour, the chance to hear belittling, and the chance to hear a whole lot of heckling. That disrespect is nothing to us on this side of the House of Commons; we put with it. But that disrespect is most insulting to the Canadian people and to the postal workers who are on the picket line because they were shut out of their jobs when they decided they would take action by going on a rotating strike. The postal workers continued to deliver the critical mail that was needed by so many Canadians. They recognized that their work is an essential service. And they are now on the lines across Canada stating what we are talking about here today.

Instead of hearing many parties in the House, most importantly the governing party of the House, say that they are listening, we have heard neglect and quite frankly disrespect and insults.

What we are talking about here today is more than just what the workers of Canada Post have been calling for in their negotiation. The postal workers, other workers across Canada, and so many Canadians want the approach from government on this service to be focused on people rather than profit.

A few months ago the Canadian Union of Postal Workers welcomed their new president. In welcome, the members voiced their desire to have a positive working relationship. They asked for what they wanted to see: a less commercial and more socially responsible postal service and a management that understands that Canada Post is first and foremost a public service.

The members asked for respect for Canada Post's legislated mandate to provide and improve postal service while being financially self-sustaining and ensuring good labour-management relations.

They asked for an end to the cuts and privatization, including the national philatelic centres and customer contact centres. They noted this could be done by sharing the benefits and cost savings of modernization with the public and postal workers.

Finally, they asked for a commitment to work with the federal government to dramatically improve government policy and expectations for Canada Post, as outlined in the Canadian postal service charter.

These were the requests that the Canadian Union of Postal Workers asked for. They asked for a better service for Canadians.

● (4940)

To me, what pops out is the word "privatization". Let us make no mistake about what we are seeing here today: an agenda of the government to move in that direction. They closed the national philatelic centres. They got rid of the customer contact centres. They got rid of the Canada Post food mail program and gave it to a private carrier. Now they are attacking the very workers who are asking for nothing more than a fair wage. The workers recognize that Canada Post has made record profits that in many cases have gone back to government coffers rather than being reinvested in not just the postal workers but more importantly the service.

That piece on privatization is not only about the direction this government is taking when it comes to postal service. The question

is where does it go next? What other services are going down that path thanks to this government's leadership—or lack of leadership, for that matter? Where will it cut next, whether it be funding, imposing legislation, or taking a heavy hand and saying that Canadians should not have public systems that have been at the foundation of our country, such as postal services, health care, education systems, the CBC, or institutions across the country that bring us together? Where will it stop? What is clear is that it has begun.

Privatization does not just mean poorer services for us. Of course that is a key part of what it means, especially in some parts of the country that are already among the poorest.

We can look at rural Canada. As a rural Canadian and somebody who is proud to say that I grew up in a small community, maybe an average community for Canada, I can say not only how important the postal service is to us as a service, but also how important the postal workers are in keeping our communities connected in bringing home a living wage and raising families in our communities. If we are going down the path of privatization, which this government has proven to be interested in taking, rural Canada stands to lose the most.

I find it highly hypocritical that so many of the members across who were elected to represent rural Canadians, so many members with signed petitions decrying the possible closure of rural post offices or decrying the lack of funding going toward postal services, stand in this House and turn a blind eye to the demands of rural Canadians.

Women we know, many of whom work in the postal service, also stand to lose the most from privatization, women who already learn less money to the male dollar in Canada, a shameful fact, given that we are in the year 2011. That is also the case with the next generation, young people.

Much excitement is felt when we talk about young people and the energy they bring. Certainly our party is keen on the new group of young MPs. Our voices are here to say that the road this government is taking is feeding off of our generation. It is taking away the foundations of a country our generation would like to contribute to, but also the kinds of foundations our generation needs to be able to build a better future.

Finally, I want to say that this ultimately is not only about privatization but also an attack on working people, on the working class and the middle class.

I will read a quote that came out of the protests that happened south of us in Madison, Wisconsin. It speaks to the draconian legislation that is not too far off from what we are hearing and debating here today. One of the leaders there said, "All this legislation is an attack on the middle class, which blossomed in this country"—much like ours—"as a result of collective bargaining victories during the middle of the last century."

Let us continue to a brighter future by supporting the Canadian postal workers' rights to collective bargaining. Let us have a government that stands for my generation and the future of our country.

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• (4945)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things I find highly offensive about the members opposite is their appropriation of the term “working Canadians”. I represent working Canadians, and many of the colleagues on this side of the House strongly represent working Canadians. Many of them, tens of thousands of them, voted for us in all of our constituencies.

It is highly offensive to my constituents when people like loggers, miners, ranchers, farmers, and tourism operators are not included in their definition of working citizens. These people work very hard and for many of them, a 60-hour week is considered an easy week. Not only members opposite represent working-class folks. We represent them as well. They are voting for us in ever-increasing numbers, especially in rural Canada.

I represent a widely dispersed rural constituency. Internet service is sometimes intermittent. Mail service is very important to the seniors and the businesses in my constituency. Can the member tell us why the NDP is persisting in hurting rural Canada?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I am familiar with the member's constituency given that it neighbours on my own. What I hear from people in northern Manitoba and quite frankly across Manitoba is that they want voices in the House of Commons that stand up for their communities and do not seek to pillage the very services they depend on, including the postal service. They want to be represented by people who seek to support institutions that hold up our rural communities. In the west there is the Canadian Wheat Board. I would ask the member and his colleagues how they feel about the Canadian Wheat Board, which supports our communities. Here we are talking not just about dismantling an institution that involves all of us. We are talking about an attack on services and on an approach that involves us all working together and recognizing that for all of us to be better off, we need to believe in our institutions and we need to stand up for the people who work in them.

• (4950)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have an email from a young constituent in Nanaimo-Cowichan who said he was opposed to this bill because of the devastation it would mean for future workers of his generation and because of the injustice that would be suffered by current employees of Canada Post and union members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. He felt that this could put his generation's security with unions in addition to the right to bargain into jeopardy as this incident could be used by the Government of Canada as an example of how to deal with future ordeals.

Could the member expand on what this kind of action means to the younger generation that is looking for well paying jobs and that has hopes for pensions in the future?

Ms. Niki Ashton: I thank my colleague for bringing forward the voice of a young person who is concerned about his future. We know that young people form the demographic that does not get involved in politics, but many of them did come out for this election in a big way. Many others say, “Well, why would I? What are the choices being made that benefit me?”

This government is surely helping them to feel that way by standing up for legislation that ensures that young postal workers coming into the workplace will earn far less, 18% or 30%, than do those who are there now and will have pensions that will not be stable a few years down the line. This is no way to invest in the next generation. Members of the government should take a harder look at the future they are providing for their children and their constituents.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have been waiting for these amendments. I want to make sure that the NDP member for Hamilton Centre and the NDP member for London—Fanshawe are not actually participating in creating these amendments, because when they had the opportunity in Ontario, they actually tore apart the bargaining agreements of the 30,000 public servants. They tore apart the contract, cut their wages by \$2 billion and forced them to take 12 unpaid days off. So I just want to make sure that those two NDP members are not involved in these—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I did say it had to be a very brief question.

The hon. member for Churchill has time for a 30-second response.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madame Speaker, I believe it is important to focus on how we are seeing here a replay, to use an example, of another provincial government, the former Harris government here in Ontario. What the rest of us across the country heard was how devastating that agenda was on the working class, on people's communities and on their well-being. If that was a sign of things to come, then many of us are in for quite a ride.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am a new parliamentarian, and I have a practical question that perhaps you can help me with. Is there not supposed to be a minimum of 15 members from the government party to make quorum?

The Deputy Speaker: No, there needs to be 15 members total in the House.

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, we could start with a little reminder: Walkerton. This is what happens when a government places itself at the service of lobbyists and not at the service of the people. This is not an ideology, but greed.

Walkerton is a small town that was having its water tested by the government. One fine day, the Harris government, on the advice of lobbyists, decided to privatize the lab studies. So the private company, which was supposed to do much more for a better price, decided to make it much more profitable. The tests were erroneous and the residents were poisoned.

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Unfortunately, this is the type of situation that we are facing. Once again, a government on the right decides to listen to lobbyists rather than face its duties. In this case, on one side, we have a very old Canadian union that was established in 1911. This union has taken part in many conflicts and has also brought many benefits. It created the context of a permanent, professional and non-partisan public service. It was an essential element in 1911. The petty politics of personal involvement were banished.

This union has become one of the best organized, most democratic and most powerful unions in Canada. It was part of many struggles in Canada. Over the years, it has created for itself a good collective agreement, with fair wages for fair work. It also established a defined benefit pension plan, and of course indexing has been added to protect pensioners from inflation. A clause for survivor's allowance, without penalty, has also been added to prevent the spouses of pensioners from falling into poverty. The union even gave same-sex couples the same rights long before any other unions. This is a very rich, very well capitalized pension plan with blue chip stocks in banks, Canadian financial institutions, PotashCorp and so on.

Unfortunately, plans like this one are coveted by everyone across Canada. This was obvious based on how quickly the government decided to intervene in the case of Air Canada. What was the problem at Air Canada? We were told that a strike at Air Canada would trigger an economic calamity, even though the company issued a press release telling everyone not to worry because the strike would in no way compromise the company.

Yet the government said it had to intervene immediately, that the union had to be crushed, that someone must prevent it from protecting its defined benefit pension plan. That was crucial in the case of Air Canada. The big shots that supposedly saved the company suspended pension contributions. Combined with some bad investments, this led to a \$2.1 billion deficit in the fund, an actuarial liability for the company.

We can only imagine what a lovely gift the government was about to give the company. By waving a magic wand, it was going to force the union to come back, to give up its defined benefit plan and, as if by magic, between \$500 million and \$1.2 billion would have disappeared from the deficit. The net worth of shareholders was going to jump by over \$1 billion in just one day. Would that not have been great? That is what the Conservative Party is all about: friends first, the people second, like in Walkerton.

● (4955)

The postal institution is as old as Canada. As a joke, we used to say that, even before the RCMP and even before the first settlers arrived, a Canadian post office was setting up shop. That is not far from the truth.

Historically, this public service institution has always played a vital role in Canada. It has always been in operation, whether as the post office department or as the Canada Post Corporation. It has always operated under political authority.

Never in Canadian history has a Canada Post president, a crown corporation or a postmaster general taken action without getting the Prime Minister's approval first, especially when planning to cause havoc and declare a lockout. That cannot be done without the

political authority's permission. And I am not the only one to say this.

Just recently, we have seen this with the Gomery commission. The hon. member for Bourassa would be able to confirm that the Gomery commission clearly showed that the Canada Post Corporation had followed the directives from the Prime Minister's Office in the matter of sponsorships.

So here we are with a big mystery. They are attempting to persuade us that the Canada Post Corporation started the lockout without permission from the Prime Minister, who had no other choice but to take action by imposing special legislation because he thought the lockout was so terrible. Wow! And he is trying to persuade 33 million Canadians of that. Let me just say that the number of Canadians who believe them after finding out the facts will drop. It will drop like a stone, in fact. No one can believe so implausible a story, that the Prime Minister does not know what his left hand is doing while his right hand is doing the opposite. The Prime Minister's authority is directly involved in all this. It clearly means that everything that has been happening is simply an ambush. They have intentionally led the union to a lockout in order to be able to ask for an arbitrator who, under this special legislation, will eliminate the pension plan for the benefit of their friends in power.

Unfortunately for the government, the longer the debate goes on, the longer people outside the House will talk about it and the sooner they will realize that the government's version of events does not add up. I doubt that 33 million people are going to believe, after a week or two of lockout, that the Prime Minister is not aware of what is going on in his own office.

What impact is this having? Some 55,000 Canadians are without an income or wages because of the government's decision. They can not afford to buy groceries or pay the rent. Moreover this is affecting the Canadian economy.

The members opposite are saying there is cause for concern and that it is important to do something about it. That is true. They have to end the lockout, stop making backroom deals and start doing their duty by listening to people and standing up for them instead of serving the interests of their friends and lobbyists.

● (5000)

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Madam Speaker, the member hits it on the nose that 55,000 workers are seriously inconvenienced by this. The government is very concerned about that. We are concerned that an agreement could not be reached after eight months. We were concerned about the rotating strikes that cost Canada Post, and ultimately taxpayers, over \$100 million, and now the lockout. At the end of the day, what we are concerned about is all Canadians. We are concerned about small businesses that are losing money. There is strong evidence that the economy is being hurt and at a very critical time when the global economy is still fragile.

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Would the member see that the best way to end this now, the most firm, complete and final way, is to agree with the back to work legislation, support the government's concern for all Canadians, not just those who are unionized, but Canadians who do not have unions, Canadians who want to go to work are being negatively impacted? As a result, seniors are not getting their cheques and folks are not getting their passports or their visas for family members overseas who are ill. The government is concerned about this on a whole. These workers need to get back to work, and this filibustering is not helping.

Would the member please consider supporting back to work legislation as the final and complete solution to this problem?

• (5005)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, what the hon. government member is asking of us is not to facilitate a return to work, but to condemn generations of Canadians to no longer have a pension plan that guards them from poverty. That is important to point out. For the sake of small businesses and people who are expecting official documents, why on earth is the government maintaining this lockout? All the Prime Minister has to do is pick up the phone. He just has to tell his guy to end the lockout, that he is the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Davenport.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government says that it does not interfere with Canada Post, of which it is the sole shareholder. That is a bit of a head-scratcher for many people. Then it turns around and does just that and offers postal workers less than what management offered initially.

Does my hon. colleague not think it would be fair if the government withdrew the wage clause in the bill?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, the entire bill must be withdrawn, in my opinion. It makes no sense at all. The government created this mess and wants somebody else to clean it up. It makes me think of a chicken farmer who puts a fox in a henhouse and then decides, very intelligently, to punish the chickens. This is exactly the kind of logic this government is using.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, what is a real head-scratcher for any Canadian watching this debate is the theme of the NDP speeches. What the members are doing consistently is speaking about anything except what the debate is about, which is back to work legislation. In the last speech we heard about the CBC, about Gomery and about Walkerton.

The facts are very clear. This is about two parties that for eight months could not come to an agreement. The minister has bent over backward to try to get to some type of resolution. The question that Canadians want to hear tonight is how long will the NDP allow these two parties to hold Canadians and Canadian small businesses that are right now creating jobs for Canadians hostage? How long will those

members condone the actions, as the Minister of Immigration said, that are hurting the most vulnerable—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must stop the hon. member there to give the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin an opportunity to respond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, my response will be very brief. All the government has to do is end the lockout. It pulled it out of nowhere, and built it from the ground up, so it can put an end to it. If the Prime Minister is no longer able to pull rank over the chief executive officer of a crown corporation, then my goodness, it was clearly a mistake to elect him.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, this discussion and debate has now taken us through several calendar days, although, as we know, the date on the table remains unchanged. I hope our minds do not remain as fixed as the table date of Thursday, June 23.

I will review some of the things that I think are salient about this situation and see if I can shed some light on it, hoping that it does some good to the discussion we have had here.

The first thing is to look at Canada Post. It is the most important public service for delivery of mail and other things that are really important to us.

As a public service, it is worth noting that it has been profitable every year for 15 years. It is also worth noting that it is facing challenges and its profit margin is going down in competition with other areas, competition with email and with commercial carriers like UPS and FedEx, even though it was able to take over Purolator and run it very profitably.

It is in a challenging situation. One of the reasons it continues to turn a profit, and in the last year I could find was for 2009, a \$281 million profit, is due to the dedication and professionalism of its workforce.

We take these things as good starting points for maintaining what we want. I presume we all want Canada Post to be a public service and not privatized. I agree with my friends in the official opposition that there is some risk of that, but I do not think it is as blatant as they do. We have to guard against privatization by ensuring Canada Post remains public and profitable.

Into this we now have, and have had for some time, difficult labour management relationships between Canada Post management and CUPW. The remaining issues on the table, when things fell apart, really had almost nothing to do with the wage issue except for the differential wages for younger workers. Other issues included health and safety issues, which makes sense given what the postal workers go through, as well as staffing issues, sick leave, questions of short-term disability, wages, pensions, benefits, job creation and the ongoing issue of training.

These issues are certainly solvable. I practised in a number of areas of law, but for about three years I practised union-side labour law. I am somewhat familiar with collective agreements and bargaining, working with unions and having long negotiations. Eight months really is not that long as long as a collective agreement can be honoured and stay in place while the parties negotiate.

This is just some of the background that came to me and it is worth looking at it.

We all know the chronology. As things began to fall apart, CUPW instituted rotating strike action, which led, very short days afterwards, to a lockout. I think we all find it somewhat inexplicable that Canada Post management took that route because it brought mail service in Canada to an absolute standstill. We now find ourselves here.

I will start with where we all agree. Then I will deal with what I think are the red herrings where we do not agree. I believe we all agree that we want the mail to move. We all agree that we would like it to move as quickly as possible. I think we probably all agree that we would rather not be here at 2:15 on a Saturday morning. I think that is a presumption that will probably be shared around the room.

On the other hand, despite the occasional moments of lack of decorum, overall all members of Parliament from all parties have conducted themselves with that sense of duty, recognizing that we are here and this issue is important. It falls on us as elected members of Parliament not to just argue endlessly, but to solve it.

I think we would all agree with those statements.

Where do I see red herrings? A couple of them really relate to the larger cultural problem of this place, which is an addiction to partisanship, but I will leave it aside. However, I cannot vote for this legislation as drafted.

I am uncomfortable with some of the accusations. Some of the members of the official opposition make a good point and then take it one step too far. I find myself thinking it was too partisan, it was a cheap shot. On the other hand, in defending the position of the government legislation, some government members have gone too far. If we could tone that down, it would help. I do not mean to sound like I am preaching or lecturing, and I hope members will forgive me.

• (5010)

On the other hand, in defending the position of the government legislation, I think some government members have gone too far. If we could tone that down, it would help. I do not mean to sound like I am preaching or lecturing and I hope members will forgive me.

Something that is a problem and a bit of a red herring is that the issue before us is what do we do as members of Parliament to ensure that the mail starts moving, that there is a fair collective agreement bargaining process that works for all parties. That is our job. It is not really relevant to discuss the fact that other workers do not have such a good deal.

I can say that until May 2 I never had a pension plan, medical benefits or paid vacation time. I have never had any of those things nor have other people in my family, but that is not relevant to what

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we have in front of us. What we have in front of us are legal entitlements of CUPW negotiated under Canadian law that must be respected. It is not to insult other workers that we respect unionized rights. It is not to divide one set of workers against another.

We have a responsibility to uphold Canadian law and Canadian law says CUPW has a legitimate collective agreement that has been negotiated under Canadian law, which is valid for a very important public service delivery of our postal system. Workers do a fantastic job and one of the reasons they do a fantastic job is that they are in a good union that negotiates well. That is the issue before us.

There are other questions. Does the 2007 Supreme Court decision in the B.C. hospital workers case have any bearing here? I know the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence said it does not, but I think there are questions.

I will now come to the difference between us. One group of people in the House believes the best way to get the mail moving is to push through Bill C-6, come hell or high water. One group of people in the House thinks the best way to get the mail moving again is to fight as hard as possible against Bill C-6 in the hope that somehow, while we are in this place in our suspended animation of June 23, there will be some progress somewhere else that solves the problem.

But it is in members' hands to solve the problem now. I made this point earlier today and I will ask my friends in the government to consider it. The fastest way to get the mail moving, which I know is their number one objective, is to change Bill C-6 through amendments that allow all of us in this place to agree that we have respected collective bargaining rights, the labour laws of Canada and Canadian workers, and we have acted quickly in the interests of all people, whether they are small business people or families waiting for cheques.

We should not allow ourselves to be so enamoured by our own rhetoric that we forget that the fastest way to get the mail moving is to amend Bill C-6 so that we can all agree, get the mail moving and go home at some point this weekend.

• (5015)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her comments and congratulate her on her election to the House.

It is important for us to put this whole debate into perspective. The Government of Canada is not taking sides in this dispute. This is a dispute between two parties: the corporation and CUPW. Both parties, unfortunately, have not come to a resolution upon expiry of a collective bargaining agreement.

The government attempted, through mediation, to get the two parties together despite that. There was a series of rotating strikes initiated by CUPW and then on the other side management decided to lock out the union.

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What a responsible government would do in a monopoly situation where there are no alternatives for millions of Canadians is to legislate workers back to work to ensure the continuation of this essential service for so many Canadians. When the Liberals were in government, they did the same thing.

What a responsible opposition would do is not filibuster this legislation. In fact, it would allow this to pass. The problem here is that the official opposition is taking a side in this issue and that shows that the official opposition is not ready for prime time.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, in response to my friend the member of Parliament for Wellington—Halton Hills, I wish we could put aside whether or not the NDP is ready for prime time or anything. That is not the issue. I do not think it is quite as clear that the government has not taken sides.

As I mentioned earlier in the House today, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations in reviewing Bill C-6 has come to the conclusion that it would violate key elements of the Supreme Court decision and it would set back collective bargaining across Canada. Why would they think that?

There is nothing wrong with back-to-work legislation. Nobody would deny that it is an appropriate thing for government to do. The reason that this piece of legislation is offensive to some principles of labour law is because it is overly prescriptive, it ties the hands of an arbitrator, it puts in place in section 15 a schedule of payment to the workers that is less than what was on the table when negotiations broke down, and it further has a rather bizarre section that suggests that the arbitrator must be guided by the need to find terms and conditions of—

• (5020)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We must move on to other questions.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills made an intervention that was a pathetic attempt at political spin. He is generally a little more fact-based in his approach.

The government is clearly taking the corporation's side. Rather than dealing with the lock-out, which was caused by the government's actions in allowing management to do this, we have legislation before us that does not address the issue.

Would the member not agree with members who have been speaking over the last few hours that the most prudent and responsible approach that the government could take would be to take the locks off and then allow collective bargaining to run its course? The government should just take the locks off and get the mail workers back to doing what they want to do, which is serving Canada and making the mail—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I do agree with the member for Burnaby—New Westminster on one thing but not on another.

I quite reject the notion that the adjective “pathetic” could ever be applied to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills. It does not apply all.

I do entirely agree that the prudent thing for the government to do would be to get hold of Canada Post and tell it to take the locks off the doors so collective bargaining could begin in a free and appropriate approach.

It was legal for management to lock the workers out. It was legal for the union to apply revolving strikes. The less that we inject ourselves as parliamentarians, and worse as political parties, into a management-labour dispute by taking sides, the better this debate will go over the next several eons.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Madam Speaker, during a bargaining process, it is preferable for the two parties to find common ground and reach a consensus. Alas, since the negotiations began, it has been my strong sense that Canada Post Corporation never intended to negotiate in good faith.

Withdrawing from the bargaining process and locking out employees is disrespectful to workers. A lockout is not a strike. A strike is protest action on the part of workers, whereas a lockout is the temporary closure of the Canada Post Corporation. It is a management decision.

The Canada Post Corporation opted to wait for the government to intervene and introduce special legislation. This approach robs workers of the right to strike because it leaves them constantly fearing this kind of legislation and, unfortunately, sends a negative message not only to the employees of Canada Post, but to all workers in this country.

Forcing workers to go back to work right now will leave them disgruntled and unhappy. This kind of forced settlement will be a bitter pill for workers to swallow and will leave them with a bad taste in their mouths. Not to mention the poisoned atmosphere that it will create between management and workers for the months to come. We are not talking about years here.

Let us not forget that several thousand workers have been affected by this lockout. When will the government finally understand that Canada Post employees are first and foremost people with families, obligations and responsibilities?

This legislation will strip the union of power when its primary role is to advocate for the interests of wage earners. The union's second duty is to ensure that information is passed on to wage earners by acting as a liaison between Canada Post Corporation and its employees.

Canada Post Corporation is pretending to be caught off guard by this situation. That makes no sense. It is Canada Post Corporation that precipitated the situation and declared a lockout.

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This government's stance rides roughshod over democracy. What about legislation based on common sense? Workers are being locked out, and worse still, the government gets involved and wants to introduce legislation to force employees back to work. Now we are really seeing the true colours of this Conservative government.

Canada's courts have recognized the right of workers to negotiate their employment contracts. Canadian courts have also recognized the right of workers to collectively organize with their fellow workers to have their rights and their employment contracts upheld.

The government's approach is, without a doubt, bizarre. This procedure is going to set a precedent that no worker wants. And who will pay for it at the end of the day? The workers, as usual.

Instead of showing our workers some consideration and respect, the government is abusing its power and riding roughshod over the rights of workers. It is unfair and it is not right.

I do not understand. The Conservatives have a majority government. They won the support they needed. And yet, did they have the guts to tell Canadians how they intended to govern the country? Did they say that they would back the big guys instead of helping workers? Did they say that they would force their legislation through without regard for its impact on the lives of workers? Did they say that they would deny workers an opportunity to negotiate according to the rules of proper collective bargaining? Did they say that they would introduce legislation to deny workers the right to be heard, and that they would chip away at their pension plans? Will they continue to foist draconian measures on Canadian workers who only want their right to negotiate better working conditions to be respected?

Out of respect for workers and their families, I believe that the government should withdraw from these negotiations and refrain from using special legislation to get their way, especially when it means siding with the employer.

• (5025)

The Conservatives' approach is all too familiar: it is easy for them to look out for their friends at the expense of Canadian workers. These are the very same workers that helped make Canada Post the postal service that it is today, a service from which we benefit day in and day out. These workers have paid into their pension plans and are entitled, like anybody living in Canada, to receive a pension at the agreed-upon time, so they may enjoy their retirement in dignity.

One would expect a little bit of consideration on the part of management, but also from government. Why not leave it up to the two parties to negotiate in an honest fashion, and open up the communication channels? Currently, the employees are not allowed in the distribution centre and have no access to the mail, so they cannot deliver it. The doors are closed. That is what a lockout means. Canada Post has to unlock the doors so that workers can continue with the rotating delivery, just like when the bargaining process began.

Now, the government is going after the workers at Canada Post, and they will be the next victims of the extreme decisions of the government. Nobody is interested in a wage reduction or having their retirement age raised by five years. This special legislation will

give all Canadian workers cause for worry, and they will wonder if they might be the next scapegoats of this Conservative government.

This special legislation will create divisions between two generations of workers, it will be the source of pay and social inequities, and it will weaken labour relations and create a damaging work environment.

The message this government is sending to workers is clear: it will not hesitate to side with employers, even if workers stand to lose a great deal. In all situations, employers will be valued over the workers. Workers will not have any opportunity to negotiate fairly because, if they insist too much on having their rights and their contract enforced, the government will not support them. Quite the opposite, it will step in and legislate them back to work. Can you believe this is happening in this day and age?

These workers paid their union dues for years. The union is trying its best to stand up for them, but what came as a surprise to the workers is that the government, through special legislation, is trying to prevent their union from doing its job properly by not respecting its right to negotiate the members' working conditions freely. I am afraid this kind of approach will drive apart different generations of workers and also drive apart management and employees.

• (5030)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would also like to rise above partisanship in this discussion.

I would really like to know something. Since we are concerned about work stoppages and their impact on the economy, what is the point of this stalling by the NDP? So far, all I see is that we are spending taxpayer money to pay people here, like the pages, support staff and cafeteria workers. It is a waste of time. We should pass a bill to put an end to this dispute. Mail must be delivered and Canada Post must get back to work. What is the NDP's goal by stalling this bill? I would appreciate an answer that does not stray from the point.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, I get the impression that the government wants to blame the situation on the NDP members and on Canada Post workers. What we want is to defend these workers and to recognize that a worker who has the right to belong to a union also has the right to bargain a collective agreement.

I would like to remind the House that Canada Post employees decided to start a rotating strike. Employees in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver took turns going on strike. This slowed down postal services, but mail was still being delivered. I do not think that we should take the blame for this situation.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, my comment is for the members opposite. All day they have shown us their little phones, saying that they have received comments, letters and words from people in their ridings who are protesting the fact that mail service has been interrupted and explained all their problems.

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I went to read the newspapers. TVA—and everyone knows that TVA is not very socialist—said that 62,000 letters, including benefit cheques and every other kind of cheque, were being held up and were not being delivered because of the lock out. It was not because of the rotating strike, but because of the lock out. So the government should take responsibility for it.

• (5035)

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, the government did not require Canada Post to return to the bargaining table and respect the collective agreement of its employees. The government probably does not want to interfere in the affairs of a Crown corporation. But it did not hesitate to table a bill that affects thousands of workers.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, just very briefly, I have here an email from Victoria, your own riding. It is from a woman who is disabled and dealing with two cancers and a broken arm. She is saying that she is fine with picking up her cheques and she says how much she supports the postal workers. She says that what's more important is that workers are respected and that there are well-paying jobs out there and people paying taxes that help to support people like her. She says, "Just because we are on disability does not mean we are desperately waiting for our cheques".

I wonder if the member would comment on how important well-paid jobs are to our local economies and for supporting people in our country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, we need to respect the workers, workers in our communities, workers who work outside, no matter what the weather is like, whether the day is hot, windy or bitterly cold.

Earlier I failed to mention the young employees of the Canada Post Corporation. This new generation deserves the same benefits as those our parents and their parents fought so hard for.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Madam Speaker, since we do not have the same concept of time in the House right now, I would like to follow up on what I was saying this morning. I was telling the story of a teacher who, although not in the same situation as the one Canada Post workers are currently in, said she was scared of the precedent this would set and the domino effect it will have.

In fact, I have read the 2007 Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. v. British Columbia*. I will read an excerpt that I find to be quite relevant:

The history of collective bargaining in Canada reveals that long before the present statutory labour regimes were put in place, collective bargaining was recognized as a fundamental aspect of Canadian society, emerging as the most significant collective activity through which freedom of association is expressed in the labour context.

The relevance of this quotation is obvious, but I will elaborate. It is what is at issue here. Canada Post workers have not had the opportunity to exercise what is a fundamental right in our society and in our Canadian history. This ties in with the story I was telling earlier. If we cannot even have this right, what rights will be taken away next? What will be the next situation in which things do not

work out and the government decides to use special legislation to resolve the problem?

I would like to give an example of recent collective action in my community. It did not involve unions. I want to make that clear so as not to scare the members opposite too much. It was during the flooding in Montérégie. Two weekends in a row, people from the entire community came to the help of strangers. They did that together, collectively, simply because these are things that could not be done alone. A collective effort was needed. That is why we have unions and workers' groups. They want to have things they are not capable of getting alone. They are not going to get what they want by going to their boss one by one. They have to express their wishes collectively.

The hon. members opposite have asked us a number of times why New Democrat members continue to express their disapproval with the current situation and with this bill. It is simple. Just like workers who come together to make their views known, we too are making ours known. We are doing so on behalf of those in our ridings, whether they be workers or small business people. That is why we are here. This is not a waste of taxpayers' money, this is our job. We are paid a salary to be here or in our ridings when something is happening. Something very important is happening now. These will be very relevant questions over the next four years. If we cannot handle situations like this and answer questions like this now, where will we be in four years? I have no idea, and I don't even want to know. Perhaps I would be better off staying in my riding, rather than being here all night, because I might prefer not to know about any of this. But we are here, and we are now trying to establish what we want to do as representatives of our communities.

Here is another passage from the Supreme Court of Canada decision:

Recognizing that workers have the right to bargain collectively as part of their freedom to associate reaffirms the values of dignity, personal autonomy, equality and democracy that are inherent in the [Canadian] Charter [of Rights and Freedoms].

What is at stake here are individual rights.

• (5040)

We hear a lot of bogeyman stories from the hon. members on the opposite side of the House. They are saying that the NDP members have a leash around their necks and the union leaders are pulling on that leash. But that is not the case. We can see in the Supreme Court decision that this is about the autonomy of the people who came together to make a democratic decision and exercise their freedom of association in order to use this tool collectively. As we have seen over the past few evenings and nights in the House, we now take these things for granted. I may be young, but I know that it is important not to take these things for granted because people have fought for them. Why should we start taking them for granted now and thereby prevent workers from continuing the work that has been started?

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Let me go back a little. I was talking about the flooding in my constituency, which has been a great concern to me since the beginning of my mandate. When I first spoke in the House, I had the opportunity to ask the minister whether the army was going to help the victims with the cleanup. But the army did not come to help the victims and that is not its fault because it follows orders. It does a great job under the circumstances. I am bringing this up and I think it is relevant because the government clearly said that the private sector should be allowed to deal with the situation, that things should take care of themselves and that the market should do the same. Why are they not approaching the current situation in the same way? Why does the government not let the union and management work things out between themselves?

I spent the election campaign hearing that the NDP was a party that was going to interfere in everything and that it was not going to let people sort out issues for themselves. Ironically, the government that claims not to act in that way is doing just that, at the expense of our workers, their rights and their pensions.

Once again, I am speaking as a young person. I do not want to come up with a definition of what a young person is, because, in our hearts, we all either are young or see ourselves as young. When young people consider the environment, for example, it is easy to see the consequences because they can be seen. We can see what is happening with the environment. When we consider our pensions and the financial future of the country, we do not see the consequences. That is what scares us: we do not know what is going to happen and we do not understand all the issues. The fact that we cannot see the consequences results in some of those involved thinking that everything will happen without anyone asking questions about the consequences. It is therefore up to us to point out the consequences so that future generations know that the issues are important.

In our current situation, I have a duty to speak as the voice of the young. And I am not alone. Once again, we are not a nasty union, we are a parliamentary caucus. Just like workers and their unions, we work as a team and for a common purpose. We use our freedom of association to work together in the name of the people, the workers, as the Supreme Court decision described. We will stay here for the night and for as many days as it takes, right up to the end of next week, up to the royal couple's visit. We will stay for as many days as it takes. We missed Quebec's national holiday and we will miss Canada Day if we have to. We have freedom of association and it allows us to be here fighting for people and making our views known on their behalf. We are not nasty trade unionists, we are not bogeymen, we are people who were elected in our ridings to do this job. Our constituents are proud of us and we have nothing to be ashamed of. This is also why we are opposed to this bill.

● (5045)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, first of all, I congratulate the hon. member on his election and his speech. Clearly this is a new member who has a good deal of passion. I congratulate him.

That being said, I have received many email messages from my constituents who are in favour of Bill C-6, including some Canada Post workers. I would like to quote a few sentences from those workers' emails.

[English]

I will not use their names because I do not want these CUPW members to be harassed by union bosses. However, a postal clerk from my constituency said she feels that legislation is the only hope to keep their jobs. She said their union has not allowed them to vote on any revised offers that Canada Post Corporation has made and that most of them think the revised final offer is fair. She said they wanted to vote, but the union would not allow them to vote. She said they are part of a democratic society and the workers should have some rights but that this is not happening. She said the union has not tried to negotiate a better offer based on the corporation's offer; it is trying to change it entirely. She went on to say that government intervention is the only hope for getting them back to work.

Would the member please comment on the remarks of my constituent who is a CUPW member?

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his congratulations. I am very pleased to hear him acknowledge my passion for these matters. At the present time, passion is indeed what is needed.

To answer his question, I will say that it is quite simple. As the New Democratic members have said since the start of this debate, a union functions democratically. Not all the members will necessarily be in agreement all the time, just as not all the people of Canada voted for the present government. Yet we make do all the same. What is more, we express our opinions all the same.

I am very happy that his constituent—I do not recall whether it was a man or a woman, and it is not important—expressed his or her opinion to the hon. member. The fact remains that, in a democracy, one cannot always get what one wants. However one must deal with the situation and work within the system, which is what we are doing at the present time.

● (5050)

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. We keep hearing from the governing party that it had to intervene because negotiations had gone on and on. Well, I have heard from one of my constituents, Dale, who was a postal worker, and his comments are that Canada Post uses this tactic all the time. They stall. They take months and months until the union is in a position where it has to have a strike mandate in order to even start negotiations. He goes on to say that he knows this tactic is used constantly. The whole point is to intimidate people so they can roll back benefits, vacations, sick leave and take away pensions.

Does the member believe the Conservatives are using the legislation to support this unacceptable conduct?

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I make no claim to fully understand the intentions behind the bill, but I know that in the present situation the workers are indeed trying to defend their pensions, their wages and their needs. For them, it is very important to be able to have access to these tools.

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When we look at the Supreme Court's decision, we can clearly see that it underscores that workers must have the right to organize and the ability to work with the tools at their disposal. The bill now being studied will prevent postal workers from doing this. That is why the NDP is opposed to it.

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find the decorum in the House at this moment is preferable to what it was earlier this evening, and I hope we can continue in this way for the rest of this debate. We owe it to Canadians to show one another respect and to show them we are serious about getting to the root of this problem that is affecting a wide range of, if not all, Canadians in this country.

For me, Canada is the greatest democracy in the world. I think we are a model for democracies, both established and western industrialized nations, but also emerging democracies. I think the way we perform in this House, the way we respect one another and debate back and forth, is a message that we send not just to Canadians but around the world.

I am new to this House, but sometimes I am quite disappointed in what I see here. I hope we can return to positive debate and to being respectful of one another.

In terms of this issue, from my perspective we are facing a regular policy problem. It is a large problem, a national problem, but it is still just an issue of public policy, so it is perhaps best to approach it this way.

To solve any public policy problem we have to understand the root of its causes. We have to come to grips with the problem we are facing, especially when it is government. We have to say we have taken a critical look at it and we understand what the problem is, and we have to explore a number of options and pick the one which is going to best solve it.

I have been sitting in this House for hour upon hour, and I have heard eloquent speeches and good questions on both sides of the House. The facts seem to be that we have a crown corporation that is critical to the well-being of Canada and that has locked out its employees. That does seem to be the problem at hand. The problem for the government is how we address this.

I will admit that the other side has made some good points. It has said that the lockout may have been prompted by an ongoing labour dispute, that it may have been prompted by what has been described as a series of relatively harmless rotating strikes. But now we have a lockout. It is important to keep this in chronological order. We have a dispute. We have rotating strikes. Now we have a lockout. That is the problem for the government to address.

Members can dispute my position because I am a member of the NDP and the opposition. However, I do not think the evidence and the other sources backing up this claim can be disputed.

The CBC, a national broadcaster of international reputation in radio and television, calls it a lockout. CTV calls it a lockout. Every article that has been written about this in the *Globe and Mail* calls this situation a lockout. Global TV calls it a lockout, and my favourite morning reading, *National Post*, also calls it a lockout.

If members do not believe our national media, they can look at the international media. When we are checking our stock options in the morning, we might look at *Bloomberg*. It says it is a lockout. Probably one of the most irrefutable sources in the world for quality news, the *New York Times*—

• (5055)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

On a point of order, the hon. Minister of State.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Madam Speaker, I apologize for interrupting my colleague, but I wonder if you could clarify this. About 12 hours ago the member was giving a speech, and I was in the House. I believe it is almost exactly the same speech.

I wonder if the Chair would confirm whether members are allowed to give the same speech over again. I know they want to filibuster, and I am okay with that, but I need some clarification.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his comments. Without the blues I am not in a position to determine if that was the case. I am sure the hon. member will consider your comments.

On the same point of order, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, on Thursday, in question period, the industry minister read the same prepared response five times consecutively in the House. I am certain the Conservatives cannot give us any lessons on—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I believe we are getting into debate. I will ask the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas to pursue his comments.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I suggest, when we look at these sources, the fact is irrefutable that we are facing a lockout, that the government is facing a lockout, and that is its public policy problem that it has to deal with.

It is critical to recognize the policy problem, because until we recognize what that is, we are not going to be able to solve it. As with any medical disease, we have to understand what we are dealing with before we solve it. I can guarantee that I have a little bit extra that the members opposite may be interested in. Here are some policy alternatives. I will start with what is least intrusive into the homes and lives of Canadians.

The least intrusive measure that the government could pursue is to leave the parties alone and let them work out this labour dispute themselves. The government could stay out of it.

The second measure could be, as the government did in 2008, to get a blue ribbon panel together and let it look at the situation to say, "We have a better solution for this; we think we can help to solve this".

Government Orders

A third measure, if the lockout is due to lack of revenue, would be to allow Canada Post, for example, to increase its postage rates.

The fourth thing we could do would be to provide more tax revenue to Canada Post. If it is indeed in so much trouble that it has to lock out its employees because it is bankrupt, we should consider increasing tax revenue.

Another option that has not been considered by the government to deal with this lockout would be to place Canada Post under the direct control of the minister. That has been done in the past. I am sure it will be done in the future. It is an option that the government could pursue.

The final and most dramatic option the government could take to resolve this lockout would be to fire the management, to replace the management if Canada Post is making enough revenue in the corporation. From what I can see in the Canada Post 2009 annual report, the corporation has had 15 consecutive years of profitability. It does not seem that to be facing a profit shortage, so it must be managerial incompetence—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the member.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Kenora.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, I apologize to the member for the interruption because he was speaking.

I have a concern in tonight's debate and I have let it go as long as I could. I am actually referring to pages 612 and 613 in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, O'Brien and Bosc, concerning displays, exhibits and props:

Speakers have consistently ruled out of order displays or demonstrations of any kind used by Members to illustrate their remarks or emphasize their positions.

I have been a member in the House for two and a half years and I can say that fairly, whether it has been the Olympics or some cause usually centred on a statement in the House, there has been discretion on the part of the Speaker to permit and tolerate it. To a certain extent I even applauded a more neutral kind of exhibit that promoted civility in this House which, as is known by all, I firmly support.

That said, there has been a real problem over the past couple of days and heading into further debate. There are members in the House right now who are wearing blue buttons that actually have CUPW printed on them. I guess the members support CUPW.

The thrust, intellectually and as a practical matter and as a matter of the substance of their debates, is to stake out a position for these specific persons. That is simply not permitted. In fact, the rules point out that these props, specifically those on their lapels, are not permitted.

The fact is that the members are representing constituents who may not agree with the particular position of members. Certainly if one checks any number of sources one would find, as the member said in his speech, there are people on both sides of this debate. It appears that the majority of folks want this legislation in place, but that said, this is unfair to their constituents. I have members of this particular organized labour group in my riding, but I do not think it is appropriate that I make representations specific to them in this

House, because in my constituency there are also small business persons and first nations people living in isolated communities who are not getting their mail. There are a host of different reasons why I cannot make representations on my person for a constituent's explicit or specific benefit.

I am asking, with the greatest of respect, that the Speaker rule on this. These buttons are more than explicit and stake out a claim and appreciably advertise whose position is being taken by members. I will let future electors decide whether they think that was a good idea at the time. It is very clear who the members represent and who they are supporting in this particular argument.

For these reasons I am asking the Speaker to make a ruling and I hope it will be found that these particular buttons, in the host of ones we have seen certainly over the past couple of years, are inappropriate and out of order and that they will be removed.

• (5100)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with all due respect, I have two things to say.

First, we are beginning to see another sort of filibuster. If you let them speak this long on a point of order, it amounts to a second filibuster. That may be part of the strategy.

Second, I do not see why we should not have the right to wear a button when we have the right to wear a ribbon on special days. I think this is a spurious debate and not a point of order.

• (5105)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. If you do rule, Madam Speaker, I ask that you take into consideration the many times that I have personally worn various ribbons. I have worn them for the cancer society, for Alzheimer's disease, for dementia. I have also worn the prostrate cancer tie.

There were some members of the Conservative Party who supported the Vancouver Canucks in their recent hockey games, and I give them credit for that, even though some of my constituents are Boston Bruins fans or Montreal Canadiens fans. There are all types of fans. Did I wear a hockey sweater to indicate my preference for the Montreal Canadiens or over another team? No, I did not.

If you do rule, Madam Speaker, I ask that you go to the historical nature of what we are doing here and understand that what we are wearing is small and respectful. It is an honourable thing for all of us to do in support of the workers of this country.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, I am certain you would be able to see through that. Clearly, those are honourable things to do, and we are not debating those issues.

The issue is that members opposite came to Ottawa to fix an apparently broken Ottawa, and they are wearing a prop in complete violation of the rules.

The Deputy Speaker: I have heard enough comments, unless there are new arguments to bring to this point of order.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Government Orders

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that there are a lot of precedents on this matter.

In 2006, we Conservatives had run on lowering the GST. Shortly after having been elected, we wore blue buttons that spoke about lowering the GST. We had a button that said “7% to 6% to 5%”. We had another one that said to cut the GST. They were ruled out of order and we had to remove those buttons.

We are simply asking for the same application of the rules and procedures here tonight.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank all hon. members for their comments. We are in a grey zone because in many cases some buttons or scarves have been allowed. It seems to me from reading the precedents that the test is whether they cause disorder, and apparently they have this evening. I would ask that the buttons be removed. I consider the matter closed.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, as for how a government might end a lockout, I will repeat the six options I just mentioned.

The first option would be to leave the parties alone to let them negotiate in good faith.

The second option would be to select a panel that might be able to advise the government on what to do in this situation.

The third option might be, if the lockout is due to a lack of revenue, to allow Canada Post to perhaps increase its revenue stream, such as by increasing postage charges.

The fourth option the government might pursue would be to provide increased tax revenue, if Canada Post is unable to raise its stamp duties.

The fifth option might be to place Canada Post under the direct control of the appropriate minister.

The final and probably the most direct and dramatic option would be to fire the current management and replace them with a more competent group of managers who could perhaps avoid something like a walkout.

In this list, I did not include back to work orders, which is what we are debating here today directly in Bill C-6. Back to work orders assume that workers are at fault, when in this case it is clearly the management that has decided to impose a lockout.

Bill C-6 would seem to be the wrong tool for this job. That is why I am standing and opposing this bill and am prepared to stay until the end of this debate to make sure that we get the proper policy tool to fix this problem.

While back to work orders will get our postal workers back to work, they are the wrong tool for this job. I am very concerned about the effects of this tool. As we know, from looking at thousands and thousands of different policy disasters, when the wrong tool is picked for the job, it leads to externalities and other problems with negative effects. This is usually the result of governments acting in haste or not taking appropriate guidance.

The worst effects of imposing a back to work order on Canada Post will be the morale of the workers. Canada Post is one of the biggest employers in Canada and one of the most respected organizations around the world. The morale of both the workers and the middle- and upper-level management is going to be devastated. This is because the two sides have not been given time to agree and work out their differences.

The division that has caused the dispute will not be resolved and will continue to fester if the two sides are not given adequate time to work out this difference. A back to work order will not solve this, and I suspect that if the problem is management, we will be facing this problem in the coming months.

As I said, from my perspective, looking at this and hearing both sides, the most effective solution would be to allow the workers and the managers to work out their differences. If the government considers the economic impacts to be so critical, then it should consider either replacing the current management or moving Canada Post under the direct control of a minister.

Unfortunately, from the debate we have heard and from the bill, not one of these options has been considered or entertained by the government, because I do not think they understand the problem they face.

I have heard from this side of the House hours and hours of talk that this is a strike, yet all the evidence shows it is a lockout. If they are using a tool to fix a strike, they are going to make a mistake. They need to pick a tool that will fix a lockout.

● (5110)

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I received an email earlier today from my letter carrier who is a constituent of mine. It reads:

Hi Mark,

I'm watching the debate live on CPAC with great frustration.... [H]as it crossed the minds of the opposition that the longer the delay the more money [it] will cost each and every member of CUPW in lost wages? Do the Liberals and NDP realize that they are using us as pawns?

Regards...your mailman and neighbour.

How does my hon. friend respond to a letter carrier who considers himself a pawn being used by the party opposite?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, the problem is twofold.

The first problem is that the unfortunate person who wrote this note has been locked out.

The second problem seems to be that the government, instead of acting responsibly and telling the public what is going on, keeps spreading information that this is a strike, and it is not. All of the major news outlets know it. All constituents in most ridings know it.

I was talking to my mother's household today. They know it is a lockout and remark how bizarre it is that on one side a crown corporation locks out its workers and the next moment the government orders them back to work.

This is a very simple problem to understand, but the government seems to get it wrong.

Government Orders

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was very interested in all the solutions the member put forward. One of the solutions he did not mention, and this I believe is what the government is after, is the privatization of Canada Post.

I have to tell members that some years ago, my family and I visited relatives in Holland, where the postal service had been privatized. It was fascinating. We had to mail letters and my sister-in-law had to pick up packages. We had to go to three different outlets or stores to buy the right stamps, depending on what was being sent in the mail. Then there were three different types of postboxes, all different colours, where one could post the items. Then of course was the question of delivery, which seemed to be delayed over and over again because, again, it was privatized. The cost of this was higher than here in Canada, at 64¢ a letter, it was less efficient and the frustration among customers was greater.

If Canada Post were privatized, the government would lose a lot of revenue and we would be very much the poorer.

I wonder if the member thinks that privatization is on the mind of the government.

• (5115)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, again, from my experience, one does not impose a solution until one figures out what the problem is.

I looked at the independent blue ribbon panel report. I am new to this issue, but I looked at the report today. This report from 2008 said that Canada Post is held in high esteem by Canadians, who are happy with the services and, in fact, proud of them. There just does not seem to be any reason to dismantle such a good corporation. It is profitable, as has been pointed. For 15 years in a row, it has generated at least a modest profit.

Again, if privatization is on the government's mind, it would only be for ideological purposes. It would not be for any reasons of good public policy.

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada Post is actually a great corporation and the employees great people.

It is unfortunate to see the kind of debate that has been going on over the last number of days. We have to ask the question, why is the NDP adamantly opposed to even putting the issue before an arbitrator?

When one side or the other is so opposed to going to arbitration like the NDP, which would just involve someone coming in to make a ruling that would be just for both sides, maybe they are on the wrong side of this issue.

Would my hon. colleague agree with that?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, I think that might be an issue for another debate, because we are debating Bill C-6 right now, the back to work order. That is what we are opposing here and will continue to oppose.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about the lockout of workers

by Canada Post and the back to work legislation the government is proposing.

I share the desire for a speedy resolution of the situation and an immediate return to regular mail delivery in this country. That is why my New Democrat colleagues and I are calling on Canada Post to unlock the doors and let postal carriers return to work.

Canada Post is a profitable corporation that earned \$281 million for Canadians last year. At the same time, it has been able to offer some of the lowest postage rates in the world, with a cost of 59¢ to mail a standard letter, compared to, for instance, Germany where the cost is 77¢ or Australia at 88¢, or even the Netherlands at 64¢.

Postal carriers across this country are responsible for the success of the Canada Post Corporation and have worked so hard to turn it into a viable, reliable and, indeed, profitable service that all Canadians depend on. The current back to work legislation, Bill C-6, is a one-sided and unfair approach to resolving this crisis. Instead of demanding that Canada Post returns to the bargaining table, the Conservative government has taken the side of the corporation and presented draconian legislation that makes a mockery of fair collective bargaining.

I oppose this legislation, first, because it offers wage rates lower than what Canada Post offered; second, because it tramples on collective bargaining rights; and, third, because it supports attacks on postal workers' defined pension benefit plan and encourages a two-tiered wage and benefits system.

Locking out workers and then imposing a contract is not fair and free collective bargaining.

The resolution to this conflict is clear. Postal carriers are ready to go back to work today. Simply unlock the doors and let them continue to deliver the mail.

This legislation is not just an attack on postal workers but an attack on the wages, benefits and pensions of all Canadian workers. I will continue to work night and day, whatever it takes, to get fair resolution.

The middle class is being squeezed in Canada. Statistics Canada shows that those who earned \$41,300 in 1980 still earn basically the same amount 30 years later. A study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives called, "Rising Profit Shares, Falling Wage Shares", claims that real wage gains for the vast majority of Canadians were virtually non-existent through much of the last 30 years. Even more disturbing, the real wages of lower-income people or those making minimum wage are less than what they were 30 years ago.

Meanwhile, the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest Canadians continues to climb. Young workers today cannot expect the same standard of living or wages as their parents or grandparents. This is what CUPW and Canada's New Democrats are fighting against. We need to ensure that new postal workers are able to earn a decent living and enjoy pension benefits.

Government Orders

We should be working to lift wages, not impose lower wages than were offered at the bargaining table by the employer. Not only has the Conservative government offered lower wages but it also wants to maintain the 10 demands of Canada Post for major rollbacks, including the elimination of sick leave, and deep cuts in benefits and pensions for new hires.

I would like to talk about delivering the mail to Canada's most vulnerable. During the recent rotating strikes, cheques were in fact delivered to the most vulnerable. If we look at what happened last week, Canada Post not only locked out its workers but also stopped all mail delivery, which meant that Canada's vulnerable were not receiving their needed cheques. This would not have happened under the rotating strikes.

• (5120)

To go back to pensions, workers are fighting for their hard-earned benefits like defined pension plans. This is what is at stake. We are talking about how people live in their later years. Will they live with dignity or will they struggle?

My dad, for instance, worked 27 years for MacMillan Bloedel and now is finding that his pension is being eroded and cut back. Is this the same fate that we have in store for those working in one of our most profitable and viable corporations, Canada Post?

The workers of Canada Post have built the organization into what it is today. They are the real, true assets of the organization. They are the people who have made the organization viable, dependable and profitable.

To really focus on pensions, let me take a moment to talk about another good friend of mine and an issue that is similar to that of many of the postal workers who we on this side have been talking about. My good friend Joel Peppar lives in New Westminster with his partner Jan. He is a senior and a veteran. He has been watching this debate since the beginning, because he too has an interest in the outcome.

His veteran's cheque, which he relies on each month, is sitting in a mail truck somewhere in the country. He has told my office that he will wait as long as it takes because he feels that it is so important that the workers get what they deserve, that they get a fair deal. So here is a guy who has defended his country and who now lives from paycheque to paycheque, and he wants to support us and the workers in their fight for fairness.

I know that Joel is not alone. I know there are thousands of Canadians like Joel who also support these workers and their bid for a fair deal. I know that Joel is watching now and wants me to continue fighting the good fight. I find that amazing. He needs his cheque but even he is not willing to put his needs ahead of those of these workers. That is because he understands the difference between right and wrong. He understands when it is critical to take a stand.

I want to mention another email that I received from a constituent of mine named George. He has been watching this debate with great interest. He is a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. He, along with his fellow workers, would like to be working right now, processing and delivering the mail. Since Canada Post has locked out the workers and thus stopped the mail service in Canada,

he says it is creating great hardship for businesses and families. He goes on to ask if it is just for the Government of Canada, his employer, to punish the workers with Bill C-6. Indeed, since the full mail stoppage was caused by the management of Canada Post, which directly answers to the Government of Canada, should the Government of Canada not be directing Canada Post to remove its lockout order?

He has heard the argument from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the member from Peterborough, that the union membership has not had a chance to vote on any of Canada Post's offers. George says the fact is that 94.5% gave the union leadership the power to bargain for a new collective agreement, which he notes is a much higher percentage than the support the voters of Canada gave the Conservative Party of Canada in the last federal election.

He goes on to say that he has heard over and over from members of the Conservative Party about the mandate that Canadians have bestowed upon them in their majority government. He says it would be nice to see them respect the membership of CUPW, which has bestowed upon his union a similar mandate: to come up with a collective agreement.

• (5125)

He asks the member from Peterborough specifically if he would he have Canadians go to the polls on every piece of legislation that is presented in Parliament. I think not.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is a great irony in the position being taken by the NDP members throughout this entire debate. One of their constant themes is that they are representing the worker, the postal carrier, the lowest person on the totem pole, but as the member mentioned during his speech, the workers are not voting on what has been placed in front of the union. They have no voice.

What I am seeing is that the NDP members are not giving a voice to the workers; they are giving a voice to what one might say is the management level of the union. I am wondering if the member could comment on why he is supporting so strongly the management level of the union and not actually supporting the worker himself or herself.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, and as I think George so eloquently pointed out, the union management has received a 94.5% mandate, an incredibly strong mandate, to be bargaining on behalf of the membership. They have been given a clear mandate to do the best they can to negotiate a settlement that would be best for all the workers in CUPW.

Of course, they cannot do that now. Not only can they not do that, the workers cannot even do their jobs because they have been locked out by the corporation.

The government cannot do its job adequately, I think, without taking this into consideration.

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• (5130)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's comments, and I also listened to the question from the other side of the House. It is obvious that the other side of the House does not realize that the union is the members; the members own the union, and the union members are workers. Let us get that clear.

People say they do not have a choice to vote, but they actually voted on the contract. If they did not vote to say whether or not they would support the strike mandate, then unfortunately they did not have their say there.

Anyhow, I want to ask the member a question about CUPW, and it is very important to say "CUPW" because that is how it is recognized. Given the fact that CUPW was doing these rotating strikes and the mail was being delivered, as my colleague said, and then we had the Minister of Labour, Lisa Raitt—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Excuse me, I did not mean to say her name. I apologize on that—

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but she has run out of time. I must give the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam equal time to respond, so he has 30 seconds for a response.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate my hon. colleague's comment and her points. Her points are well taken. Her question about representation in terms of what I think Canada's New Democrats are doing is to be commended, because I have heard from a number of my constituents and a number of members of CUPW.

I've heard from members like Michelle, for instance, who says: "I'm a postal worker from New Westminster that has sent you many letters. It's 12:30 Friday morning. I've been watching CPAC for hours now and would love for you to send my thank you to you and all your fellow NDP members, the biggest thank you for the fight and understanding of where we are coming from."

She thanks us for the fight we are putting up for them. It actually brought tears to her eyes on that evening, she says, to see us standing up here and talking about those things that most of her fellow workers are fighting for. She just wants to pass on how much she appreciates the support we are providing and the comments we are making.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hear from the Conservatives that they are getting all these letters from various postal workers. I am just wondering if the hon. member would agree that if they have those letters, they could table them in the House so that we could look at them and maybe concur with their remarks, if they wish.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a great idea. I would like to see them. There have been hundreds of emails and letters coming in from across the country. I have certainly been getting dozens. We would welcome getting many more of those from members across.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a grave moment. Yes, I know that it is around 3:33 in the morning. But no matter what the time might be, it is grave all the same. This deplorable situation and this bill, which is totally harmful to postal workers, cannot go on. What is more, all Canadian workers and their families must be respected. Bill C-6 is unprecedented. It will do harm, and it risks leading to a deterioration of working conditions for all Canadians. Is this what the Prime Minister wants? Is this what the Minister of Labour wants? Was this the intention of the Conservative government? I do not think so. I hope not. I dearly hope not. This is why we are here: to set the record straight. I spoke about the time earlier, and I am mentioning it again, to explain the situation to the Conservative government so that it can amend this horrible bill. Yes, this is a grave moment.

Let us once again explain the source of the problem. There was a negotiation process between the Canada Post Corporation and its employees. That negotiation was not easy. Negotiations are sometimes difficult.

The postal employees could have launched a completely legal general strike in accordance with the rules, but they did not want to go on strike. What they wanted was instead to use certain pressure tactics. Why? Because they like what they do. They want better working conditions. They wanted to work. Their aim was to use these pressure tactics. It is only natural that they should want to bring pressure to bear.

They also wanted to put pressure on management without hurting the Canadian people. That is most noble on their part and they should be applauded for it.

After the Canadian Union of Postal Workers began a series of rotating strikes, the union even offered to end the strike if the corporation agreed to keep the previous contract in effect for the duration of the negotiations. Incredible. The workers were even prepared to accept the status quo in the meantime, but Canada Post refused. The officials turned that down. Truly incredible.

On June 15, Canada Post decided to lock out all of its employees and shut down mail delivery. What a mistake. What an illegitimate action to take.

On June 20, the Conservatives tabled a regressive piece of legislation. Let us say it: this legislation is regressive. It would impose a contract on postal workers that includes, among other things, a wage settlement that is lower than what management offered. Can anyone in this House rise and dare call this good legislation? I challenge anyone in this House to rise and say that this part of the bill is good. I challenge all Conservatives to say that this clause is fair. I am speaking of course of the part that includes a wage settlement below the level in the management offer. It is incredible.

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My riding assistant, Daniel Lemire—a nod to him in passing: I do not think he is watching at this hour, he must be asleep, but that is okay—recently met with the locked-out workers in Drummondville. He found people who were idle, frustrated, even very angry at being unable to go to work. Yes, they want to go back to work. First of all, they wanted to go back quickly. They said we should see to it that the bill is passed and they can go back to work. But after all the conditions in Bill C-6 were explained to them, they said, “Hold on a minute.” Now they are worried because the Conservative government wants to pull the rug out from under them and deny them their legitimate right to negotiate in good faith for better working conditions and for the good of their families.

The locked-out workers told us that they wanted to return to work. As I was saying earlier, they were not the ones who decided to stop working. This is a lockout. These people enjoy their work. They enjoy providing this service to the public. They are only waiting for the Conservative government to remove the locks from the office doors so they can return to work.

● (5135)

That way, they can go back to delivering the mail for the good of seniors, SMEs and all Canadians. However, they are not prepared to swallow the affront that is Bill C-6, which the Prime Minister is trying to force down their throats. They want to return to work with respect, dignity and honour.

Let us talk about postal services in rural regions. The riding of Drummond includes many small municipalities; it is a large rural region. How many small municipalities are there in the riding of Drummond? There are 19 towns in the riding of Drummond. I will not name all of them, but I will talk about the little town of Saint-Guillaume, where I lived for a long time. If my colleagues should have the occasion to go there, I invite them to drop by the famous Saint-Guillaume cheese factory, which produces excellent cheeses distributed all over Quebec and beyond.

Let me tell you something about town life. The post office is the heart, lungs, eyes, ears and mouth of the town. Towns cannot do without a post office. It is like a primary school or a financial institution. It offers local services essential to the survival of our precious municipalities.

Unfortunately, this back-to-work bill does not guarantee the survival, viability or vitality of these unique institutions, which enable our small municipalities to continue to prosper. In my riding, the town residents are highly engaged and very attached to services such as those provided by the post office. Consider how essential the postal service is to our seniors, our mobility-impaired people, and our SMEs. There are some SMEs in my constituency, and they are very dynamic and innovative.

In short, the back-to-work bill tabled by the federal government penalizes postal workers and rewards Canada Post for locking them out. It has to be said that it is Canada Post that has interrupted national mail delivery. It is Canada Post's fault. So what does the government do? It gives Canada Post the carrot and the employees the stick. It should not be that way; that is not logical. This is an unhealthy sign of real bias.

As I was saying earlier, the bill imposes wage increases that are below those offered by Canada Post, but I will give some actual numbers. Canada Post's offers were 1.9% in 2011, 2012 and 2013 and 2% in 2014; this is well below the rate of inflation, which is 3.3%. The Conservative bill would further reduce those increases to 1.75% in 2011, 1.5% in 2012, 2% in 2013 and 2% in 2014. It is scandalous.

Here is some more information. Public postal service and postal workers do not cost the public purse anything. My colleagues mentioned this earlier, but it bears repeating: over the last 15 years Canada Post has made profits of \$1.7 billion and paid \$1.2 million in dividends and income tax to the federal government.

To summarize the situation, this is not a strike, but a lockout. The government is trying to impose a contract that is not a fair collective agreement. It is inappropriate for the government to intervene and impose a contract on the employees. We will oppose this bill and the government's attempt to privatize Canada Post and reduce services to Canadians. I would have liked to read an email, but I will not have the time.

I will say this in closing: let us unlock the doors of Canada Post and finally make it possible to have real negotiations that respect both parties.

● (5140)

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's debate. This debate has been going on for a while, and everybody is enjoying it. Those who are not enjoying it, of course, are the Canadians waiting for their mail.

I notice that the member raised the fact that Canada Post is a profitable corporation. A few moments before, one of his colleagues also raised the point about profits. In fact, the member before thought it might be an idea for the government to fire the management after 15 years of making a profit. So profit is a bad word, according to the NDP.

In the provinces where the NDP have been, such as in British Columbia, my home province, they have certainly suffered. Two terms of the NDP put my province into a have-not status.

I wonder why these members are not more concerned about the people who are suffering. They want to say it is a lockout. Let us pretend that there was not a strike. Rotating strikes are okay. They do not hurt the economy; they do not hurt people. You cannot run a business when it is shut down city by city indefinitely. They have taken \$100 million of profit out of Canada Post Corporation already.

By the way, Canada Post's profits since 2009 have been going into the transformative changes that will make sure Canada Post exists for these workers in the future.

● (5145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, my colleague made some interesting comments, to which I listened closely.

Government Orders

Despite everything, I would like to read the email I received, which I mentioned earlier. It provides a very good response to him. This lady is a letter carrier who has been locked out by Canada Post. She took part in the rotating strikes that were legitimately organized. She has lost her salary, since Canada Post does not want to bargain with the CUPW bargaining committee. She says she wants to work, like all the other CUPW members who are locked out. However, she does not think that the repercussions of the few days of strike activity organized by CUPW have been as significant as what Canada Post has imposed not only on all postal workers, but also on all Canadians. In no way was it the aim of those workers to take the population hostage.

It is very important to remember that the workers want to work and that this was a rotating strike, not a general strike. They could have called a general strike, but this was nothing but a rotating strike, precisely in order to minimize the inconvenience to the public. Who made the problem worse? Canada Post did, by—

The Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member so we can move on to the next question.

The hon. member for Bourassa.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the same speech from a different member of Parliament. I had hoped that the member for Drummond would tell me whether the recipe for poutine came from there or Victoriaville, but I guess that will remain a mystery.

More seriously, they can drag out the debate as long as they want, but I am not sure that we are being effective. Committee of the whole is where things are resolved, when we propose amendments.

What amendments does the member for Drummond have to propose? Is he prepared to allow the House to go into committee of the whole so that we can discuss the amendments? I am not asking him to read what he is told to read, but I want to know what he really thinks. Is he prepared to make amendments?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bourassa, who is the funniest member in the House. It is pretty incredible. Sometimes he talks a bit too much, but I am saying that on a personal level. Since it is so late, I thought I would throw in some humour.

What is very important is that we remember the clause in one of the old settlements done by the government. This clause in the agreement between the Canada Post Corporation and its workers ensured that there would be a good work environment in the future. This is lacking in the settlement proposed by Bill C-6. A clause should be added to ensure that there is a healthy work environment after the situation is resolved.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by highlighting the fact that unionized workers at Canada Post were locked out by their employer. They were willing to continue to work with minimal delays. They were willing to deliver pension and disability cheques. They were trying to minimize public inconvenience because they believe the postal service is important to Canadians. It was the government that locked them out. Now small businesses are hurting and people are

becoming more and more frustrated because they do not have access to the mail system.

The issue is that the members opposite, the members of the government, simply wish to stomp on the rights of workers and prevent them from negotiating an agreement with their employer. The government wants to force them back to work with this draconian legislation. The whole thing smacks of a setup: the workers are locked out, this creates a mail stoppage, the public is upset, and the government is able to use the lockout as a propaganda tool.

This also gives the government the opportunity to implement Bill C-6, to force workers back to work and cut costs at Canada Post. What is in Bill C-6 is a deal that is far less than the inadequate contract offer made by Canada Post.

I am very afraid for the workers at Canada Post, in fact for all those who work for crown corporations and as public servants in this country. If this legislation passes, their right to bargain will also be placed in jeopardy because this bill undermines Canadians' rights to collective bargaining and the legitimate expectation that there be fair treatment of workers by their employers and by their government. This right is protected in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I would also like to point out that this government claims bargaining is the best way to achieve a settlement for workers. They said this when they introduced their so-called pay equity bill. However, what we are really seeing is Conservatives undermining collective bargaining, leaving workers without the ability to negotiate a fair and appropriate agreement with their employer.

This back-to-work legislation reflects this government's true anti-union, anti-worker agenda. It is quite clear they are planning to chisel away the rights of workers—all workers. They want to take away the right to bargain for fair wages, safe working conditions, and pensions. It is pensions that are at the centre of this.

This outright attack on unionized workers sends a chill down my spine. I fear for public sector workers and employees of crown corporations, and indeed all workers in this country. Who is next? The CBC, the voice of Canadians, a part of our cultural history? Will employees of the CBC see wages and benefits rolled back? The National Gallery? Parks Canada? The Canadian Wheat Board? Of course, we know the government is trying every underhanded tactic to dismantle the Wheat Board.

Despite what some members opposite may choose to believe, unions have been very good for this country. We have all benefited from what they have negotiated at the bargaining table. It is not just fair wages. Unions have been on the forefront of human and equality rights and environmental protection. They also work for better pensions, health benefits, reasonable hours of work, and much more.

Government Orders

It was union negotiations that brought about the weekend. Interestingly enough, it was the CUPW's strike, the strike of 1981, that established maternity leave rights and benefits that set in place the opportunity for families to ask for and negotiate maternity and paternity rights across this country. The ability of young mothers and fathers to have time to stay at home to look after their infant children is owed to the men and women of CUPW, who went on strike for 41 days to gain those rights.

We know workers' rights are regularly threatened because employers do not just try to reduce wages, they attempt to cut corners. Unions are there to protect the health and safety of their members, to ensure they have fair wages, and they are treated with respect. Union members are not greedy. They are voters, and they elected us to represent them in this House. They deserve our respect, just as every Canadian deserves our respect. By attacking their rights, we are attacking all Canadians.

Now I would like to outline some of the issues of the current labour dispute. First, Canada Post management wants to eliminate sick leave and impose an inferior short-term disability plan that does not provide sufficient protection for short-term illness.

● (5150)

It also poses major problems concerning medical privacy. Recently the union offered to refer the issue to a government appointed arbitrator. CUPW believes that the current sick leave plan is adequate. It functions well and there is no need to change it.

Workers' health and safety is key. Postal workers deserve the right to work in a safe environment.

Canada Post also proposes a four-year agreement with wage increases and a cost of living allowance which will not provide sufficient protection for the wages of postal employees. CUPW believes the wage offer is too low considering the current annual inflation rate.

The people of this country know that food prices, the cost of energy, housing and prescription drugs just go up and up. Everyone is struggling, including postal workers. To add insult to injury, employees hired after the date of signing the Canada Post proposed collective agreement would have a starting salary 18% less than the current starting rate of the letter carriers. This would create a two-tier pay structure for the same job. That is far from fair. Canada Post has already cut many more jobs than is justified by the reported decline in volume, a decline that we know has been much exaggerated by the corporation.

As a result, there has been a significant increase in voluntary and forced overtime and a reduction in regular full-time positions. This harms workers and their families.

Changes need to be made. This entire situation needs to be handled differently.

The words of those directly affected by the strike are salient to this debate.

Karen sent me an email just yesterday. She said:

"I am a postal worker in your riding in London, Ontario. I've been watching the debate about the bill online and wanted to ensure that the NDP speakers knew some of the following details".

"The corporation has demanded numerous rollbacks throughout the bargaining process despite the fact that Canada Post Corporation has made record profits for the past 16 years. CUPW members across the country voted 94.5% to go on strike because we do not believe these rollbacks are necessary. CUPW decided on rotating strikes in order to impact the public as little as possible. CUPW also informed the public in advance as to the locations that were going to be affected. Once the 72-hour notice was given, the employer immediately discontinued our benefits. On the date of the first rotating strike, provisions of the collective agreement were also discontinued; part-time hours were cut immediately and full-time hours were cut in half the following week. Many plants across the country are currently full of mail because the hours were cut and the mail could not be processed. But postal workers continued to sort and deliver the mail despite these harsh tactics by CPC. CUPW agreed to stop the rotating strikes if CPC reinstated our collective agreement. The Canada Post Corporation refused! Then CPC locked out postal workers across the country, affecting all Canadians. They did not inform the public before making this decision".

"We are not on strike, we are locked out. CUPW has been reasonable throughout these negotiations, CPC has not. The issue of health and safety is very important to CUPW members because we have one of the highest rates of injury in Canada".

I also heard from Geoff, a retired postal worker, who wrote:

"I and my brethren are very concerned about the obvious and predictable union-busting tactics of this ruling government. When the Conservatives got into power with a majority, I feared many things for our country's future, and sadly they are already taking place at breakneck speed. One of these things was that it would be glaringly anti-labour and this has obviously come to pass in the tabling of back to work legislation against Canada Post workers. I think it is incumbent upon the opposition party to hold this legislation up so as to force Canada Post to come up with something resembling a reasonable contract offer at a time when good jobs are disappearing all over the country. I watched my last 10 years in the post office, as routes got even longer, the route measurement system was systematically abused and we were carrying ever larger loads on ever longer routes, leading to more frequent injuries on duty".

"Please stall this bill and get meaningful talks back to the table".

Contrary to government assertions, many Canadians know that this is an unfair lockout by Canada Post aided and abetted by the Conservatives. Canadians want their mail. They want their mail sorters and letter carriers to get back on the job.

Government Orders

I call on the government to withdraw this unfair legislation and unlock the doors of Canada Post.

• (5155)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is exactly right. These people have been locked out and that is why Canadians are not getting their mail. Could my colleague could talk about the outrageous bonuses that the CEOs receive? The company wants to reduce the wages of the workers who are busting their backs out there and yet CEOs are getting big bonuses. I am wondering if my colleague can speak to that.

We need to remind colleagues on the other side how many unionized workers are actually out there because those who are actually part of the Canadian Labour Congress, which they are affiliated through, number over three million and I know there are many more that.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. Some 55,000 postal workers are out of a job. They have been locked out. All they wanted was to secure their pensions, to secure a livelihood for their families and to do the work they do best.

My colleague mentioned bonuses. I would like to refer to the reality in this country. We know that the CEO of Canada Post makes in excess of \$600,000 per year and the profits of Canada Post last year were \$281 million. Surely there is room in that fiscal reality for a proper settlement for postal workers so they do not have to worry about feeding their children and receiving their pensions.

I would also like to remind the House that the banks last year made \$22 billion in profit and \$11 billion of that went to CEO's compensation and bonuses. It seems to me that there is a rather skewed notion of fairness in this country.

• (5200)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have followed this very closely over quite a few hours, as we all have. This was started with a speech by our Minister of Labour who talked about the comprehensive process, that there had been bargaining at the table for many months. There had been conciliation. There had been arbitration provided by the government. We looked at the rolling strikes and I think people are diminishing the impact of those rolling strikes. We have heard from our Minister of Health how that really impacted. She understands better than anyone in the House how much the north relies on the delivery of food, diapers and the essentials of life. Because business people were unsure about what was going to happen, it was just like having a strike.

Does the member opposite believe it is now time to pass this legislation, get mail to the north, let our businesses get back to work, and it is time to not pick sides any longer. Let us get this legislation passed.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague talks about picking sides, but the government already did. It picked the side of the corporation. It allowed the corporation to lock out its workers and then it brought in legislation that supports the corporation.

The Canada Post Corporation locked out its workers. The union members of CUPW are being punished with back to work

legislation, legislation that reduces the stingy offer that Canada Post made.

I referenced an email that I received earlier in my remarks. That individual who works for Canada Post said the Canada Post tactic is consistently to refuse to negotiate until it gets a strike mandate from the workers.

The government talks about eight months of negotiations. There was no such thing. Canada Post would not come to the table. It did not come to the table until the workers had no choice but to take the strike vote and then it locked them out.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Lavergère (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post made nearly \$300 million in profits in 2009. To be exact, it made \$281 million in profits in 2009.

We do not have the numbers for 2010, which is actually a little surprising. I thought those numbers were supposed to be released two months ago. We are a little surprised and have to wonder why these numbers have not yet been released, and whether there is any connection with the current labour dispute.

In any case, we are talking about nearly \$300 million in profits in 2009 and 15 years of profits. Canada Post has turned a profit for the past 15 years.

Also, as we heard earlier tonight, Canadians are satisfied with the services offered by Canada Post and with what this crown corporation represents to our communities.

There were rotating strikes that partially, but never completely, interrupted postal services. However, the employees were willing to continue working under the conditions of their old collective agreement.

Looking at all this, we wonder where the problem lies and what crisis made the Government of Canada allow Canada Post to lock out its employees—this is not a strike; it is a lockout—and deprive all Canadians, including small businesses, but really all Canadians, of a service that they appreciate, that they need and that is vital.

Where is the crisis that, on top of all that, is making the government want to impose back-to-work legislation that contains many completely unacceptable clauses? Things like pensions, for example, come to mind. Several issues are unacceptable. For instance, it is imposing wages that are lower than what Canada Post itself was willing to offer.

We do not understand what is happening. The Conservatives talk about the best interests of the Canadian economy. Yes, the economy is important, essential and vital, sure. However, this expression reminds us of the best interests of the nation. Our question is, best compared to what? Compared to the interests of Canadians, to the interests of workers?

We in the NDP believe that the economy exists to serve people, and not the other way around.

Government Orders

When we hear the Associate Minister of Defence questioning the right to strike, as we heard yesterday, and when we go over events that led workers who exercised their legitimate right to strike and who were prepared to go back to work to be locked out, we have doubts. We shudder, even. We wonder how far this government will go and who will be the next victim.

I am thinking, for example, about the people—and we see this a lot in Quebec—who are fighting for unions at Wal-Mart. What is going to happen, not only to those people, but to many others who want to use legitimate, recognized methods to secure acceptable living and working conditions? What is going to happen to them? Who will be the next victim? What treatment does the Conservative government have in store for Canadian workers as a whole?

• (5205)

With this bill, the government is targeting not only the postal workers, but all of us. That is why all of my colleagues have received so many emails from people who wanted to testify to this and who feel threatened themselves. I will not read you an email, but I will tell the House what a taxi driver told me a little earlier. I do not imagine he belongs to a big union. He told me to stay the course because the people need us.

I say to that taxi driver: yes, I am going to resist with all my strength, along with my colleagues in the NDP caucus, and we will be here day and night to resist and to stand up not only for the postal workers but for all Canadian workers and all Canadians. Because we cannot allow this government to undermine workers' rights in Canada, nor can we allow this government to undermine the Canadian postal service, a service that all Canadians believe in, which is more than a service, it is an institution.

We know what the post offices represent in our small towns and villages all across Canada. Mostly, it is the presence of the government in all the regions, from coast to coast, as you say in English. A settlement like the one that Bill C-6 intends to impose will create a situation at Canada Post that will be terrible and intolerable, poison labour relations and undermine the excellent service that all Canadians have come to expect.

• (5210)

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to welcome this new member to the House. I am wondering something about her speech. The New Democratic Party has historically been very open to union leaders and is known for its ties with them.

How can she think that her party has an objective position? How can she think that her party represents all Canadians? Surely there is now a party that represents a sample of the Canadian population and that thinks about the interests of all Canadians. How can she think that the NDP truly represents Canadian interests?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. This question gives me the opportunity to reiterate that the debate is not about union leaders, but about the workers and their families, their children, their parents and all Canadians. It does not concern just a small group, like Canada Post managers, the big banks or major industries, but all Canadians.

This gives me the opportunity to repeat the argument I made earlier, namely that the economy exists to serve people, not the other way around.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the profits that have been made over the years at Canada Post. In fact, for the last 15 years there has been considerable profit. She asked why on earth the efficiency of Canada Post and the fact that Canadians are very happy with their postal service is never mentioned and why it is not front and centre.

I wonder if perhaps it has something to do with the fact that the government and the corporation wants to create the impression that somehow workers are not doing their job and that somehow Canadians should be dissatisfied. It certainly helps the government in terms of its propaganda in regard to Bill C-6.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his question.

It is clear that this legislation is sending the message that the workers are guilty in some way. It is Canada Post workers who are being punished by this legislation and who are being offered wages that are lower than what the employer offered them.

We are punishing them as if they were guilty, while throughout the process, their behaviour has been completely legitimate. They were prepared to return to work by accepting the conditions of their former collective agreement, while they were actually doing a job that Canadians appreciate.

I like to say that Canada Post is an institution that is respected across Canada. Why do we now want to punish the workers? I am at a loss for words.

• (5215)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to wish a happy Fête nationale to all Quebecers who celebrated this great holiday yesterday. I am sure that right now in my constituency there are still people celebrating, even though it is now 4:15 a.m. I would like to say hello to them. Perhaps they are watching me before going to bed.

Unfortunately I was unable to be with them for the Saint-Jean-Baptiste festivities. For that I would like to apologize. However, I am certain that the people in my constituency fully understand the reasons why I am here today. We have been obliged to remain here, in this House, and it is very important to explain the reasons for our absence from the riding.

It is very simple: we cannot let this bill pass without standing up for the workers of our country. I am also very proud of what our caucus has done today and in the last few days. The members of our party have indeed stood up together for the country's workers. For it is not only the workers at Canada Post that will be affected, but all the workers of our country.

Government Orders

This bill sets a dangerous precedent that reveals the hidden agenda of this government, that being the privatization of public services. The NDP has always fought to preserve what we have achieved and to maintain our good public services, and that is what we are doing again today and what we may be doing again in the days to come. In spite of what anyone may say, Canada Post cannot and will never be replaced by a private corporation that will continue to offer the same good universal services as those offered previously.

The government seems to be taking only some members of the public into account. In the last 24 hours—and even more—of this debate about postal workers, I have not seen a single member of this government rise to talk about and stand up for postal workers. One might think that the hon. members on the other side of the House take mail carriers for second-class citizens and believe that they deserve no better than other Canadians. They constantly tell stories about people not receiving their letters or their cheques, about small businesses in difficulty. If it is so important to them to get the letter carriers back to work, all they have to do is call the CEO of Canada Post and ask him to unlock the doors so that the workers who want to work can finally return to work.

That is in fact what the workers were doing before the lockout, before Canada Post decided to close the doors: they were working, engaging in rotating strikes that were doing virtually no harm to Canadians. Even the Minister of Labour said that there were not many complaints and that no major disruptions had resulted, as the Conservatives are trying to claim.

The postal workers were very respectful, for they know that the service they provide is essential to the lives of many people. That is why they took care to demand their rights while ensuring that service to the public was still provided.

Here the government is once again trying to divide Canadians. It is once again trying to pit two groups against each other. In this case those groups are the postal workers and other Canadians. I would like to remind the government that the letter carriers and postal workers are Canadians as well, and that they too deserve acceptable living conditions, consideration and respect.

The Conservatives like to give examples of people suffering from this lockout, but I have also received messages from letter carriers who are pleased with our work and who admire the battle we are now waging for them. One letter carrier in my riding wrote me a message this morning that has given me even more energy to keep up this fight. In his message he says that he is recently retired from the postal service and was always well treated by Canada Post, but that now things have gone too far. He feels that the government is turning back the clock. He says that he lived through many strikes and that they are what gave him what he has today. He wishes to thank our leader, my colleagues and me for what we are doing for them. It is signed Robert, from Sherbrooke.

I want to reassure my constituent and say to him that we will continue on until this bill is amended and made acceptable to all the workers of this country.

This bill is retrograde—and “retrograde” is no harsh word I am using here. No, for not only has the government had the nerve to create a special bill to send the workers back to work, but it is

sending them back with worse conditions than those already offered by Canada Post. How dare it make the management offer even lower? I totally fail to understand the government’s approach here. As my constituent said, the government is turning back the clock with this sort of measure.

If the government were serious and really wanted the mail to finally move, it would take the locks off the doors of Canada Post.

● (5220)

But how do we expect Canada Post to bargain with its employees when the government wants to impose a bill that dictates the employees' wages and working conditions? This is nonsense. The government is telling the employer that it does not need to bargain with its employees, the government itself is going to decide for them what conditions they deserve, and they will not be able to bargain, they will only be able to accept the legislation. I cannot get over what this government is doing. I say to myself that at this time of night, surely I must be dreaming, because I do not understand how the government can be introducing a bill that is this disrespectful.

I am happy to be here in the House at this late hour to fight for the rights of these workers, who have the same rights as all other Canadians. I really do wonder how the members who are going to vote for this regressive bill are going to be able to look their letter carrier in the eye the next time he comes to deliver a letter to them. If I were in their shoes, I would be ashamed. I will be proud to greet my letter carrier and to be able to tell him I was here in 2011, and I did everything in my power to ensure that he could continue to have decent working conditions.

I would like to quote Denis Lemelin, the president and chief negotiator for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, who said: “... we make no apologies for refusing unreasonable concessions demanded of us by a profitable company.”

Over the last 15 years, Canada Post has made \$1.7 billion in profit. And this is the corporation that wants to cut its employees' wages and take more money out of their pockets, when it is making profits and its executives are again going to pocket bigger bonuses, one of them amounting to 33%, if I recall correctly.

So I condemn this bill as it now stands and I will be voting against it.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak this morning. The member gave an enthusiastic presentation, although I would question the accuracy of it.

We all know the reason we are here. It is not because of rotating strikes, a lockout, or even the government legislation. We are still here because of the NDP's stubbornness in not allowing this legislation to go forward and these things to move ahead.

Government Orders

I have a bit of an emotional reaction to what the NDP is doing. I come from Saskatchewan, a province where the NDP has done massive damage over the decades. Pretty much everything it has done in my province has been negative for the province. For many years it restricted land sales in agriculture. It nationalized and almost destroyed the potash industry until it was sold to private interests and now it is one of the major industries in the world. When it comes to resources, one of the failed provincial leaders made the statement that they were going to be left in the ground until there were better prices. By the time the resources began to be extracted, Canada was decades behind its neighbours who had developed them.

I have watched New Democrats represent special interest groups over the years, and I saw it again these last couple of days. They are not really that interested in the workers, they are interested in the union bosses. We see that in other areas. In agriculture, for example, earlier one of the members mentioned the Canadian Wheat Board. We see that they are not interested in farmers but in the leadership.

It was really brought to the fore this evening during the vote. We saw that the New Democrats themselves are not all that interested in this. It is more of an exercise for them to show off for their union bosses. We saw that only 70 of their 103 members voted in favour of their own motion.

I am wondering if he can comment on why his own members are not interested in supporting their position.

• (5225)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

In his speech, my colleague strayed a little from the topic we are discussing today. I would like to assure parliamentarians that all the New Democratic Party members of this House have stood firm and will continue to do so throughout the days to come by voting against the bill, which is not respectful of workers. It is not just Canada Post workers who will be affected, it is all workers in Canada. The NDP is not just on the side of the union or the union bosses, it is also on the side of all workers in Canada. That is why we will continue to fight, for days and hours.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much liked the hon. member's speech, and I am interested by one aspect in particular.

That is the relationship between the union movement and progress in society in general. Could the hon. member talk a little more about that? It would be very helpful.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Pontiac for his excellent question.

That unions have allowed our society to make great progress is a fact. The person who wrote to me also mentioned that in her 15 years of hard work she defended their interests and managed to get decent working conditions that let them lead a decent life, as every Canadian would wish to do. This is in part due to the unions who succeeded in defending their interests and in winning concessions from their bosses, who often do not view their employees with much respect.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly correct the record. The member said in his speech that members of the government have not mentioned the postal workers. I was here from 8 p.m. last night until 6 a.m. this morning, and I can say that we did hear members of the government speak the voice of postal workers. That did happen.

I heard an opposition member for whom I have a tremendous amount of respect say that it is a democratic right to hold up the House to speak that voice. We acknowledge that, but there is a democratic right and then there is just right, and this is not right.

It has been a productive debate, do not get me wrong, but it became repetitive at about 3 a.m. Now it is 24 hours later. Canadians find it frustrating.

Speaking as a new member of Parliament, it is very frustrating that the Liberal colleague who is sitting way down there asked a question that did not get answered. He asked a direct question. It did not get answered.

When will the opposition quit beating its chest at the expense of Canadians and end this debate by bringing forward its solutions or by voting for this legislation?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, allow me to reassure the hon. Conservative member. If he makes no concessions, we will not accept this bill and we will keep saying what we have been saying for several days, as long as the government refuses to budge. We will do so until things change.

I would also like to tell him that we are ready to introduce amendments in due course, when we are in committee of the whole, if necessary. I will be very pleased to work with all hon. members.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to once again speak on this critical issue.

The workers of Canada Post have been locked out. That is right: they have been locked out. They are not on strike. They have been locked out.

This is not a strike. The workers are “locked out”, a term should give us all nightmares. I am sure we all remember very clearly that not so long ago the Prime Minister himself locked parliamentarians out of the House of Commons.

It was not the fault of Canadians that parliamentarians were locked out and it not the fault of Canadians that the workers at Canada Post are locked out. In our case, the government locked us out. Is it not a coincidence that it is the government once again that has put the padlocks on? Canadians are the ones who are affected when the government padlocks government doors.

Postal workers want to go back to work but they cannot. Why can they not go back to work? They are locked out. Heck, posties even tabled a proposal to keep the old contract in place in negotiations. Canada Post refused and shut down the mail service. Canada Post locked its workers out.

Five days later, to compensate Canada Post for locking out its workers, the Conservative government introduced legislation that imposes a contract with an extremely regressive wage settlement. Given the fact that it takes time to draft such legislation, one can only conclude that the government was prepared to wreak havoc on the workers. One can only conclude that Canada Post was aware of Bill C-6 and willingly chose not to negotiate in good faith.

That is a shame. Workers got locked out and now we are trying to force them back to work. They did not go on strike.

Let me refresh your memory on this regressive piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

• (5230)

[*Translation*]

This government has put forward a one-sided and irresponsible piece of legislation. With the bill, the government wants to impose an agreement in which wages are lower than those that Canada Post had offered. That is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Another important element of this debate is the move to defined contribution pensions. The phenomenon is blatantly one-sided. If defined contributions are absolutely as necessary as we hear, it would seem logical that management at Canada Post would be happy to lead by example and change its pension plan first.

Do not hold your breath, Mr. Speaker. These plans are far worse than defined benefit pensions. There is not a CEO in Canada who would trade a golden parachute for the gamble of the defined contribution pension.

For the benefit of those who are just taking in this debate, I will explain what a defined contribution pension is. With a defined benefit pension plan, an employee receives a set monthly amount at retirement. The amount received is based upon the participant's salary and length of employment. The retiree receives that amount plus cost of living increases every month for life.

These are the kinds of pensions most of us are familiar with. These are the kinds of pensions that allow seniors to live in dignity.

The great advantage of the defined benefit plan for an employee is that the employer bears the risk of market downturns and actuarial mistakes and is responsible for topping up deficiencies at the time of retirement. This allows individuals to retire knowing to the penny the kind of lifestyle they will be able to maintain.

Confident that they will be able to afford a reasonable retirement, these people can plan their lives accordingly. They will not have to worry if they want to put kids through college or university. They will not have to worry that they might not be able to afford to retire and have to save every cent they can to guard against that.

Government Orders

In contrast to traditional pensions, where the amount of the benefit is defined, there is the defined contribution plan. This plan is so named because it is the amount of the contribution that is defined. Employees contribute a portion of their salaries into a retirement account where it can be invested in stocks, bonds, mutual funds, et cetera. Some companies make a matching contribution up to a certain percentage. The account grows through contributions and investment earnings until retirement.

In a defined contribution plan, there are no guarantees about how much, if any, of your money will be left when you retire. The risks are placed squarely on the individual employees. We know what happened with the economic downturn that the Conservative government did not believe was coming.

These pensions can be profoundly different for employees who have very similar work histories. Here is an example. Imagine that a person retires at a time when markets are performing well. Due to good fortune and impeccable timing, that person's benefit will be higher as a result. If another person with exactly the same pension and roughly the same amount invested retires six months later but during a market downturn, that person may find benefits dramatically reduced by comparison.

It does not sound very fair. It is pension roulette, at best. We saw that in the recession. Many pensions around the world saw reductions in benefits of up to 40% in 2008. That is not good news for those retirees, to be sure.

I have had many calls from seniors who, holy crow, had to start selling their homes and moving into apartments. They did not even know if they could afford the rent. We have too many seniors living in poverty in Canada as it is. The trend to defined contribution pensions could well place even more seniors in poverty in the years to come.

Where is the commitment on the part of this government to actually do something about this phenomenon? From this side of the House, it does not appear to exist at all. This attitude is the antithesis of J. S. Woodsworth's famous line, "What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all."

Take a look at the horrible lockout that miners in Sudbury went through recently. They spent a year on the picket line fighting the introduction of defined contribution pensions for future hires. We should think about that. These hardrock miners understood that the shift in pensions would be such a gamble for future hires that they sacrificed a year of income, delayed retirements for a full year, and walked picket lines in the heat of the summer and the cold of the winter.

My husband was one of those miners. They showed dedication and the courage of their convictions. Those miners fully understood the spirit of Mr. Woodsworth's quote.

That obviously is nothing the Conservative government can relate to in the least. This was about the future workers in the mines and the future workers in all other jobs. Again, "What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all."

Government Orders

• (5235)

I cannot get it out of my head. It speaks of the disconnect the government has with everyday Canadians. If the government operated under that mantra, we would either be debating legislation to change the pensions for this place to defined contribution schemes or, at the very least, debating a more balanced piece of back-to-work legislation.

However, we are not, and it is nothing less than a national shame.

In closing, I will reiterate my objections to the way the government has so obviously taken sides in this dispute, the dangerous debate about the privatization of Canada Post that is a side effect of the lockout imposed on Canada Post employees, and the risky proposition of defined contribution pensions.

We need to stop this race to the bottom that has gone on for far too long in Canada. We need to see the value in an economy that is defined by its human capital; an economy that values good-paying jobs, instead of attacking them in order to validate the desire for cheap portable labour; an economy that is not all about sweetheart deals for the business elite and nothing but concessions from hard-working Canadians.

We have heard the government say that it wanted to have a stable government and that is why we went into an election. Let me tell members what a stable Conservative government means: unstable wages, unstable benefits, unstable pensions, unstable services, unstable employment, unstable economy and unstable life.

Shame on the Conservative government.

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to correct the record, it was the NDP and the Liberal Party that forced this unwanted \$300 million election upon us, and it was Canadians who chose a strong, stable, national majority Conservative government. That is how we came to be here, and I am very grateful, because that is how I find myself in this hallowed chamber.

This is not about picking sides. I can assure the member that the Conservative Party values the hard work of our postal workers. It is really about the economy, as I heard at the door and as I am sure everyone heard at the door.

There are still too many of our neighbours who are looking for work. In Canada we have had a very successful economy over the last number of quarters. I believe it is for seven quarters that we have had consistent growth, and that growth compares very favourably with the rest of the world. We need only look at Greece, where they are holding out their hands again for a second round of funding from the EU. The United States is looking at possibly entering a second recession. We are doing incredibly well in Canada.

Does the hon. member not honestly feel that by having the workers go back to work and getting mail delivered, we might actually improve the economy?

• (5240)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate to the member to take the padlocks off.

The CEO is appointed by the government, just as senators are appointed by the government, and we can see what happens there. We just have to look at the legislation on climate change.

I would say to my colleague that we are not advocating just for the postal workers today, but for every worker. The fact is that the government is trying to instill something, and it has indeed picked sides. If it had not, it would have asked Canada Post why it does not allow the postal workers to continue negotiating with the collective agreement they said they were willing to continue with. Instead the government said it would allow Canada Post to lock the workers out and would then force them back to work.

The postal workers want to go back to work, but you have locked them out.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Have you locked them out?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I have not.

The Speaker: I think the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans is reminding the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskwasing to address comments through the Chair and not directly at members. I am sure we will all keep that in mind.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs when she asked if the workers should not go back to work and get the economy moving, she was absolutely correct. We reiterate once again that the workers did not shut the doors. It was the corporation that shut the doors, knowing full well it would have the full support of the Conservative government in its needs on that.

Why would a Conservative government institute wage language in legislation, stipulating wages lower than the corporation was going to offer? Why would it do that? It is almost unprecedented, except for the 1975 wage and price controls. The Conservatives went absolutely berserk when John Turner and Trudeau did that in 1975.

Why would the Conservatives offer lower salaries for working people in this country, when the corporation itself offered higher salaries?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, it is a race to the bottom for the Conservatives, as I said in my speech. It is awful that they are picking sides.

The Conservatives have been talking about the economy. If they are really worried about the economy, why are they giving big corporate tax cuts? They are looking to support their corporate tax cuts. I know what they are trying to do.

Government Orders

They are looking at selling land associated with heritage sites attached to lighthouses. These are heritage sites. Then there is the vulnerable persons check. If the Conservatives are serious about the economy, why is it that my constituents have to wait three months or more for a vulnerable persons cheque? Jo-Anne Parsons from Kagawong has waited three months for a vulnerable persons cheque. She is not able to work without it.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to speak tonight, because on behalf of the entire House of Commons, I want to wish good luck to the Canadian women's soccer club at the FIFA Women's World Cup tournament, which is to take place in Germany on June 26 at 11 a.m. eastern time. Soccer is one of the world's greatest games. The Canadian women will do all of us proud.

One thing about being here for a while is we get to notice trends within the Conservative Party of Canada.

It was not too long ago that RCMP officers negotiated through their pay councils a 3.5% increase. That took over six months of negotiation between the pay councils, Treasury Board, the public safety board and the Government of Canada. Just two days before Christmas in 2009, the public safety minister said in an email that the negotiated 3.5% was gone and was arbitrarily down to 1.5%. It was done just like that.

These are not ordinary workers. These are the people who keep our streets safe, yet arbitrarily, without discussion and without consultation, that 3.5% went down to 1.5%.

The Conservatives talk about getting the odd letter from a postal worker saying that workers did not have a chance to vote. We have asked them to table those letters, and I am sure they will in due time.

They worry about democracy within a union. I would remind those members, as a long time unionist, that the union is probably one of the most democratic institutions in this country.

Here is something that is not democratic: the agriculture minister said very clearly on May 3 of this year that when it comes to the Wheat Board, he would not hold a vote by farmers to decide if the Wheat Board should keep its monopoly. What happened to democracy for our farmers?

After RCMP officers and farmers, who is next? It is the postal workers. Who will be next after the postal workers?

Members can mark my words. If the Canadian Wheat Board goes down, supply management in this country will go down. The Conservatives received a letter from John Manley that said he is looking forward to the ending of the supply management system in this country. That was written in May of this year.

If the Conservatives were true to supply management, they would have removed it from the discussions at the Canada-EU talks, but they did not, so this will be happening—

• (5245)

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order on the question of relevance. My hon. colleague raised the issue of the Wheat Board, but we are hear to talk about Canada Post.

His question is about democracy. A vote was taken on May 2. We campaigned on the issue of the Wheat Board, we were elected on it, and we are following through on it.

I ask the member to stick to the issue at hand.

The Speaker: The first part, about relevance, was a point of order. I would encourage the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore to keep his comments relevant to the bill before the House.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, that is correct, but this is like a jury. I am building up a case as to the trend of the Conservative Party of Canada. I do thank you very much for that.

The reality is that the postal workers were locked out. If the Government of Canada is truly serious about ending the postal concern, it takes one phone call from the Prime Minister of Canada to the appointed person on the board to end it and send it to arbitration. Canada Post will present its side, CUPW will present its side and the arbitrator will rule.

However, the Prime Minister will not make that call. He has created a crisis where there was none. We have seen this before, again and again. We have to ask ourselves, why are the Conservatives doing this?

I encourage anybody listening out there on CPAC and here in the House of Commons to read the book by John Steinbeck called *The Grapes of Wrath*. People would pick a bushel of peaches for 5¢, and another family would come by and say they could do it for 4¢, so the family at 5¢ was gone. It is the rush to the bottom, and it goes on and on.

There is a reason I am so passionate about letter carriers. When we came to Canada after the destruction of Europe and the onset of the post-war depression of Europe, we were my father and six kids, along with three other kids, nine of them in total, and he finally got a job with Canada Post. He was a letter carrier for many years. He was proud to wear the uniform of a postal carrier.

That was in Postal Station L, in Marpole in southern Vancouver, and for years he delivered the post to some of the richest people in the Lower Mainland along Southwest Marine Drive. My colleague from B.C. knows exactly where that street is. The folks down there treated my father with great respect. Every Christmas my dad got turkeys, hams and envelopes of money because the people were very proud to see their letter carrier bringing the mail in an expedient fashion. My father and his colleagues were very proud to do that work.

My dad made a living wage. My dad was able to have medical and dental benefits. He looked after a family of nine on his salary. Of course, my mother was working as well. They also had a group home that supplemented the income, but it was because of that job that they had the chance—and Newfoundlanders know that word—to look after their families and become productive members of our economy.

Government Orders

We hear about the economy from the Conservatives over and over again. In her speech the minister called this particular situation a “strike” three times, which it is not; it is a lockout. It is amazing that the Minister of Labour could confuse a lockout and a strike, unless the Conservatives are trying to mislead the Canadian public and trying to blame the workers for the situation.

I do not believe that the Minister of Labour drafted the bill. I cannot believe in my heart of hearts that somebody who is from Cape Breton and knows very well Davis Days and what happened to coal miners and steelworkers in the great island of Cape Breton could draft such draconian legislation. I do not for a second believe that the Minister of Labour did that. I honestly believe that her directions came from higher above, either the PMO or the office of the Privy Council. It did not come from her. I would almost bet my next paycheque on it, because I do not believe a woman of that calibre would draft such draconian legislation.

The reality is that we are here now exercising our democratic right to hold the government to account and stall this legislation as best we can.

I can't help but notice the Conservatives complaining that we are filibustering and talking into the edge of the night. I remember very clearly the Nisga'a Treaty. My friend over there from York knows it very well. There were 478 amendments, and they slowly crept up out of their seats for each one, making the person recording the names a very tired person by the end of it.

At the end it was Nisga'a 478, Reform zero. The treaty came through. It turned out to be one of the finest treaties for aboriginal people in this country, yet the Reform Party at that time filibustered and kept it going for a couple of days. They defended their right to do that, and the rules of the House said they had every right to do so.

• (5250)

This is exactly what the NDP is doing right now. We are standing up for working people in this country. We heard about the farmers, we heard about the RCMP, now it is the letter carriers. Who is next? Who is next on the agenda, CBC employees? We already know the wheat board is going to be gone soon. Who is next on the hit parade?

The Conservatives put us into the biggest deficit we have ever had in this country and now to pay for it they are asking hard-working, honest to goodness Canadians to reduce their salaries, reduce their benefits, reduce their pensions in order for the Conservatives to balance the books when they made the financial mistakes themselves. I say shame on the Conservatives for picking on the working people of this country to pay for their mistakes.

If they truly wish to balance the books I have many other ways they can do it. They can start off by getting rid of the Senate. There is \$100 million dollars right there they can save. There are many other things. They can get rid of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. There is \$11 million dollars they can save. I can go on and on about where they can save money and not touch one public servant in this country in terms of honest, hard-working people in this country.

We in the NDP will never apologize for standing up for Canada Post workers and their allies in the country from coast to coast to coast. When we see injustice in the country, you can always count on the NDP to stand up for Canadians and their families.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here for one reason and that is because the NDP, the official opposition, has taken a side in this dispute.

I know there has been a lot of rhetoric thrown around about this, but the proof is this: if the Liberal Party were to have been elected as the official opposition in the last election, we would not be here because both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party understand the responsibilities that come along with power. We would not be here. That is the proof.

My advice to the NDP members is if they want to move from protest to power, in the words of the former NDP premier and current Liberal leader, they need to accept the responsibilities that come with being a government in waiting. If they feel that this bill sides with management, as they have been saying in the House over the last couple of days, then instead of filibustering the bill and siding with the union, they should instead propose amendments to the bill to improve it so we can deal with this issue and get Canada Post working again.

The NDP still does not understand the role of the official opposition, to be a government in waiting. It has taken a side in this dispute by filibustering the bill. Instead of taking a side in this dispute, if it feels that the bill has flaws in it, it should learn the discipline of power and propose amendments so that the House can get on with addressing the bill and dealing with this issue.

• (5255)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, if I had a baseball bat I would knock that one out of the park.

He is accusing us of picking a side. Guilty. We are standing up for workers and their families. I am guilty of that. However, I can guarantee this, we know the power of government in opposition because in four years we will be sitting over there.

I remind my hon. colleague, who I have the greatest respect for, that he should understand that when one governs it does not give one extra arrogance. One does not lock out the employees and create a crisis. That is the arrogance of governance. Maybe the government should learn just a little bit of humility and understand what working people and their families have to go through in this country.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he should be careful. If that party wants to be in power one day and learn from an NDP government in British Columbia, it will pass back-to-work legislation.

I want to pick up on something he said earlier because he was using words of wisdom. He said the former Reform Party of Canada engaged in a filibuster that did not amount to anything in the end.

Does he agree that we no longer need to carry on with this filibuster? We need to get working and focus a great deal of effort on proposing amendments in committee of the whole. Then we will really be trying to make things work.

Government Orders

We are currently just marking time. We call this marking time. For the three or four people watching us on television, it is five in the morning. We are marking time and repeating ourselves. Some hon. members are sharing notes with their colleagues. We see the same hon. members, because they got and sit next to the person making the speech, for they want to be seen on television often.

Nonetheless, the reality is that we are marking time. Can we move on to more serious things, go to committee of the whole, propose amendments and truly help resolve the situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I can do one better than that. We could end this thing in 30 seconds. The Prime Minister calls Deepak Chopra and says unlock the gates, get the workers back to work and let's have a fair settlement. That can be done immediately.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): I have great respect for the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. He has done things to bring this House together on the soccer field and other places. For that we appreciate him. However, I am asking whether his memory is selective. Only months ago, our Minister of Labour brought together the Maritime Employers Association and after months and months of negotiating helped them facilitate an agreement with the workers. We seem to have forgotten that great success. In this case, after months of work the attempts ended in failure so there was no option left for her but to do what she's done.

I want to remind my colleague that this is not about the workers. This is about union leaders. Again, he is being selective in the way he is framing this debate.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Speaker of the House of Commons, CPC): The hon. member for Sackville-Eastern Shore has thirty seconds.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I will take 28 seconds, Mr. Speaker.

I have just asked my hon. colleague if he honestly believes that the fine individual, who I have great respect for, the Minister of Labour, has actually drafted that legislation and that those are her fingerprints all over it. I could almost guarantee my hon. colleague from British Columbia that someone else did that and she is the one who has to be the spokesperson for it. I do not believe that somebody from Cape Breton can draft the most draconian legislation that I have seen in 14 years that affects workers and their families in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate you on your election, since I have not had a chance to do so before.

I would like to take the opportunity of my first speech in this debate in the House of Commons to wish all of the residents of the riding of Saint-Jean a wonderful Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, a public holiday, and the same to all francophones in Canada, whom we tend to forget in Quebec: Acadians, Franco-Ontarians, Franco-Albertans, Franco-Manitobans, and I could go on this way for each province and territory.

To me, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day is the celebration of an entire people, who see themselves reflected in a certain set of values. It is more than a national holiday, St. Jean Baptiste Day, it is a people's

holiday. Obviously, I would have preferred it if the government, which claims to recognize the Quebec people, had agreed to suspend the proceedings of the House, but unfortunately it did not do that. I would have preferred to celebrate our people's holiday on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, in Lacolle, in Saint-Valentin, in Mont-Saint-Grégoire, in Saint-Paul-de-l'Île-aux-Noix, in Saint-Blaise, in Saint-Alexandre, in Sainte-Brigide or in Sainte-Anne-de-Sabrevois.

While I have the opportunity, I would also like to recognize the sense of responsibility shown by our colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, who did not give in to the demagoguery and who stayed with us in the House. We do not have the same vision of Quebec and the best ways to protect and defend its interests, but we have in common our love for Quebec. Unfortunately, that is not the case for the Conservative members, who hold Quebec in contempt and insult Quebecers by refusing to suspend the proceedings of the House for Quebec's national holiday. I must recognize that three of the four Bloc Québécois members spent Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day here with us to stand up for workers against the brutality of the lockout imposed by a government that is brutal and reactionary in numerous ways.

On Tuesday, when I was reading *La Presse*, I noticed something bizarre concerning the Canada Post lockout. The government wants to impose wage increases of 1.75% in 2011, 1.5% in 2012 and 2% in 2013 and 2014. At first glance, one wonders why the postal workers are complaining, since after all, they are getting guaranteed wage increases. In the article, the situation grew grotesque a few lines later, when it said that in the last round of bargaining, Canada Post was proposing increases of 1.9% in 2011 and 2% for the next three years. In other words, the government is imposing a dictatorial settlement that over a four-year period amounts to an average wage \$875 lower than what Canada Post was proposing.

My first reflex, as an engineer, is to multiply \$875 by 48,000 employees. That comes to the modest sum of \$42 million, that the families of postal workers will not be able to put back into the Canadian economy, into the small businesses in our communities, the child care centres and small local shops. What is most ironic is that part of that \$42 million would have gone back into the pockets of the Conservatives' friends—the big banks, the oil companies, the pharmaceutical companies, and all the rest. Well, I am not going to worry about those companies, because they have good connections in the government.

One can quite reasonably ask where the logic is when a government grumbles as soon as there is a possibility that \$42 million will be paid in wages to 48,000 employees over a period of four years, but hands out generous tax credits to a handful of big companies that are already quite profitable.

• (5300)

As recently as this week, during question period, I asked the Minister of Finance about a Statistics Canada report on the debt crisis of Canadian families. The conclusion of this report is that, for each dollar they earn, Canadian families have \$1.50 in debt. One gets the impression the government does not understand that when a family is deeply in debt, \$875 can open up many possibilities. It can help a family pay down the debt and avoid going deeper into debt.

Government Orders

By prohibiting Canada Post from paying an average of \$875 to each employee over four years, the Conservative government is taking \$42 million out of the Canadian economy. This same government boasts about its economic performance and proclaims itself a champion of the economy. What an unbearable irony.

Why was this lockout imposed? It was imposed for strictly ideological reasons and to set a precedent in labour relations. And this precedent will be used by both employers and this government.

True enough, this dispute began with rotating strikes. Nobody is denying that, and everybody recognizes that. But it is time to wake up. The strike is over. It is outrageous that the Conservatives keep talking about a strike when what we have is a lockout. Their intent is shocking.

● (5305)

[English]

I would ask my colleagues to please read my lips. The strike is over. We are talking about the lockout. I ask the government to please unlock the doors now.

[Translation]

By imposing this special legislation, the government is not only stepping in for Canada Post, but it is also demonstrating it can be a tougher negotiator by granting less attractive working conditions to postal workers.

One can easily imagine the Minister of Labour, who could more aptly be called the minister of employers, showing up at the bargaining table and telling the incompetent negotiators to step aside and that she will show them how to take a hard line in negotiating a collective agreement. This attitude is not worthy of a great democracy, and it is not worthy of the great country in which I decided to settle nearly a decade ago.

To conclude, I would like to send a message of hope to the hundreds of people who sent me emails, which are coming in every minute, and to the thousands of people who are watching us on CPAC. Contrary to what the hon. member for Bourassa is suggesting, there are not just three or four people watching us, but thousands of people who are staying up all night to watch CPAC. To the thousands of people watching us, I want to say that on May 2, 2011, they elected NDP members to stand for them, and they should rest assured that we will not betray them.

Even though I am a day late, I want to wish everybody a happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste holiday.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. If he really wanted to show respect to Quebec as he says, he could have managed to find a spot to make his speech on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. This is June 25.

I had the opportunity to meet with my constituents during an extraordinary event held on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day with 400 people in attendance. There is a real concern that is evident in people's eyes. It reflects the fact that 70% of Canadians support back-to-work legislation. This work stoppage is having quite an impact on the economy. Members can suggest all kinds of options, but when we go out in the field to meet with small business owners, those who create

wealth and are the drivers of our economy, they are asking us to settle the problem as fast as possible.

Notwithstanding the 100 emails he has received, what does my colleague say to those who create wealth, to those who create jobs and to the independent business people in his constituency, who are in a shaky situation because of the labour dispute at Canada Post?

● (5310)

Mr. Tarik Brahmī: Mr. Speaker, my answer will be crystal clear, and I will try not to follow the example of the minister, who keeps repeating the same thing, like a broken record, during question period. I will answer simply that all the government has to do is unlock the doors, stop this lockout, and everybody will be able to go back to work.

I am getting hundreds of emails from postal workers telling me they are ready to go back to work and they are just waiting for the government to unlock the doors of the sorting and distribution centres.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed listening to the remarks made by my colleague from Saint-Jean, who has already made an impact in this House as an eloquent speaker. As he mentioned, there are emails from all quarters. I have received several dozen emails myself, just as every member has. However, these emails come from Conservative ridings. We will have an opportunity to talk about this a little later.

It is interesting to note that the Conservative members have failed thus far to mention all the folks who have written in to us from Conservative ridings. I am referring to those people who support the NDP's actions because they consider the government to be so irresponsible. The government decided not to put an end to the lockout. The Conservative members have failed to mention this.

I would like to ask my colleague the following question. Why does he think that the Conservative members are hiding the fact that many of their constituents disagree with their actions?

Mr. Tarik Brahmī: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

We are all obviously in the same boat. My office has received emails from ridings across Canada. The Conservative party will not acknowledge this. I even received an email earlier from a postal worker telling me that he voted for the Prime Minister in the previous election but that next time, he would vote for the NDP, because he is very disappointed by the Prime Minister's lack of support. In fact, I think the email's author was from Saskatchewan.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to point out that most Canadians support our bill, which is before the House this evening. According to the polls—if my memory serves me correctly—70% of Canadians support our efforts to resolve this issue.

I would like to ask my colleague the following question. There are tens of millions of Canadians currently affected by the postal crisis, so I would like to know what he has to say to Canadians who are having to deal with the fallout from the current predicament.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Jean has 30 seconds to answer the question.

Government Orders

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

I would simply say to them that there is a process that exists in the history of labour relations in this country whereby employers and employees cooperate in good faith when they come to the bargaining table. There is no precedent in the history of this country for a government to arrive, take the place of one of the parties, and lay down the law, including conditions that are worse than those previously offered by the employer.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to take a few minutes to wish all of my constituents in Trois-Rivières a happy national holiday and to let them know that I will be there for the activities. I imagine that I should be there in a few hours.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We were celebrating the 24.

Mr. Robert Aubin: I was obviously expecting that response. Thank you to my dear colleague from Bourassa.

I went through this preamble not because I have not slept much and am rambling, but because I noticed that here, in this House, we have witnessed a miracle. The calendar on the desk shows that it is still June 23. So I have plenty of time to return to my riding to celebrate.

I joke, because as I have been listening to the debates over many hours now, I started to realize that it would really take a miracle to put an end to this. But in looking at the calendar, I realized that that was the miracle. In this House, we found a simple way to stop time and still continue working. We have been debating in this House for hours, we are moving forward, yet it is still June 23.

Why is this miracle that is possible in this House not possible with the bargaining of a collective agreement? We could require that Canada Post and the workers provide the service and, at the same time, ask the two parties to hold clear, clean, fair, just and precise negotiations, stopping time until a settlement is reached. If it is possible for the House of Commons, it must be possible for everyone.

The problem we have been seeing for a while is not about the differing opinions that we all have as much as it is about the demagoguery used by our government colleagues to try to force a bill down our throats. A bill that is indigestible, to say the least.

Over the past few hours, I have amused myself by taking note of the most demagogic lines we have heard. I did not sort them by order of importance to pull out the top five or top three, because that would have meant participating in this demagoguery. Regardless, I have no doubt that the Canadian public watching us on CPAC is interested in this debate. There were people in the gallery until 3 a.m. I think that is telling. Not to mention, I have been receiving so many messages that the BlackBerry I have on my belt is more like a massager.

What have we been hearing in these debates? First the legitimacy of the union and of its negotiation committee in particular has been attacked. I believe that a committee that gets 94% of the votes to represent its members has significant support. Here, in Parliament, we have a government leading in a legal manner after winning only 40% of the votes. I wish people would stop making this argument.

Then they talk about negotiations that have been going on for eight months. I have a slight problem with the word “negotiations”. The beauty in negotiations is trying to achieve a balance between the interests of the employer and those of the employees. All the work done to achieve this balance must not however be destroyed by the intervention of a third party. That seems obvious to me. In this case, the government should be using its power of intervention to force the parties to negotiate, and not to impose a settlement. Let us face it, the telegraphed lockout and the arbitrator's mandate make it easy to predict the outcome of this dispute, unless the government shows openness and allows real negotiations, in return for which the postal workers are prepared to resume mail service if the collective agreement they had before the lockout is maintained. That is the second demagogic argument that should be dropped.

• (5315)

With regard to damage to the blessed economy, it goes without saying that this dispute cannot last forever because of the economy, which was hardly affected by the rotating strikes. However, the impact has been tremendous since the lockout, but not for everyone. When we talk about a lockout, what are we talking about? We are talking about employees thrown out on the street without any wages who are told to stew for a while until they have had enough and are prepared to go to employer and accept what they would not have accepted otherwise.

What happens in the meantime? The crown corporation's profits go up because its expenses have gone down. In fact, I am expecting an email from the CEO of Canada Post encouraging me to defend the workers because his bonus increases with every day of the strike.

Enough has been said about strikes and lockouts. I do not need to add anything more. The concept seems to be clearer in everyone's mind. Even the Conservatives are speaking more and more about a lockout, which is the real situation.

I received a little message. The union had offered to stop all strike activity—including the rotating strikes, which, I would remind the House, were not terribly disruptive—if Canada Post would reinstate the old collective agreement while the mediator was continuing his work. The corporation categorically refused. This illustrates the current atmosphere.

Since we are in the process of negotiating instead of the parties—which is not at all our role—let us explore things from the inside to see how the situation is playing out for the locked out workers. I would like to share a few facts.

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Canada Post management decided to adopt a really tough negotiation strategy. As soon as the union notified the corporation of its intent to take strike action, all leave and insurance coverage were cancelled. The collective agreement was tossed out the window. As a result, the employees were left without the financial resources to deal with serious illnesses. Some were forced to pay the full cost of medical expenses for themselves or their loved ones. Some had to pay thousands of dollars to buy medications they need to treat their illness or that of their loved ones, because Canada Post decided to cancel all medical coverage, I mean, medical coverage. A little music would have done us some good, since music has a calming influence.

Employees on sick leave were contacted and informed that they would no longer be receiving a salary during their absence and that they no longer had medical coverage. At present, there is not a single Quebecer without medical coverage, apart from the postal workers. Any corporation that brings in such draconian measures cannot do so without knowing that it has this government's support. It is truly unacceptable.

In closing, members on both sides agree that some sort of legislation is required to get the mail service running again, but we will never, and I mean never, support Bill C-6.

• (5320)

[*English*]

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very sad that the parties could not reach an agreement and that we are all discussing this matter here. It is even sadder to see the NDP members working very hard to hide the facts from Canadians.

The fact is that the parties commenced negotiations eight months ago. The fact is, according to the Canada Labour Code, the minister appointed a conciliator and then a mediator. Despite all these communications and conversations, the fact is that the union chose to go on strike. Of course, the union had the right to choose to strike, but after that, the corporation had the right to choose to have a lockout.

I have a question for my friend, my colleague, from the other side, because I have been having conversations with career companies, transmission shops, mechanic shops, grocery stores and restaurants. I have a note from someone who says that if he doesn't get his cheques, he cannot pay his rent, and if he misses his rent, the NDP will have to pay for it.

The question is: What is the NDP's plan to reimburse those small businesses for the damages caused by stalling this legislation?

• (5325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his friendship. It was short-lived. First it was friend, then colleague, but perhaps we may develop it over the years.

Quite simply, perhaps I was not understood. Maybe it is the language barrier. Not only have the parties not agreed so far, but I can also predict that they will never agree, as long as the fight is unbalanced, two against one. If you really want to resolve the economic problems of your small- and medium-sized businesses very quickly, end the lock out.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his speech. What I am seeing here is a government that, since its budget was adopted, is cutting, cutting and cutting public services. It is cutting pensions. It is making cuts everywhere.

I would like my colleague to comment on that. It is as if the government has seized this opportunity. Actually, we have known for a very long time that it wishes to make cuts to the public postal services. For a long time, post offices in the regions have been lacking funding. It is as if the government is taking advantage of the strike just to try to get around the rules and make cuts to postal services using special legislation.

I would like my colleague to comment on the true intentions of the government, which is accusing us of wanting to hide things from Canadians. Instead, I think that it is the government that is trying to hide things from Canadians.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his very relevant question; to me, the answer is quite simple. In this House are two ideologies that are far apart. The party in power, the government, believes in the economy and in money as it believes in God. I quite like money too, not for what it is but for what it allows us to do. That is the difference on this side. We want to create wealth so that we can then better distribute it for the benefit of each and every Canadian.

[*English*]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to commend my colleague. At 5:30 in the morning, I think he is still doing a pretty good job. However, I have a question.

In the world of labour relations, if somebody is given impossible conditions by an employer, he or she may leave. It is called "constructive dismissal". If someone is on rotating strikes and precipitates a lockout, similarly it is the responsibility of the union, not the employer, that brings about the ultimate division between the two. Could the member comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

There is only one way for everyone to win; that is when two parties can negotiate with no interference from a third party, in the context of a strong, fair and equitable balance of power.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member began his remarks, I noticed that it was 5:15 a.m. It is now 5:29 a.m. So it seems to me that his question period has been cut a little short. The hon. member actually has a minute left to answer questions.

I would just like to ask you that you always keep your eye on the clock so that we can make our points and, of course, answer questions. At some stage, we would really like the Conservatives to rise to defend their position. We fondly hope that they will be able to do so, and, as we do so ourselves, that we will always have the full 15 minutes to which we are entitled.

Government Orders

• (5330)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am not sure which of the clocks the hon. member was regarding, but certainly on the digital clock that the chair occupants have the opportunity to view, we indeed went about 30 seconds beyond the time that was allocated. We try to do our best to be judicious and fair in all respects.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster takes too much time, he is the one using up all the time. With his long points of order, he is preventing his own colleague from being able to answer questions. I had questions I wanted to ask and I am very disappointed.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I think the matter is resolved sufficiently. We will continue with debate. We will resume debate with the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have decided to speak once again as part of the debate on the back to work legislation for Canada Post employees because what is going on here is very important. We are about to take a step that should never be taken by any rightful government.

At no time should a government decide to so shamefully violate the rights of workers, when there is the simple solution of removing the locks and putting an end to the lockout. If this government had done what it should have done from the beginning of the dispute, which is put an end to the lockout and allow Canada Post workers to continue to work, we never would have needed this bill, and mail service would not have been suspended for Canadians and Canadian businesses.

But no, the government would rather introduce legislation that mocks the workers of this country, that violates workers' rights, that imposes working conditions that are worse than what was offered by the employer. The government would rather set our country back, even though we have always been proactive about the rights of our citizens.

For three and a half years, I wore the Canadian flag on one of my shoulders, in both red and white and in green camouflage. What is important is that I was always proud of this flag and what it represents.

Every time I travelled abroad, in Europe or in Africa, when I was asked to talk about my country, I was proud to do so because this country has always respected and promoted the fundamental rights of its citizens. I talked about all the battles Canadians had to fight to improve our standard of living.

I honestly believe that there is nowhere better than here, this land where I grew up. And I would want nothing else for my future children.

That is why I urge my colleagues from all parties in this House to look past their partisan quarrels, because what is going on here is much bigger than that. Not only the workers of Canada Post, but all

workers in Canada will suffer the consequences, and the dignity of our country will be undermined.

When this government so shamefully shows that it can side with the employer in a dispute, it does not just hurt the postal workers, but the entire political institution all of us here represent.

We are not talking about overpaid employees with obscene benefits, as some would have us believe; we are talking about men and women who work hard, who have average salaries, who work irregular schedules at the start of their career which quite often does not allow them to enjoy their family life, and whose working conditions sometime cause their health to suffer. We are talking about most Canadian families who work every day for this country.

Let us talk a little bit about the working conditions of Canada Post workers. Some of you may recall the election campaign that started in 2005 and ended in January 2006, in the middle of winter and during the holidays. Most of you who campaigned at the time probably went door to door. Was it not terrible to walk knee-deep in snow, go up icy steps and deal with the freezing cold conditions?

We do not often have to campaign in the middle of winter, but Canada Post employees have to face the winter every year and not just for the duration of an election campaign. They cannot take a coffee break to warm up when it is too cold outside. People do not invite postal workers into their homes to let them warm up and to encourage them to carry on.

The French version of our national anthem, of which we are so proud, says “protégerons nos foyers et nos droits”, which means “we stand on guard for our homes and our rights”. It seems to me those are the two things we are talking about here.

What does it mean to stand on guard for our homes? I think it means to protect the health and safety of our workers. I think standing on guard for our homes means to ensure that workers have a decent pension plan.

What does it mean to stand on guard for our rights? I think it absolutely means to preserve the right of workers in this country to negotiate.

In my work as a nurse, I learned that if I did something for my patients instead of letting them do it, or I did their thinking for them, I would never get anywhere with them. To successfully get lasting change, it is essential to give them the tools they need, but also to allow them to solve their own problems themselves.

• (5335)

With this bill, the government is interfering in a dispute where that was not needed. At the outset, the government should have ordered that the lockout be ended and the parties return to the bargaining table and find a way to agree, and that they find a middle way between the demands of the two sides, to achieve a fairer solution.

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Let us talk about that: a fair solution. In this bill that we have been discussing for some time now, there is one thing in particular that is revolting: the wage cut. It is not a wage cut imposed by Canada Post; no, it is being imposed on the workers by our government, a government that deserves credit for being clear about the interests it is prepared to defend.

I would like to say one thing to all Canadians who are watching us or will be watching us later in the day: it is not your interests that our government is prepared to defend, it is not the government that is prepared to spend hours on end in this House to try to persuade the party opposite to bring forward reasonable and respectful legislation.

Our government seems to have respect for only certain people, the ones who are at the top of big corporations, the ones who make profits. The government should not forget, however, that the profits made by Canada Post do not fall from the sky. Those profits are the fruit of the hard work done by the postal employees, and I am sure that all those employees will be grateful to the government for the gratitude it might show them, gratitude that could be expressed, for example, in a bill that did not provide for lower wages than they had been offered. I hear them saying thank you from here.

We do not agree on numerous points, on either side of this aisle, but we agree that the workers should go back to work so that everyone who relies on the postal services can breathe easier. There are two ways of achieving that result. The first is to pass an unfair bill that jeopardizes the social benefits that all workers in this country enjoy. The second is to end the lockout and allow the postal employees to go back to work with dignity. I am on the side of human dignity.

Once again, I call on the government today to reverse its position. Not for the NDP. We are not here to win or lose a vote; we are here because something brings us together: the profound conviction that each of our fellow Canadians deserves respect. Our fellow Canadians deserve better than that. The government has the power to prove that it respects Canadians and Canadian workers.

So I suggest that it end the lockout, and most importantly, I call on all my parliamentary colleagues of all political stripes, on behalf of everyone we represent here, to vote against this bill as long as it remains unchanged.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to address one point made earlier by a member of the NDP that the government side had not mentioned anything about people who might take a different perspective in our ridings. I certainly have received emails in support of the back to work legislation. I have also received emails in support of the opposition's position.

One thing I heard earlier was that we were fixating on the suspension of time, June 23. The clock is still ticking and with every minute that passes, while our colleagues are making money, my constituents are losing money. I heard that there were two solutions, but there are actually three.

When will opposition members quit thumping their chests, produce solutions, get into committee of the whole to deal with the issues and put forward their solutions instead of their complaints, end this debate and get this resolved?

• (5340)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I am going to answer here with another question, one that I think provides the answer. I wonder why my Conservative colleague, who has the chance to be in the lobby of the people who control the situation, is not talking to the ones who are responsible for it and asking them why they are not doing something, why they are doing nothing to take the padlocks off and end this lockout. All Canadians who are affected by the absence of postal services would benefit from that solution.

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to very passionate speeches by the members of the New Democratic Party. I know they believe what they are saying. Liberals agree that the government bill is a bullying bill. It is absolutely unfair and would be decided on what the arbitration outcomes would be, et cetera.

Members know the government is fixated on what the bill says and has decided it will not change its mind. The NDP is fixated on this filibuster and does not seem to want to change its mind. Meanwhile, nothing is getting resolved.

I am really frustrated. Every hour we talk in the House nothing is happening. The mail is not flowing, people are not going back to work, we are not deciding on a solution to put the government in its place by saying that if it is not a bully, then it should listen to the amendments. Why could we not go into committee of the whole and get some amendments on the table?

We were asked to come here and find solutions, not simply be intransigent, as both sides here are.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, we would not need to introduce amendments and propose changes if the government did what it has the power to do: demand that the lockout end and take the padlocks off the doors.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague a question.

[Translation]

She talked about standing up for our families and our rights. I think it is very important.

But some have said people are complaining. Others said they wanted to fix a few problems. Personally, I would like to know whether my colleague thinks what we are doing today is a waste of time.

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing here now is absolutely not a waste of time. The government is on the verge of taking a step I believed could never be taken. It is about to trample the rights of workers.

Each minute we spend talking about that will never be a waste of time. Even if it takes many more hours to get through to this government, I think it is well worth it.

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[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to do is to reiterate, as we all do, why we are here. We are here because the government seems to be working hand in hand with the board and management at Canada Post. I suggest that an historical review of what has gone on would show that there was probably a lot more co-operation than is seen now and that would probably be appreciated by most Canadians.

Again, the reason we are here at 5:45 in the morning is not because anybody particularly likes speaking in the House of Commons at this time on a Saturday morning, but because we want to ensure, given the government is not—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (5345)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I am sure hon. members will be interested in hearing what the member for Hamilton Centre has to say. I would be delighted if we could keep the noise down to a bit more calm in the chamber.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, it was pointed out to me by one of the hon. ministers, looking at the calendar, that it is actually still June 23. That is part of the magnificence of being here, that not only is it June 23, it is also June 25.

The fact remains that we are here because we want to do what the government has not done, and that is to give the union and the management an opportunity to negotiate a fair agreement in their own way and in their own time.

We know the government, of course, is playing a game, and it is evident if you take a look at the chronology we have been through. There was a rotating strike action, meant to put pressure, not to shut down Canada Post but to put negotiating pressure on management, which is done all the time with transnational corporations or entities. It is a ramp-up, and ideally it is meant to prevent a lockout and a strike. It is a tactic that is part of negotiations, and it is not an attempt to stop the work of Canada Post.

During that time the union offered to management the following deal. They would end the rotating strikes and be at work everywhere, all the time, in return for management acknowledging that the workers would work under the current collective agreement and that it would act as if it had full effect and force of law. That is pretty reasonable. It is not as if they threatened to do something or said they would do one thing if the company did not do another thing. They began their rather modest tactics.

We all know that did not last very long, a couple of weeks. During that time management told the union that some pressure was being put on them and it was causing a little problem here and here, and they asked the union to stop doing that. The union said they were quite prepared to stop doing that, but all they asked was that the company honour the current collective agreement while they continued to negotiate.

Just as a little aside, you would wonder why they would not accept that, because it does sound reasonable. It would have been one more very positive step, actually. It would have been a good

show of cooperation. They could have agreed on a period of time and taken two or three weeks and had it as part of negotiations. If it did not work, they would be back where they were, but if it did work, they would succeed in the ultimate goal, which is to reach a peaceful, agreeable collective agreement.

One wonders why management would say no. One idea, which sounds strange and bizarre—you would not think this would really happen—is that it is possible that maybe they had some inkling, a bit of an idea. They got out the Ouija board, checked around, phoned some of the psychics to try to get a sense of what might be going on, on the government side. Going to the psychics might be a really good start.

They managed to figure it out: “Well, it sounds like there might be legislation that is going to order them back to work, so why would we do something that would negate the government stepping in? We’ll just stay where we are, let the rotating strikes continue, and, sh, sh, we know the government is going to quietly introduce legislation that will solve our labour relations problems and we do not have to sit down and bargain any more.”

I do not know if that happened, but it sure makes sense. It makes a lot of sense. That is one of the answers, when we have so many questions here without answers.

I hear somebody muttering from somewhere in the ether about conspiracy theories. Maybe, but we are open to whatever other conspiracy theory any hon. member can come up with. Looking at what is going on in reality makes no damn sense, so something has to be going on.

Then the government introduced incredibly heavy-handed, unfair, mean-spirited legislation.

• (5350)

Then they used the argument that this could not go on, so they locked them out, and they watched the government bring in legislation that forces them back and forces management to pay less money than it agreed to in the negotiations.

Then to justify what it is doing, the government says it had to do that because they were not at work, and if they are not at work the mail cannot move, and if the mail cannot move it is going to cause economic hardship. That is how it justifies its legislation, which in reality makes no sense at all. Had they followed what was offered the first time, which was to negotiate under the current collective agreement, we would not be here. If they had not locked them out, we would not be here.

All roads do seem to point to the cabinet room of Canada. That seems to be where we are.

It is mind-boggling that it is happening. I want to emphasize that the wage increase that was negotiated fairly at the bargaining table is being reduced by the legislation that is supposed to help the economy. I do not know how putting more money in the hands of Canadians who spend that money is supposed to be harming the economy, but that is the bizarre reality that is here.

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It is quite appropriate, actually, that as I speak it is Saturday and as I look at the table it is Thursday. That makes about as much sense as the negotiating procedures that have been followed by Canada Post and supported by the Government of Canada.

I will not get to my last point now. I will pick up on it in a few days, because we will be here for a while.

I want to weigh in behind a lot of my colleagues who are referring to the fact that they see this as a piece of the generational issue that we ought to be talking about. I know there are some in the Twitterverse who are ridiculing them. That is unfortunate because we have a serious problem. Of course, it is the young people who see it, because the problem will not really manifest itself for another 10, 20, 30, 40 years, right around the time they will be in the prime of their lives and right about the time our children or grandchildren will be in the prime of their lives.

Given where I am in life, I want to thank them for taking the lead in making sure that this House acknowledges and addresses the issue of the growing gap that exists today, how much wider that gap is going to be, and the harm that is being inflicted on our younger generation when our role here collectively is to make this a better place for everybody. That is why we are here, and we will stay here until we achieve that fairness.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing I can say about listening to my colleague in the House is that I do not have to wear an earpiece when I do it. I am a little worried about the hearing of his colleagues on the other side, though.

One of the responsibilities that we as a government have is to ensure that we are looking out for the citizens of Canada, to ensure that they are protected when they cannot be at the table in these negotiations.

One thing I would like to point out is clause 13 of the bill, which says:

nothing in this Act precludes the employer and the union from entering into a new collective agreement at any time before the arbitrator makes a decision and, if they do so, the arbitrator's duties under this Act cease

Also, in clause 11 there is a 90-day provision for the arbitrator to make his decision.

So there is a risk for both parties in here if we go into this arbitration decision.

It seems to me that that clause is the best of both worlds. We have a bill that allows us to get people back to work and at the same time it gives 90 days for a parallel process to happen, whereby the two parties can come up with an agreement. But we can get people back to work, we can get the mail, we can protect our seniors, and we can protect our small businesses.

• (5355)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his attention and for the question.

I will admit to him that during my time at Queen's Park I had a couple of colleagues who were threatening to file complaints under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. I think they try to avoid that

here by moving me around so that I am not screaming in anybody's ear for any prolonged period of time.

I do my best to keep it down, but you know what? When you do most of your speaking in a union hall, some things just never leave you. I will do my best to try to keep my tone down. I always fail, but I do try.

I accept the question as being a fair and serious one, and I will respond in the same light. My answer to the question is that the first choice always in bargaining in a free democracy is the arrival of a conclusion that both sides accept that they freely entered into. When people are ordered and forced back to work, the first option is removed. That is why we are here. We want to give that first option of reaching a free and fair collective agreement at every opportunity, and we will stay here until that objective is reached.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to touch base on the question that was just asked.

The member was saying that there is a provision in there that would actually allow for collective bargaining to continue. I just want to ask my colleague, and I know he has looked at the bill, if he saw any incentives in there to allow for that collective agreement to go on. When the government actually put this bill together, did it actually remove something from the employer, such as their bonuses maybe, to give that incentive a chance?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

It really is strange that the board of directors and the management of Canada Post, who deal with the finances of the corporation every day, should conclude that, as tough as things are, they have room to offer a certain amount of money in negotiations for wages and yet the government comes along and says, "No, no, Canada Post cannot afford that. We say, from over here, that Canada Post cannot afford to honour the commitment of wages that they already made in free and fair negotiations." But there sure seems to be lots of money to make sure the CEO gets his \$661,000 a year.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is rich hearing this member get up in the House and pretend that he cares about workers' rights when he had that one opportunity in the province of Ontario as a cabinet minister, and his actual record is that he tore up the collective bargaining agreement that 30,000 provincial workers had, threw it away, cut their salaries by \$2 billion, and forced them to take 12 unpaid days off. Then he wrote a song, he and the other NDP members, and the member for London—Fanshawe, and called it "We are all in this together". They went around a piano, sang it, and thought the workers would feel really good about it.

He gets up in this House and pretends he cares about workers when his record is just the opposite. When he had the opportunity, he screwed workers. He and his government tore the contract up, cut their pay, and forced unpaid holidays. That is the record he is trying to defend—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The member has used up the time allowed.

We have 30 seconds left for the member for Hamilton Centre.

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Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I hope we get an opportunity to do this a little more fuller in terms of responses. But in 30 seconds, the first thing I would say is that the people of Hamilton Centre decided in the follow-up election that I should be returned to Queen's Park twice more after that and four times here.

I would also take a look at what he and Mike Harris did when they came in after 1995. We are still picking up the pieces of what is left of Ontario after he and his wrecking crew got through.

• (5400)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I wonder if the hon. member might, in order to facilitate and help us here a little bit, have a copy of the social contract in which he reduced workers by \$1.9 billion and in which he did force them to take 12 unpaid days off. I wonder if the member might have a copy of that agreement that he, as a cabinet minister, and the member for London—Fanshawe forced on the employees of Ontario available to us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That is not really a point of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope my voice holds out as well.

I take a different perspective than the member from Hamilton Centre, who is a very effective orator and who has experience on the union side.

My experience in collective negotiations has been on the management side. What I think is an issue here is the remarkable diversity of the new NDP caucus. In this caucus, 103 strong, the strongest caucus the New Democratic Party has had in the House of Commons to date, we have a remarkable diversity of experience. Our people have labour, employer, and small-business experience. People come from a variety of professions. They are doctors, lawyers, and nurses. People have come from the trades as well. There are teachers and students. All of these different experiences add up to the power we have with the 103 New Democrats who are standing up for the middle class, for workers' rights, and for collective bargaining.

I know that it is difficult for the Conservatives and Liberals to work through the night. We have heard the complaints, since eleven o'clock last night, from the Conservatives and Liberals. They find it difficult to debate and just do not want to continue to have this important debate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member for Bourassa is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague shows a lot of class. We are all working for the welfare of our constituents. I urge him not to stray from that, because the kind of things he is saying are just not right. They are filibustering, and we do not agree, but we are still doing our job.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our job in this House is not to make sure that the

Conservative members of Parliament feel comfortable. Our role in this House is to defend the letter carriers and mail sorters, who are ordinary, middle-class Canadians. Sometimes that is going to make some members uncomfortable. We make no apologies for that. We are here to do a job, and we will continue to debate and stand up for the working people of this country.

The point I am making is that even though we are sitting at 6:05 in the morning, there are about five million Canadians, on any given night, who are working either graveyard shifts or swing shifts. The kind of working hours we have had over the last 48 hours are the normal working hours for five million Canadians. They are the ones who are raising their families, going to school, and working hard all night. By day they are contributing to the country. We pay tribute to them this morning. That is their ordinary working environment. For us to work throughout the evening pays tribute to them as well.

Since this debate began, a number of facts have clearly been established. Some Conservative MPs at the beginning of this debate were saying that it was a strike. We know clearly, and the facts have been established, that this was a lockout by the management of Canada Post. I am happy to say that many Conservative MPs have become better informed, and that is something we welcome. They now understand. Many of them have been speaking about the lockout. That is very important.

We have also established, and this is a very important element, that this sledgehammer the government is imposing on the letter carriers and the mail sorters of Canada is, in real terms, a wage reduction. It is not a wage increase; it is a wage reduction. Members of the Conservative Party are now better informed about that, as well.

One cannot say that it is a wage increase when what the government wants to impose is actually less than the inflation rate. This means that over the course of the next few years, the letter carriers and the mail sorters, those who work to keep the nation's mail going, will be earning less and less because of the sledgehammer imposed by the government.

We have established as well that this is a very real threat to pensions. Working through one's working life and not being provided with an adequate pension, and having to work below the poverty line, is something most Canadians do not accept.

We have also established that this draconian sledgehammer legislation permanently disadvantages the youth of our nation, who want to get involved, want to provide service, and want to work for Canada Post.

We have established a number of facts. What has been fascinating about the evolution of this debate over the last 24 hours is the reaction we are seeing from various parts of the country. We have received far too many letters and e-mails to read into the record. However, I would like to read just a few of the e-mails we are receiving from Conservative ridings. These are Conservative constituents, and Conservatives should be listening to them.

Government Orders

A constituent from Richmond, British Columbia wrote, "I'm a letter carrier in Richmond, B.C. I am writing to you because unfortunately, my member of Parliament has her hands tied. I was appalled and embarrassed by her remarks during her speech yesterday".

A constituent from Surrey, British Columbia wrote, "I hope many Canadians are following this issue. I do not need to go into details. We both know how unjust this bill is. I am not a union worker. However, I see a bigger issue here. The Conservatives need to be set straight".

A constituent from Lethbridge wrote, "I watched the debates in Parliament yesterday, last night, and this morning. My family has watched it as well. We are all amazed and grateful that you and the New Democrats will stand for us and not be bullied by Canada Post and the government into an unfair contract. Thanks you for standing up for our rights under the law for free bargaining".

A constituent from Calgary Centre wrote, "Thank you for your defence of the worker and the Canadian way of labour disputes. I do feel the government gave the employer a sledgehammer to solve this issue. Hidden under the guise of serving the public, the government has made sure of Canada Post's continued revenue input into general coffers and the continued bad management practices of its management staff".

● (5405)

A constituent from Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar wrote, "We want to say thank you and we appreciate your support in our struggle. Keep up the good work".

A constituent from Saint Boniface wrote, "My sincere and heartfelt gratitude for the support and solidarity you, the New Democrats, are demonstrating for our struggle with the Conservative Party, with the member for Saint Boniface, and with the rest of the government that is arbitrarily interfering with the workers' right to collective bargaining".

From Winnipeg South a constituent wrote, "I have been watching the debate in the House of Commons with pride and amazement. Surely the House has not heard such a well-informed and eloquent debate on labour issues in many, many years. It is also obvious in many of the fine speeches from opposition MPs that they not only get the issue but have been there themselves and care deeply. Thank you very much".

A constituent from Peterborough, Ontario, another Conservative riding, wrote, "Thanks for speaking up. I run a small business in Peterborough, Ontario. If we remove the lockout, take the locks off, we get mail delivery and effective bargaining".

[Translation]

A constituent from Montreal, Quebec, wrote,

"It is heartwarming to see all of you in the House standing up for principles that are dear to me, like the right to free collective bargaining, the principle of equal pay for equal work, a decent pension plan, and public services for the general public, and fighting against this unfair attack against workers. I am particularly encouraged by the fiery speeches made by all these young New Democrats."

● (5410)

[English]

A constituent from Nepean—Carleton wrote, "I would like to thank you for the great job you are currently doing in the House to stand up for the working class. We back you 100% and sincerely ask that you keep up the fight for us postal workers and all workers".

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Bourassa on a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the utmost respect for those who work in this House. My colleague is talking so fast, the interpreters cannot keep up. For my part, I am having a hard time understanding what he is saying. Could he please slow down?

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member will know that from time to time, the speed and the pace of speech can be a difficulty for translation. I would encourage the member to consider that in the course of his speech and to watch, as he is getting close to the end of time.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, there are so many e-mails, it is difficult to read them all into the record.

I will just finish up. This is from Atlantic Canada, from the riding of the fisheries minister. It says, "I want to thank you all for such truth and solidarity towards workers. It has allowed me to have a new faith in Canadian politics. I will do everything it takes to see this current government hears what real Canadians want. I am a father of two and am finding it very difficult to sleep at night this past week, not knowing what our future holds for me and my children".

We could read many more into the record. These are the voices of Canadians. These are the voices of those we support. This is why we are having this debate in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us get a few things straight here. My hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster started off his presentation by saying that he wanted to recite some of the facts. Let us really talk about the facts in what is happening here today.

As opposed to what all members of the NDP have been saying, their position is not advocating on behalf of ordinary men and women, the workers of Canada. It is far from it. Their position is advocating on behalf of their union bosses: CUPW. It is okay if that is their position, and it clearly is.

Half a dozen or more of the people I see sitting in the House right now come from an organized labour background. That is okay, but what the members of the NDP should be truthful about in this debate is that they are not representing all of the millions of hard-working Canadians who are adversely affected by this work stoppage. More importantly, they are not even advocating on behalf of postal workers.

Government Orders

My friend mentioned a number of e-mails he received from across the country. I also have a number of e-mails, and all of these are from postal workers who are advocating that the union receive and accept the offer from management. They state unequivocally that they are opposed to the union, because the union will not give them the right to vote.

The NDP is only advocating on behalf of one special interest group, and that is the CUPW union leadership, not the rank and file. Let the members at least be honest about that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think the 94% support from mail sorters and letter carriers speaks for itself.

As somebody who has never been a member of a union but has always been on the management side, I have been profoundly disturbed by some of the comments we have been hearing from Conservatives, starting with the Minister of Labour, who made a distinction between Canadians and mail sorters and letter carriers, as if they are not Canadians, as if they have no rights, as if somehow they are separate from the rest of Canada. That is the kind of division the Conservative government promotes.

The reality is there are seven million union households in this country. There are millions of Canadians who have opted to join a union. That is far more than the number of Canadians who voted Conservative in the last election. Those unionized workers are as much Canadian as the member and I are.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wore my green tie today to remind me of the green infrastructure fund in the economic action plan which the NDP voted against. I wanted to make sure I remembered that because this is similar in that there is no common sense in what the NDP is doing.

I do have a message for the member from my constituents. Not only do I represent more union members than anybody else in this House per capita in Canada but probably in North America. I represent more workers, more people who work shifts and more people who are actually contributing more to the economy than anybody else in the House. Some 6% to 7% of the country's GDP moves from my area alone. The message of my constituents is loud and clear. They are telling me that the NDP members do not represent unions. I have belonged to a union. Those NDP members do not represent the views of my constituents at all. That is the message I have been told to bring here loud and clear today, that those people are not representing the rank and file workers of this country. They are representing CUPW and the leadership of the union only. They are self-interested in that. They do not represent Canadians. That is the message my constituents have asked me to bring.

• (5415)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question, so what I will do is talk about my constituents.

I am a long-time member of the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce, and a proud member of the Burnaby Board of Trade. The small business owners in my riding understand that when we have a good middle class, when we have real collective bargaining and we build the middle class, there is a stronger economy in the community. That is what we stand for, the community's economy,

not shipping jobs overseas, certainly not ripping up collective agreements, and not government imposing wages on workers.

We are the moderates here. We are the ones who are tracing a path to a solution. We certainly would like Conservative members to compromise a bit and listen to the workers not only in their ridings but right across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the people of Quebec celebrated their national holiday. I would have liked to be with my family and the people of my constituency of Brossard—La Prairie to celebrate the day, which is so important for our Quebec nation. It is unfortunate that the Conservative government did not want to suspend the proceedings of the House to enable us to celebrate our national holiday. But I am proud to be here in Ottawa with my NDP colleagues from the Quebec and Canada caucus to defend the fundamental principles of social justice, more particularly workers' rights.

When I arrived in Parliament yesterday, I crossed paths with a group of Canada Post employees. Those people are proud workers who want to go back to work, to deliver the mail to everyone waiting for letters and cheques and to enable small businesses to do business. They know that Canada Post belongs to all Canadians and that its mandate is to guarantee postal service to all Canadians. They are in a tough situation, trying to assert their bargaining rights, to support their families, to pay their bills, to work in a safe environment and to retire in dignity.

One of my high school friends, Quentin, chose to become a letter carrier. My friend has two adorable children. He is a good father who has chosen an occupation in which he works very hard, often on schedules not always easy to reconcile with family activities. When I see him, he is very proud to talk about his work.

Today I oppose the government's measures, which I feel are unfair to Canada Post employees, and I am doing that for people like Quentin and the Canada Post people I met yesterday. They are good people who simply want to do their jobs.

I am rising today because I oppose the bill as introduced by the government. The purpose of this bill is to impose an employment contract on Canada Post employees rather than let the union and management negotiate a collective agreement. The parties should have the right to bargain in good faith without the government imposing a unilateral settlement on them. That is a fundamental principle of law.

What I find even more unfair is that the bill includes a wage settlement that is not only less than what the workers were seeking, but, even worse, less than the wage settlement offered by Canada Post management. I still cannot understand this injustice.

The problem with this bill is that, if the government imposes his vision on Canada Post, what will prevent it from doing so in other cases? I believe, and I dare hope, that it is not this government's intention to interfere in all employment contracts.

Government Orders

We hope to improve this bill. We have offered to work with the government to find a solution to the deadlock in which we find ourselves today. As our leader has repeatedly said, we are reaching out to the government to assist in finding a fair and equitable solution. We remain optimistic that the dispute can be resolved, but there has to be good faith. The government must stop interfering. It is important that the fundamental right to bargain with the employer in good faith be respected.

As you know, Tommy Douglas was the first leader of the NDP. He was the father of Canada's health insurance system and, in a CBC competition, was named the "Greatest Canadian of All Time".

At the NDP's 50th anniversary celebration, I learned to what extent the NDP has always been there to defend the most disadvantaged, the most vulnerable individuals, whether it be those who did not have access to a physician, seniors who had been abandoned or workers who were being exploited in inhuman conditions.

When I decided to go into politics, I did it, among other reasons, because I wanted to advocate social justice. I sensed that I too could help the most vulnerable individuals. Today the government wants to use its power to impose a labour settlement on Canada Post employees, which would prevent the parties from reaching a solution negotiated in good faith. Having decided to act in that manner, the government has clearly indicated its intention to favour the employer, which now finds itself in a distinctly stronger position.

• (5420)

Unlike the government, I believe it is not good to interfere in the business of the bargaining parties, particularly when those parties negotiate fundamentally important issues such as pensions.

Some Canada Post employees have worked all their lives in conditions that were not always easy, making sacrifices that many of us would not be prepared to make, thinking that one day they would be able to enjoy a well-earned retirement. Today they are facing the uncertain thought that they may lose what they have worked for. I consider it normal for workers to use the means afforded them by law to assert their rights.

Allow me to restate the facts, although I believe that, after a number of days and hours of debate, they are already known. On June 3, postal workers began rotating strikes. Seven days later, on June 10, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers offered to end the strike if the corporation agreed to ensure that the current contract remained in effect during the negotiations, but Canada Post refused to do so. Four days later, on June 14, the Minister of Labour announced that it was unnecessary to introduce back-to-work legislation since the labour action consisted solely of rotating strikes. Cheques were being delivered and people were nevertheless receiving their mail. The next day, on June 15, Canada Post decided to lock out all its employees and to shut down mail delivery service. On June 20, barely 5 days later, the Conservative government introduced a bill to impose a contract on Canada Post employees including a wage settlement below the level offered by management. In recent days, the government has been interfering by asserting that legislating Canada Post employees back to work is necessary for the economy.

I agree it is important for all Canadians to receive their mail as soon as possible. Seniors have to receive their pension cheques and small businesses have to send out their invoices. However, the Conservative government is going about this the wrong way. The government is using a heavy hand, legislating unilaterally and favouring Canada Post, even though postal workers have offered to go back to work during the bargaining process.

It is important to bear in mind that this is not a labour strike, but rather a lockout imposed by Canada Post and supported by the government. The government lacks leadership in conflict resolution and is contributing to a negative climate and confrontation. The workers have a right to bargain in good faith with their employer. That is a fundamental right. Canada Post can continue delivering the mail while bargaining with its workers.

Canada Post is not in trouble. The crown corporation posted a profit of \$281 million in 2009. Canada Post has been profitable for the past 15 years and its president and CEO earns more than \$600,000 a year, making him the most highly paid president and CEO of all the federal crown corporations.

However, it is not too late to reach an agreement, provided the parties are given the chance. We are lucky to have one of the best postal services in the world. Our duty is to ensure that the rights of the people who operate this essential service are respected. We must work together, stop government interference, comply with the fundamental principles of law and let the parties bargain in good faith. This is a matter of justice for all workers and for the youth of tomorrow.

• (5425)

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what this bill really says is that the arbitrator should be guided by the need for terms and conditions consistent with those in comparable postal industries. I wonder if the member opposite disagrees with that. It says that the arbitrator should be guided by the need for terms and conditions that will ensure the short- and long-term economic viability of Canada Post. I wonder if the member opposite disagrees with that. It says that the arbitrator should be guided by the need to maintain the health and safety of workers. Does he disagree with that? Does he disagree with the need to sustain the pension plan?

What is it about those guiding principles the member opposite disagrees with so vehemently?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with the principles guiding the new negotiations. However, I do have a problem with the fact that a wage settlement is being imposed because employees are being forced to accept wages lower than those offered by Canada Post management. They say they are going to arbitration, but the solution and the result are already being put forward. Free bargaining is not being permitted. The parties are not being allowed to bargain in good faith.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his extremely interesting speech.

Government Orders

I know that he has a legal background. I would like to ask him what he thinks of the "orphan" clauses. He is a new MP and a young MP. What does he think of the legality of these "orphan" clauses included in the minister's proposal?

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, who was re-elected. I am very pleased to be working with her.

These clauses are illegal. They do not respect the fundamental right to negotiate, which must be respected and which is enshrined in the charter. There is a problem here, and the government needs to know it.

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member opposite speaks of his desire to help the vulnerable. I spent a significant portion of my life volunteering and supporting vulnerable people. I prefer to call them children or youth or seniors, or by their actual names, which is probably the best way to refer to them.

If the member cares so much about vulnerable people, could he please answer two questions for the House? First, why will the member not allow the mail service delivery to continue so the charities that do so much work can receive the cheques they need to run their charities effectively? Second, why will he not allow mail delivery to be restored so the great donations that small businesses provide to allow charities to operate can be delivered?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our colleague on the opposite side of the House for her question.

We want people to receive their mail. The problem is that there is a lockout. It is the current government that is preventing everything from functioning. The postal employees were ready to work. They wanted to continue to do their job and deliver the cheques, which was good for the economy that the government wants so much to have grow.

It is the government that is preventing all of that. The workers are there. They want to deliver the mail. But there is a problem. The employer is preventing the workers from doing their job.

• (5430)

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the really good things about this debate is the number of people who are following it on Twitter and social media and sending us information. One person sent me a tweet asking if I knew that Canada Post had 20 vice-presidents.

I am curious as to whether those vice-presidents would be willing to accept two-tier wages like the new workers would get from Canada Post under this proposed agreement. I wonder if the vice-presidents would take a decrease.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Indeed, we can see that this is the same mindset as the Conservative government's. It is making cuts and giving tax breaks to big businesses. Canada Post is making cuts when it comes to the workers, but not to management. What should be done to save money is not being done.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with your kind permission, I would like to use these few moments to paraphrase a famous poem by Boris Vian. It goes like this:

Men whose names are great
I am writing you a letter
That you will read perhaps
If the Tories remove the locks.

I found it appropriate under the circumstances. In fact, since yesterday, a number of hon. members, from my party and from the government, have been able to read emails and messages that people have sent them. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you a message from a lady in Montreal who works for Canada Post. I have to say that I was also able to discuss Bill C-6 yesterday and to express my views on the matter. After introducing herself, she writes that she has been a Canada Post employee for about 30 years and wants to thank us for the support that we have been giving them in the House as we debate Bill C-6. She explains that this is her last contract and that she will be retiring soon. She indicates that our comments have been very accurate and precise; she tells us to keep up the good work, and then she thanks me.

I would like to use this email to draw the attention of hon. members to the fact that this lady, who has devoted 30 years of her life to delivering mail to our fellow Canadians, will soon be able to retire knowing how much her retirement pension will be. That will not be the case with new Canada Post employees if the bill before us is eventually passed and imposed on them by an arbitrator. Its clauses contain a significant disparity in treatment. New Canada Post employees will have to work five years longer before they can retire. And since they are in danger of having a defined contribution plan, not only will they know that they will have to retire later, when they are older, but they will also not know exactly how much money they will receive when they do retire.

This is an extremely important aspect of the current debate. I am pleased that the hon. member for Gatineau raised the question a few minutes ago. It really does create a two-tier system. It creates a conflict between generations, where some employees have certain rights and enjoy certain working conditions while new employees, the younger ones, have inferior working conditions.

Government Orders

I have been talking about the pension plan, but it is equally true for wages. New employees will start at a salary that is 18% lower than Canada Post workers currently get. This is completely unacceptable. The NDP is going to fight day and night, as we are doing now, because we do not accept these iniquities and inequities. It is not true that young workers will be paying for the poor decisions of the Conservative government.

Why is it unfair and inequitable to have a two-tier system within the same corporation? Because we do not have a two-tier system when it comes to rent, mortgages, cars or groceries. These things cost just as much for young workers, who are often in a situation in which they wish to buy a house, start their lives and start a family. They thought they had found a good job, but they are going to be left with inferior working conditions, and that is not fair.

Before the session began, I had the opportunity to meet the president of Force Jeunesse in Montreal. For those who do not know, Force Jeunesse is an umbrella organization for several youth organizations, including junior chambers of commerce, junior unions, community groups and student groups. One of their key concerns for the upcoming year is in fact orphan clauses.

He told me that young people are afraid. They see what is happening with Canada Post, what this Conservative government is going to allow, and they are wondering if this is what young people have to look forward to in the coming years. Are young people entering the work force going to be systematically held down? Is that the Conservative government's vision for the future? Is that the kind of society we want?

We in the NDP say no. We must allow these young people to enter the work force, to have good working conditions, to qualify for a mortgage in order to buy a house and face the future with confidence, because they know they have good working conditions and insurance coverage, and a good pension plan for when they need it after giving 25, 30 or 35 years to a company or to the public service.

In this debate, it is also important to remember that attacks on unionized workers are attacks on the middle class.

● (5435)

I want to go back a little bit. We can easily argue that the middle class is a creation of the union movement.

When industrialization began in England first and then in other western countries, continental Europe mainly, peasants left the countryside in droves and moved to the city. There were large factories producing the first manufactured products under extremely difficult working conditions: six or seven days of work a week, 10, 12, 14 hours of work a day, child workers, completely appalling health and safety conditions, pitiful wages. All these people could hope for was to survive and that their children would live in the same terrible conditions.

What happened over the course of decades and centuries? These workers got organized. They created trade associations, trade guilds. They fought to make gains and change their working and living conditions. Then as these fights were fought by women's groups, community groups and especially unions that changed the work organization and signed collective agreements, workers obtained

salary increases and created things that did not exist before: health and safety committees, paid leave, sick leave, the fact that a child must not work in a mine or a factory. All of this meant that the average quality of life and working conditions improved.

When we look at what constitutes the middle class these days, we see that much of the middle class is made up of small-business owners, entrepreneurs, restaurant owners, convenience store owners, florists, hair stylists, and so on. They form a good portion of the middle class, but another big part of the middle class is made up of unionized workers with good working conditions. People who work in mines have good working conditions. It is a tough job, but they have good working conditions, because they are unionized. People who were lucky enough to work in forestry in the past—there are fewer and fewer unionized workers in that industry—and in the oil industry were unionized.

Everyone who works in the public service, the teachers who teach our children, are also unionized workers. Nurses in hospitals are also unionized. When the Conservative government attacks unions, the fundamental right to associate and collective bargaining rights, it is attacking all of these workers.

An attack against the union movement is an attack against the middle class. We are here to defend families, workers and the middle class. That is important to us. That is our priority and we will not abandon it.

For the past two days, government members have been asking us why we do not want to get the mail running, why we want to prevent SMEs from doing business. They have been asking us why we refuse to get the economy rolling and let things get back to normal.

As far as I know, not one NDP member wanted a lockout at Canada Post. The lockout was imposed by the employer and the Conservative government is doing absolutely nothing to get the postal service running again. It has an obligation. It cannot say it has no role to play in this. That is impossible. Canada Post is a crown corporation; it is a public corporation. Ultimately, the government is responsible for it.

If the government truly cares about charitable organizations or entrepreneurs who need to send invoices and other things by mail, they should immediately put an end to the lockout. That could be done by making a phone call. What is even worse is that the wages that are not being paid to the 48,000 Canada Post workers will increase Canada Post's profits and, as a result, the CEO of Canada Post will receive a larger bonus.

Government Orders

Canada Post's union has been completely blocked in the bargaining process. It is so biased that the crown corporation does not need to bargain because it knows that special legislation could force employees to return to work. What is more, it is the one that locked the employees out. There is no free bargaining. This system puts workers and their families at a complete disadvantage. We are calling on the government to take responsibility and to put an end to the lockout as quickly as possible.

• (5440)

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP have been very effective over the past two days in what appears to be a sit-in to stall the real conversation, which from my understanding is proposing amendments.

Rather than continuing this filibuster, can we not move to the committee of the whole? Could the member opposite please advise the House as to when his leadership is planning to allow us to go the committee of the whole? It does not matter whether that be the leadership of the NDP or the leadership of CUPW, we need to start getting to business.

I would like to hear the hon. member's comments to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I see that he has taken over for the member from Bourassa, who is no longer here to ask the same question he has been asking all night about this.

What is important to the NDP is that we will sit in committee of the whole and everything will happen when it happens. Our first message is that it is clear what side we are on and that we are defending the workers. Second, we are calling on the Conservative government to step up and put an end to the lockout as quickly as possible, so that everything can be resolved.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting watching this debate, because some of my Conservative colleagues have not been given a clear message of how this has happened. They seem to believe that the NDP have stopped the mail.

The mail was stopped by the lockout. When the legislation was brought in Thursday night, even if we had rolled over, as our colleagues next door might have done, the mail would not have rolled on Friday. So not a single piece of mail has been stopped because of the New Democratic Party.

Mail does not begin till Monday. That is 48 hours. We can certainly talk for the next 48 hours, until the mail starts to roll, and we are more than willing to do that. However, it would seem to be incumbent upon the members of this House within this 48-hour period that we have till Monday morning to find a solution.

I would like to ask my honourable colleague, if the government ends the lockout and takes the wage rollback out of the back-to-work legislation, would it not be possible for us to end this? I know some of my Conservative colleagues are worried about getting to barbecue

season. This could be done by Monday morning and the mail will roll and nobody will ever be able to say that the New Democratic Party stopped one piece of mail from coming to people's doors.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very relevant and very pertinent comments.

Indeed, in this particular situation, mail delivery could be restored very quickly. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has already demonstrated its willingness to get back to work as soon as possible and to resume free and open negotiations without this sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. That is what Bill C-6 represents, since it imposes a contract that is completely unacceptable given that Canada Post, with the Conservative government's support, now wants to offer wage increases that are lower than what it was previously willing to give.

For the workers, it is unthinkable that a corporation that made \$281 million in profits in 2009 can no longer offer them what it was previously willing to give its workers. The difference translates into \$754 for each worker for the next four years.

• (5445)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I keep hearing the same thing: I hear the NDP suggest they represent workers. I mentioned to the last speaker how in my riding in northern Alberta I had more union members than anybody else in the House, more union members than anybody else in the country per capita, for certain. To my right is the Conservative member for Edmonton—Leduc, and he is probably one of the top ten as far as union members and workers in the country.

I do not understand. Maybe it is because the NDP actually came in second in my riding in the last election. That is right, they did come in second, with 13%. What a mandate from the workers of Canada, at 13%. I have workers from all over the country, and I am wondering if the member could tell me why I get 72% of the popular vote in northern Alberta, where there really is a middle class and there really are workers from all over the country representing all unions. I had a strong mandate from the people, as did the member for Edmonton—Leduc and as did most Albertans who represent most of the workers who travel across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased by the comments made by my hon. colleague, who just proved me right by making the connection between the middle class in his riding and the fact that a large proportion of the workers are unionized. I encourage him to maintain this rate of unionization by creating legislation that favours unions and even, if possible, to increase the rate.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their warm welcome.

It is with some pleasure I enter the debate here on Bill C-6. As a disclosure, I have been up for about 25 hours now, so that is a small caveat to forgive me for any of the potential mistakes I make. I usually do not forgive myself before I start.

Government Orders

The dispute we have in front of us is about far more than just one simple piece of legislation, as draconian as it is. It is about far more than one labour dispute that we have here with Canada Post and its management.

What we have before us is a government that is attempting to set out what might be called labour policy, but it might be better described as management policy for the country. Its implications go far beyond the 45,000 CUPW members who are going to be beholden to any legislation that is drawn here. It goes far beyond that to other public sector and public service employees.

This is a strange government. Every once in a while when they get into some sort of trouble or scandal they are quick to throw a public service member under the bus and say the bureaucrats made them do it, as we saw recently in the Muskoka affair, and at other times when they are looking to hold up the public sector they laud them for their proud work.

We have also seen a slight evolution from the government in the speaking notes over this past 24 or 30 hours. The labour minister started off the discussion by saying that it was the 45,000 postal workers against the 33 million Canadians. They were not in the same basket somehow. Then we saw the evolution of that to many Conservatives now standing up and showing very high regard for the postal workers in their riding and the good work that they do. That is good to see, because trying to characterize a group of Canadians as outside of Canada somehow because they are having a labour dispute is a troubling trend, and should be a troubling trend, for all of us. That is not the way to characterize any Canadian who is having any dispute in a democratic and fair way with any level of government or management. So it is nice to see Conservatives acknowledging that these are people, these are families that live in their constituencies as well as ours, and they deserve a fair break, as do all Canadians. We all seek fairness for this. I hope there is some common ground in this.

We have also seen an evolution that the labour minister three times in her speech mischaracterized this and I think misled the House in fact by calling it a strike. We now see the talking notes have shifted and the Conservatives are now getting up and calling it what it is, which is a lockout. It is correct to call it what it is, because to mischaracterize it any other way is to try to reframe the debate from the truth into a lie. We need to talk about what has happened here and how we got to this point, because if we do not know how we got here, how, for goodness sake, is this government ever going to hope to find its way out of the predicament it finds itself in now?

I say that this is about much more than one dispute simply because the government has chosen to take this particular approach in this particular case. I would suggest it is a bit of a trial balloon to test it out to see what happens in Parliament, to see what happens in public debate and discussion around the notion that an employer can be in the middle of a negotiation with a group of employees, see some job action from those employees—all legal—and then lock those employees out and have the government impose a contract on the locked-out employees, thereby rewarding the employer for having done the lockout in the first place.

I do not know if this is good labour law. It is certainly not good for peace in the land, because we must take account of how we

developed labour law in this country in the first place. It was developed after many generations and many years of people striving to be able to legally gather, collect together and raise their voices in a unified way, after trying to find other ways to raise their voices and sometimes clashing with the law itself. It was in fact governments and business that eventually called for some sort of certainty in the process to settle disputes. It was not the union movement that called for this first. If you go through your industrial relations history, and I encourage many of my colleagues to do so, it was the companies that realized that it was bad for productivity and it was bad for business to have these very often strong and sometimes violent strikes. Instead, they wanted to have a legal mechanism codified in the law and protected by Parliament and the courts to allow the employer to sit down in a predictable way with their employees and negotiate fair terms.

● (5450)

That can be a difficult process. We all have to make concessions. Anybody in this place who has ever been involved in any kind of negotiation, mediation, or collective bargaining knows that there has to be some give and take, and that can be difficult.

Canada Post is protesting that its ship has fallen on hard times, that there is not enough money, and yet it shovels bonuses out the door to its executives and its 20 vice-presidents that it has stacked up over the years. The argument of a \$220-million bonus package does not make any sense when you turn around and claim poverty and say that the postal service is in trouble. Meanwhile, the volume of parcels has been going through the roof, and the economy is changing.

The point we are making is that beyond this particular lockout, beyond this particular moment, the government must reconcile itself with the fact that causing more uncertainty in the labour market and more uncertainty in Canada's economy lowers productivity, lowers our competitiveness, and lowers our ability to compete with the world.

It seems to me that the government has given absolutely no incentive to future employers to bargain in what is called good faith. There's no incentive at all. If we allow the pattern that is happening here to take place, which New Democrats will not allow, the next employer in line about to negotiate with its employees will ignore the bargaining table because that is not where the deal has to be made. That employer will simply lobby the cabinet of the day to make sure the next Bill C-6, the next force-them-back-to-work bill, is there. That employer can lock out its employees, claim hardship, dictate the terms of the negotiation and force its employees back to work. Forget all we have learned through more than a hundred years of labour disputes. Forget those hard lessons that you pick up over time to realize that give and take is what we want.

A bunch of employees who go back to the workplace upset, feeling that they were absolutely murdered by the system in the process, is not a workforce that you want to manage. Anybody with any intelligence or experience in management knows that a motivated workforce is absolutely the best thing you can have. It is the best investment, the best asset, the best resource.

Government Orders

Here we have a government sending signals to management and to other groups across the country that they do not need to go to the bargaining table and organize and bargain in good faith. All they need to do is simply rely on the government to have back-to-work legislation at hand.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to raise this point of order until my colleague across the way was done speaking, but he continues to harp back on it. My point of order is in relation to the member's comment that the Minister of Labour misled the House in saying this dispute had anything to do with a strike. The member opposite keeps going on about how we are here because of a lockout.

It is quite clear that the Minister of Labour did not mislead the House. It is quite clear that the Minister of Labour was simply pointing out that the union bosses, who my colleague across the way supports, initiated a rotating strike, which led the postal service to lock out members. Both the strike and the lockout brought us to the point we are at today.

I would like the member to withdraw his accusation that the labour minister misled the House. It is a totally inappropriate and unparliamentary thing to say. A lockout, in any event, is just as legitimate a negotiating tactic as the strike was, and they are both involved in this dispute.

• (5455)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I think you will find that what is happening here is a point of debate in an attempt to participate in the debate. There is certainly time to debate. If those members want to have speaking spots to debate, they can have as many 10-minute spots as they would like, but it is unfair to interrupt our colleague's speech.

If the hon. member wants a speaking spot, he can take a 10-minute speaking spot, but this is not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I appreciate the interventions by the members.

The convention around the notion of misleading the House has essentially been that if a member is saying that someone is deliberately or with intent misleading, then that begins to get very close to unparliamentary language. In this particular case, if it is constructed in a way that the effect of what the member has said seems to mislead, then that does not exactly point to being unparliamentary language.

We will decide that we have resolved that matter, and we will go back to the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your ruling.

On the point my friend has raised, I recall the speech from the Minister of Labour where three times she said what we are in right now is a strike. I do not know how the member interprets telling the truth from not telling the truth, but if what we are in is a lockout, which is completely different from a strike, it is simply for him to determine what the Minister of Labour was trying to accomplish by saying what she said. She characterized this as something that it is not. She then later admitted that it was not strike but in fact a lockout.

The Conservatives can argue all sorts of points that they would like, but the point they cannot argue is the fact that the mail is not moving right now because the doors are locked at Canada Post. There is no other reason.

We have had public declarations from the organized members of that union who were saying they have binding agreements and they are ready to go back to work and move that mail, but the lockout must end. They cannot move mail that is behind locked doors. That is the fact.

We are simply trying to encourage this government in every forceful way we can to allow the parties to negotiate. That is what the Supreme Court of Canada said is their right to do.

If the government cannot see its way to doing that, it is its choice, but it cannot turn back on New Democrats and say that somehow we created the problem. In fact, it was the government's piece of legislation and its tactic that has led us to this moment. It should take ownership for what it is doing.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to further underscore some of the points I made in my first intervention, I will continue along that vein.

The NDP members are not representing the views of ordinary Canadian men and women. They are not representing the views of Canadians workers. They are representing the views of the very narrow interests of the union bosses at CUPW. They are not even representing the views of postal workers.

To illustrate my point I will read excerpts from three emails we have received from postal workers.

The first one says: "I am a postal worker and we didn't get the right to vote on the final offer. Why? The union knew we would have accepted the offer. We are being held hostage by the union".

The second says: "I'm a postal clerk, and our union has not allowed us to vote on any revised offers that Canada Post Corporation has made. Most of us think the revised final offer is fair and we wanted to vote but we were not allowed to by the union".

The third one says: "I'm also a postal worker and no one in our station voted in favour of striking in the first place. We were very happy with the offer management presented".

All I am trying to illustrate here, which I think most Canadians know intuitively, is that the NDP is representing the very narrow views of CUPW and the union bosses and not ordinary working men and women across Canada.

• (5500)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the question from my friend, who I have some respect for.

It seems ironic coming from a government that interprets a 39.6% vote from Canadians as a full endorsement of all the things the Conservatives want to do, but the 94% strike mandate from the 45,000 CUPW members, some of whom he just quoted, is somehow not an endorsement of the leadership, who were elected into their positions of the union, and what they are seeking to do.

Government Orders

The government thinks that the only way to solve this is to bring in the sledge hammer of forcing these folks back to work. This is how the government's view of democracy works. Perverse is one way to describe it.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the debate we have heard how successful Canada Post is. In fact, it has been incredibly profitable over the last 15 years. It has invested these profits back into the Canadian public treasury. Canadians get a very good bargain for their postal service, having one of the lowest postal rates in the industrialized world.

Since Canada Post is clearly such a success story, my question to the hon. member is: Why does he think Canada Post, with the support of the government, is wanting to roll back the clock on the wages and working conditions of postal workers?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I thank my colleague from Toronto for the question.

It is ironic. I suppose Canada Post and its workers feel some small graciousness from this Parliament as there have been so many who have applauded their work and proficiency. That is known throughout the world because other postal services come here to study the efficiency and the modern advancements this network has made.

If one talks to good CEOs or good managers who are running a good company and asks what the secret to their success is, the smart ones and the good ones will say it is the people. It is the intelligence and hard work of the people who come in every day to work and make this company successful. To turn around and expect that after this kind of action they are going to get the same productivity and zest and all the energy that Canada Post workers put in every day, this government is absolutely undermining the very stature Canada Post has achieved over many hard working years. Members should know that the unions and the workers have made many concessions in the last four or five rounds of bargaining on wages and pensions. However, there has to be a line somewhere, where one says enough is enough; there should be fair treatment, fair wages and fair pensions for the generation coming. That is exactly what this dispute is going to settle.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is pretty much the end of the night shift, and we will all be glad of that. Certainly I will be, that is for sure, but I hope I am able to make as coherent an intervention as my colleague just did.

I want to talk about three things over the ten minutes I have. Hopefully I can do that. I will talk a bit about democracy, as it relates to Bill C-6. I want to talk about the next generation. And if I get to it, and hopefully I will, I want to talk a little bit about postal worker wages and pensions and corporate profits and the salaries of CEOs.

I will start by telling all members of the House how thrilled I am to be here, how thrilled I am to be part of this caucus, part of the official opposition and able to participate in such an important debate, in such an important attack on workers' rights. I am so grateful to the people of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who supported me in the recent election and sent me here and gave me, frankly, this wonderful opportunity to work and to speak at some length on an issue that is so important.

I have a bit of experience in parliamentary procedure and in the legislature. I was in the Nova Scotia Legislature for 12 years. I was there as a member of a two-person caucus, of a three-person caucus and of the official opposition, and here we are as the official opposition, but I want members to understand how I have approached each and every single day as an elected official. I approached it with the sense of responsibility to speak up on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of those people who too often go without a voice in places like this.

Again, whether it was in a two-person caucus or whether it was in the official opposition, I took every single opportunity I had to make sure I raised any concerns I had or any concerns my constituents might have had or any concerns I had about people being affected by the actions of any particular government.

I did not worry, and I still do not worry, that I am somehow inconveniencing the government, that I am somehow inconveniencing any other party within the chamber I am in at any given time, because I have a responsibility as an elected official, in this case as an MP, to be as articulate as I possibly can be, to work hard to point out the flaws, the weaknesses and the things that can be done to make a piece of legislation better. That is why I was elected. I take that very seriously, and I thank the people of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for giving me this opportunity.

Also, I want it to be known that I come here with not only the experience I gained but also the experience of having been raised by a man and woman who were big Conservatives. I should say that out front because somebody from Nova Scotia is going to tell us. I grew up in a big Conservative family, but the most important thing about these people, I want it to be known, is that they were small business people.

My dad was a World War II ace. He fought in North Africa. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar. My mum worked in the insurance business. She was also active in meals on wheels before she died and, in fact, provided hospice services for the first self-identified AIDS patient in Nova Scotia.

I am very proud of my parents and what they did and the values they left with me. The values they left with me are about fairness, about justice, about speaking up when we see things are wrong, about making sure we do not take no for an answer, that we stand up against tyranny and injustice.

● (5505)

My father did that in the war and that is what many of our veterans did, those who came back from and those who died in the second world war. That is why it is very important that I take every opportunity in this place when I see a piece of legislation come to the floor that has the kinds of implications as this one does on working people in this country. I commit to members opposite and the third party that I will do that with every breath in my body.

Government Orders

The second thing I want to talk about is the next generation. My daughter Jessie is 23 years of age. Hopefully she will be out of university some day and will be looking for a job, other than the one she has as a lifeguard, which does not pay very well. She will be out in the workforce, as are many other young people today, and I feel I have a responsibility to ensure that she can find jobs that pay a decent wage, that have good benefits and a pension, that she can work in a safe and healthy workplace and not suffer from discrimination or other human rights violations in the workplace. That is the responsibility I have.

With my history as a trade unionist, I know why we have public pensions, employment insurance, universal medicare and why we have all the rights and benefits we do. It is because of my father and mother, and the pioneers in the trade union movement, in the small business community, in legislatures and in this country. It is because of what they have been able to do to ensure that people in the workplace are able to enjoy those kinds of benefits.

While I have had the opportunity to enjoy the hard work they have done, my responsibility is to ensure that I protect the benefits and working conditions that they were able to fight for to ensure people are safe and healthy. My responsibility is to make them better and stronger and to ensure that my daughter and her generation are able to work and contribute to their families and communities. That is my responsibility and, I would suggest, the responsibility of every member of the House.

There have been some suggestions and comments by members opposite that the people who work for Canada Post have it good, that they make all kinds of money, have a pension and they should be happy and go away. I will share some numbers with members. An entry-level CUPW worker makes about \$23 an hour. An average pension enjoyed by a CUPW worker, who has worked his or her entire life with Canada Post and contributed actively to his or her pension plan, is about \$24,000 a year.

Let us compare that with some of the CEOs of Canada's big banks who have realized salary increases of well over 10% in 2009. The Bank of Nova Scotia's CEO makes \$7.45 million, the president of the Bank of Montreal made \$9.7 million in 2009, the CEO of TD Bank made \$15.2 million, the CEO of the Royal Bank made \$12.1 million and the CEO of CIBC made \$6.2 million. The oil companies made \$16 billion in profits last year and yet they are receiving billions of dollars in tax breaks.

• (5510)

My point is simple. Why is it that the government wants to hand over billions of dollars to profitable corporations at the same time as it wants to put the boots to hard-working women and men who toil at Canada Post?

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am assuming the member's constituents probably knew his father who was a small businessperson who worked really hard. I wonder if they actually thought that he would represent small business in this chamber when he came to Ottawa and not represent the union bosses. I want to know what the member's dad would say now.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague mentioning my dad. He has been dead about five years now. He was

a Conservative all of his life but, ever since I got into politics in 1991, I know he supported me and the New Democratic Party because he understood what fairness and working for ordinary people was all about. My constituents also understand because I have a history of 12 years in the provincial legislature and 25 years in the trade union movement, which I did not hide. I spoke proudly of that to my constituents. They know all about the person they voted for and I appreciate their support.

• (5515)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague to the House of Commons.

I would like to get his comments on the following. As I observe what is going on today, it appears to me that the lockout is a symptom. It is a symptom of this disease that I see has permeated Canada Post and other organizations. I say that because I have talked with workers with Canada Post and the two unions that represent Canada Post. It appears that since their former CEO came into power, who has now been unleashed to destroy the system in the United Kingdom I understand, that labour relations have deteriorated in Canada Post. We had a period of time that it was okay.

Could this not be a golden opportunity for the government to work with Canada Post and the union to iron out some of those difficulties, to get a just contract and lay the groundwork for future good labour relations not only for Canada Post but for other crown corporations and government departments?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that this is an opportunity. The union has made a clear commitment to the government and to Canada Post that if the government were to pull this legislation back and tell Canada Post to rip those padlocks off the doors, they would go back to work and deliver the mail and then work toward rebuilding labour relations that, frankly, have been damaged already by this situation.

I want to go back to the point made about the troubling sign about this attack on public services and the public sector. It confuses me to some considerable degree that a government that says it is so focused on the economy would want to get rid of all the middle-class jobs, secure pensions and benefits for people who are spending their money in our communities and making our economy strong. I do not understand what that is all about.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the statement by the member opposite and I must say that I am quite concerned. This Conservative government is committed to passing Bill C-6, the restoring mail delivery for Canadians act to ensure that mail delivery resumes.

I have heard from many of my constituents, including workers from Canada Post, who are outraged that the opposition continues to stop passage of this very important piece of legislation. By stalling passage of this bill, the opposition is saying no to seniors who are asking for their pension cheques, no to parents asking for their child tax credit benefits, no to disabled Canadians asking for their disability cheques, and no to small businesses who want to pay their bills and mail cheques to employees.

Government Orders

I stand in this House today listening to the member opposite who spoke about fairness in his speech. Will my NDP colleague join the members on this side of the House by passing this bill quickly and saying yes to the many Canadians who are pleading for mail service to continue.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I hope you will allow me at least the same amount of time that the question took.

What I am hearing from my constituents is a concern that this attack at this point on postal workers is just the beginning, and that that whole list of groups that the member indicated may be next. People who represent the disabled community are concerned that the disabled community will be next, that their rights will be next.

People are worried that it will be other groups in the community, such as women, foreign sector workers or any number of groups that the government does not like and that their rights will then be attacked by the government.

● (5520)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this labour dispute, and I have heard it called various things, is something with which I have some familiarity as I was a union leader for many years. One of the things taught to me was that we never ever start something we cannot finish. We do not let workers go out unless we know how to get them back.

Canada Post apparently knew how to get them back. It locked them out because it knew full well that it had allies on the other side of the House who would legislate them back to work immediately. Mere hours after the labour dispute, the lockout, got started, the minister notified this august body that she would be legislating them back to work, and that is unfair.

We in Canada have developed a labour relations system that is the envy of the world, because we have predictable, regular, understandable timeframes for labour disputes. In other parts of the world, the labour disputes can start whenever the union wants them to start, but here in Canada, we know there is a clock. When that clock comes around, we know it is when we are collectively bargaining that we are in a legal labour dispute position, and we in Canada have set up mechanisms that force the parties to talk to one another, that force the parties to sit down and negotiate. That is not happening here. Why is it not happening here? Because some signals apparently were sent from the other side of this legislature to the mandarins at Canada Post that they did not have to worry about a labour dispute, because they would find legislation in their favour as soon as a labour dispute got going in earnest, as soon as they locked people out.

We need to figure out how to resolve it ourselves. That is why we are having this conversation, because the parties are unable to do it. The parties are unable to do it, because one side knows full well it does not have to do so. It does not have to have that conversation, because that conversation will be shortened by the government.

The other side in this dispute, the company side, does not have to actually bargain in good faith. It does not have to sit down and actually talk about what it needs and what the employees need and see if it can find a way to make those needs meet. All it has to do is sit with its hands crossed and say no, and here we are.

We have a number of examples in Canada of protracted labour disputes. I do not think there has ever been a protracted labour dispute at Canada Post, but I have been involved in some. I had a 17-month strike at one of my employers over pay equity, over women being paid the same as men. Women were being paid \$8.99 each hour for their work, and they had to go on strike for 17 months. In that case, really nobody won.

I have been involved in a four-month strike. It was a Crown corporation, and it took that long for the employer to get its instructions from the government about what it was supposed to do. I have been involved in a two-week lockout that the employer kept calling a strike, publicly. Eventually the Canada Industrial Relations Board had to rule that in fact it was a lockout, that the thing the employer was calling a strike was a lockout because it had locked the doors.

How do we get out of this? One way to get out of it is to let the labour dispute take place and wait for one side or the other to say that enough is enough and we have to settle this thing. Let us get to the table and talk about it. That will not happen here, quite clearly, since Canada Post has been told it does not have to actually sit down and bargain.

Another way we could do it is with a declaration. There are two kinds of declarations, one in the Public Service Staff Relations Act and one in the Canada Industrial Relations Board, that this is an essential service, that this service is something that cannot have a strike or lockout.

● (5525)

That seems to be what the current government is arguing, that there cannot be a postal disruption in Canada, even for a day. It was on the day the lockout started that the government announced Canada Post workers would be legislated back to work.

The definition of an “essential service” in the Canada Labour Code is that the employer or the trade union and the employees in the bargaining unit must,

continue the supply of services, operation of facilities or production of goods to the extent necessary to prevent an immediate and serious danger to the safety or health of the public.

Since the members opposite have not argued this, I guess this is not an immediate and serious danger to the safety or health of the public. It is an inconvenience, and it means Canada Post is losing money. We agree that it certainly causes some very serious consequences not for everybody but for certain individuals, for pensioners and people in receipt of other government cheques. The postal workers' union has agreed to deliver those things. They will deliver the things they deem essential and that people in this House seem to agree are essential.

Government Orders

Somebody locked the doors. It was not the NDP and it was not the postal workers. It was the government and its Crown corporation that decided to lock the doors and prevent the delivery of what might be argued is essential stuff, though it has not yet been. We have agreed that it is stuff that it is pretty darned important to have delivered to people. Pension cheques, social security, and family allowances are the kinds of things that need to be delivered. We argue that they should be delivered, and Canada Post workers are willing to deliver them, but the government is preventing them from doing so.

There appears to be no way to stop this from dragging on, so what is another option? The only option that has been presented to us is the sledgehammer option in which, mere hours after a labour dispute starts, the government indicates it will not let that happen and forces workers back to work with less than was offered before. The government will force workers back to work with a bad faith position.

I say “bad faith position” because in my many years of bargaining if any employer brought an offer to the table and then reduced it for no good reason, not because there had been a sudden change in the economic conditions of the employer or there was legislation, in order to provoke the other side, that was considered to be bad-faith bargaining. That is not what the NDP is about here. We are about good faith. We are about fairness and we are about trying to get things done. We are about trying to get people back to work. That is really what we want to do.

The sledgehammer approach was brought about after the Minister of Labour claimed to have used everything in her power to bring these parties to an agreement. She talked at length about the number of months they had met. Of course if one side is just sitting there with their arms folded, the meeting does not really mean anything. The minister talked at length about the number of months that were involved in conciliation.

She did not appoint a conciliation commissioner. The difference, for those who do not know labour relations parlance in this country, is that a conciliation officer meets in private with the parties and never publishes a report, except to the Minister of Labour. The minister gets to know, but the conciliation officer's deliberations and decisions and ideas and proposals are all private.

However, a conciliation commissioner is public and that person actually reports to the public on what he or she thinks the outcome should be on a resolution to the dispute. That was not allowed to happen here. That was not allowed to take place, so we are faced with a situation that just got worse.

● (5530)

With regard to one other small piece, one of the members opposite keeps referring to the fact that they should let them vote. In fact, that is another thing the minister did not do. She has the power to force a vote, and she did not exercise it. I suspect we all know why.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take a bit of issue with the member's comment about this not being a serious and essential need for Canadians. This is a serious and essential need for Canadians. Canadians need their mail delivered and mail delivery must be restored.

Small businesses in this country make up 1.5 million of the 10.6 million people who are employed. Therefore, I would like to ask the member why he and the NDP will not stop their filibuster and allow mail delivery to be restored so those small businesses that rely so much on cheques coming through the mail to employ people do not have to start laying people off because they cannot meet their expenses.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: We absolutely agree that this should end and do so in a way that is fair to everybody. However, it is not this piece of legislation that is fair. The Canada Post workers have offered to go back to work if Canada Post will just cut the locks off the doors and let them go back.

The member opposite suggested that I was not agreeing that this was essential. I did not say that. I said the government and Canada Post have the opportunity to declare this an essential service. If they do that and they believe that an immediate and serious danger to the safety or the health of the public is at risk, then they can declare it an essential service and the Canada Industrial Relations Board will decide how to arbitrate a collective agreement in a fair and impartial way. The Canada Industrial Relations Board will not actually legislate one side or the other to win.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, just with respect to the issue of essential services and what individual Canadians require, a lack of mail delivery in this country means that people who live in the far North or remote areas are not receiving prescriptions or eyeglasses, things that are essential for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Indeed I think the member has pointed out part of the debate we are engaged in.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for you as a Speaker and I think you are doing an excellent job showing some of these new MPs the differences among the various rules in the House of Commons so I want to commend you for your excellent role this morning.

I listened to my hon. colleague's speech with great interest, because during the election I was standing outside the Tim Hortons in South Porcupine, Ontario and a young guy came up to me and he said, “Charlie, if this government gets a majority how long do you think it will be before we see Wisconsin north?”

I said, “Well, you know exactly what will happen if they get a majority”.

If members look at what happened in Wisconsin, it is very similar to the situation here. It was an attack on public-sector workers. It was an attempt to demonize them using the terms “union thugs” and “union bosses”. It was an attack on their pensions. That was the thin edge of the sword. We see now the attack on CUPW, the attack on the pensions, the two-tiered system.

Government Orders

I am getting emails from firefighters, from nurses and from people who work in the public sector all across Canada, who ask why it is that the government would try to impose a wage settlement that would undermine what had already been agreed to. Does the member not think this is an attempt by the government to bring forward the same kind of retrograde actions against workers that happened in Wisconsin?

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, I agree that this action by the government is just the beginning of what will likely be a Wisconsin-like attack on workers in this country. It will not be just on public-sector workers, but that is where they can start. That attack will demonize anything to do with unions. It will demonize anybody who has a good pension, good wages or a good collective agreement or, even without collective agreements, anyone the government believes is getting too much while the bosses the government represents, the CEOs, are getting too little.

• (5535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a lot of people debating on both sides of the House, and it really gives me the impression that what is going on here goes beyond the current debate and even goes beyond the dispute between Canada Post and its employees.

If you look at the record of proceedings of the House, at Hansard, you can see that the members on the other side of the House in particular attack the very notion of unionization and the very concept of the labour relations process. When you hear talk of union bosses trying to rule everything and everyone, I believe that perception is out there. From their perspective, the unions are obviously an easy target. These are people who fight, who stand up for their rights, and it is apparent that the people on the other side of the House ultimately want people who are docile, who are able to comply with their employers' wishes and who want to comply with the wishes of people making the economic decisions in times like this.

The Conservatives rely on that perception in order to divide Canadians. What they are doing in their arguments is very clear and obvious: they are trying to pit Canadians against each other, to polarize. As I said in my speech yesterday, this government is the most polarizing government in Canadian history.

I believe we have to remind the House of some basic concepts here. It must be understood what a union is. In my view, the people from the Conservative Party do not understand what a union is. A union is an organization of ordinary people, the people they claim to defend. These are ordinary people because, in our economy, there are people with economic power, employers, and there are people who individually have no bargaining power to oppose that economic power.

It should be borne in mind that a business executive has power; and I am not talking about small and medium-size enterprises that are often family businesses. I am talking, for example, about publicly listed companies. Those businesses have power. The representatives of a business are generally paid quite well by their business. In addition, if the business closes, they are entitled to compensation and, with their administrative skills, can easily find jobs elsewhere, at another business, so they can continue managing.

The situation is different for employees. They depend on their salary to survive, to feed themselves, to meet their basic, essential needs and perhaps splurge a little, and to have a comfortable standard of living. They need it. An employee who suddenly ends up out of work has very little with which to survive when EI runs out. Consequently, there is no balance of power in bargaining.

Knowing that, we must now determine why people unionize. People unionize in order to acquire some power to offset the economic power of a business. These are ordinary people, people like you and me. Currently, more than 30 or 35 percent of the Canadian population is unionized. These are ordinary people, unless we decide that they are not ordinary people. Not so long ago, even 40 percent of Canadians were unionized. They unionize in order to acquire this collective power against economic power, which is utterly normal. They also bargain for better conditions.

For example, there is a lot of talk about wages. When there is no union or minimum labour standards, it is easy for an employer to favour certain employees over others. It is easy for an employer to tell one employee that he will have five weeks of vacation leave because he likes him, whereas another employee will get only two or three weeks of vacation because he likes him less.

A collective agreement negotiated by ordinary people who join forces to bargain with an employer makes it possible to establish the basic ground rules to ensure that all is fair for everyone.

Do they ultimately secure better conditions? Of course they get better conditions. The ordinary people I represent in Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, like the ones my colleagues represent in their constituencies, secure better working conditions when they are unionized. Why? Because they have acquired this bargaining power.

It seems the Conservative members consider ordinary people as people who refuse to work together, who refuse to acquire power and who will acquiesce much more readily to employer demands.

Another question arises: why do they take labour action? In this case, it will be recalled that there was no general strike at Canada Post, but rather a series of rotating strikes.

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• (5540)

Why that kind of labour action, or strikes in other cases? So they can exercise that power. If there is a bargaining exercise in which the employer refuses to bargain in good faith—there are examples in which Canada Post did not bargain in good faith—they must exercise that power. Ordinary people join forces to compel the employer to return to the table to bargain and to establish the ground rules. In this case, it is quite clear that Canada Post was not in good faith. It let the negotiations drag on so the government could introduce special legislation favouring it. I will get back to that point. Much has been made of that during this debate.

Now I am concerned about what is going on here. I am concerned because this debate goes beyond the mere issue of Canada Post and the labour dispute. It is clear that, in its argument, the government, although it claims to be in favour of small business, ordinary people, seniors and retirees, promotes a downward levelling. If the power of unionization and the power of ordinary people to join forces to address an employer collectively are reduced, the conditions they secure will obviously not be as good and will be levelled downwards. Instead, the government should be helping ordinary people improve their lot.

Based on the figures, whether it be those of Statistics Canada or of the research institutes, those commonly called think tanks, the middle class in Canada is gradually disappearing. It is the ordinary people who joined forces to form unions that created the middle class. Before unions came into existence, people who demanded rights were oppressed. There was a have class and a have not class, those who had financial resources and those who lived from one day to the next not knowing what would happen to them the following day. It was when the right to form unions was granted that the middle class emerged. Coincidentally, as attacks continue against unionization in Canada and attempts are made to eliminate bargaining power, we are witnessing the gradual disappearance of the middle class and the emergence of the same economic disparities as existed at the turn of the century.

It is clear from the arguments of members opposite that, if the right to form unions did not exist or was not protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it would be threatened as it is in some states in the USA, including Wisconsin. In that state, unionization is clearly and specifically under attack in both the public and private sectors.

In their arguments, the Conservatives refer to the need to avoid jeopardizing the country's current economic recovery. That argument can be advanced in virtually all unionization fields and labour disputes. The government said the Air Canada strike had to be terminated and a separate agreement was reached at that time. Today they say the Canada Post dispute has to end. What will it be tomorrow? VIA Rail, Bell, Bombardier?

We have to stop talking about this dispute. We have put forward solutions. The government has chosen to promote a forced back-to-work solution with pre-established wage conditions favouring the employer, while restricting their arbitrator. As a result, management will be very pleased because the conditions will be in its favour.

And yet there were solutions. If the government really wants to use special legislation, with its majority of less than 40 percent of Canadians and less than 20 percent of Quebeckers, it has the power to do so. It could end the lockout and allow the rotating strikes to continue. Canadians would receive their mail. The government could also have introduced special legislation to extend the collective agreement until the bargaining process had been completed. People would have continued receiving their mail. There are options.

• (5545)

I would have liked the government to be able to use those options rather than attack the fundamental principle of unionization.

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to what the member said. The member used words like “concerned” and “worried”. Absolutely, everybody in the House is concerned and worried.

We are getting correspondence, hourly, from constituents, as well as from people across the country, who are expressing concern and worry. They are worried about the economy. They are worried about small business. They are worried about our postal workers who are unable to work. They want to work. We have heard from postal workers who want to be back there.

I see it is still June 23, but it seems to me it was only a day before that when we debated an NDP motion that supported small business. What happened to the NDP's support, which it expressed so eloquently? Why is the NDP not now supporting small business?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

We are always on the side of small businesses. I think it is obvious. We said so in our election platform as well as in the motion we moved, which was passed in the House. We are quite happy about that.

We are as concerned as the hon. member about small businesses, pensioners and also the ordinary people I represent in the riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

I mentioned that at the end of my speech, and the hon. member heard it. I said that there are ways to get out of this predicament, and one of them is to withdraw this special legislation and bring in new legislation in order to extend the collective agreement until the end of the negotiations.

Mail would be distributed, union members would bargain, and everybody would be happy. Bill C-6 could be withdrawn, and we could have another bill to end the lockout and keep rotating strikes, which allow mail delivery.

If the hon. member is really concerned about small businesses, the Conservatives have to withdraw this legislation and replace it with another bill that would be respectful of the rights of workers and make mail delivery possible.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have just a brief comment and question.

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I have been sitting here, thinking about what the word “respect” means. On the Canada Post website, when it talks about the values it has as a corporation, it says that it succeeds by “working together” and that it treats each other with “respect”.

Could the member comment on what kind of respect there is for an organization or corporation that locks out its own employees? The crown corporation's website talks about the values of work and labour relations, yet it has gone to extraordinary lengths to lock out its own workers to prevent them from being at the bargaining table and to prevent the mail from being delivered.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from British Columbia for her question.

Obviously, if a labour relations process is to work well, it takes good relations and good faith on both sides.

In this negotiation, there has been a lack of significant good faith on the part of Canada Post, and that is what led to this conflict. Many government members have emphasized that Canada Post is really a corporation belonging to all Canadians who are represented by this Parliament, but when a crown corporation such as this locks out its employees in the hope of getting special back-to-work legislation, thus effectively putting the power of Parliament on its side, it shows a lack of respect.

This crown corporation should be able to bargain in good faith with its employees to resolve this conflict swiftly. This is not what is happening now.

Various options existed, such as special legislation that would allow quick resumption of operations and would be respectful of employees. This is not what was introduced, and that is why we are still sitting today.

• (5550)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to thank you and your colleagues. I know that it is not easy to be here to preside over the debates. Sometimes you have to make rulings that are quite the opposite of what the hon. members want.

Thank you very much. You do extraordinary work and I just wanted to acknowledge that.

[*English*]

Before I continue, a thought came into my head as we were listening to the debates. I represent rural communities, as do many members here, and one of the problems we have is trying to attract young people to stay and work and raise their families in our communities because often we do not have good paying jobs.

I have looked at a contract with Canada Post where it says that people starting work would get less money than those with whom they are working side by side. My concern is that it would discourage people from trying to stay in rural communities. They would then try, for other reasons, to go to large urban centres.

The underlying theme that we sometimes forget when we talk about small business and trying to keep people in our communities is that people who make money stay and support small businesses in

our communities. This is something I have discussed on a number of occasions with representatives of the chambers of commerce in my area.

[*Translation*]

I want to put things into context. We are here today to defend the rights of Canadian workers. We know that on June 3, postal workers started a rotating strike. They were then locked out, as we have already gone over.

As we know, the union has been responsible. It offered to end the strike if Canada Post agreed to uphold the former contract during the negotiations. However, Canada Post refused. Then there was this lockout and support from this government through the introduction of this bill. That is the context.

We are wondering why this government wants to impose a labour contract on the employees. One might say it is not the government's role to do so and that an effort should be made to find solutions by negotiating the conditions of the contract.

Some people have already made the link between what is happening here in Canada and the anti-labour movement in the United States known as the Tea Party. The most draconian example comes out of the State of Wisconsin, a state I am familiar with. Governor Scott Walker abolished the bargaining rights of more than 175,000 public sector employees. The same goes for the right to job security, gender equality and so on.

What is their motive? Clearly this is an issue of maximizing profits for companies on the backs of workers. That is the issue in the bill before us. The employer claims it cannot meet the demands of the employees.

I always try to underscore certain things when I rise to speak. Canada Post earned revenues to the tune of \$281 million last year. The funny thing is that I learned from people I talked to at Canada Post that some of those profits apparently go to the federal government. Instead of using this revenue to improve activities, performance and efficiency and to arrive at a fair agreement, some of the money goes to the federal government.

Personally, I think this is akin to stealing money from the workers and from Canada Post. It is like the \$50 billion stolen from the employment insurance fund. Today, less than 40% of the unemployed are eligible to receive employment insurance benefits.

• (5555)

[*English*]

We can put this into another context. I have been showing a film in my riding called *Poor No More*, with Mary Moore from CBC. Many of you have seen it. It outlines what has been happening in our country and in some other countries. Interestingly I shared the film with the executive director at the chamber of commerce in my riding, and at the next meeting—I think it is my turn to buy lunch—I would like to discuss it with her.

We have poverty in this country. We have an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor. We have an agenda that is driven by the Council of Chief Executives.

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In the film they point out that 150 of the biggest corporations in Canada are driving the agenda. For those who have not seen the film, there is a worker at the LCBO in Ontario, a casual worker, who has been there for 11 years. She has no benefits and no pension, and when she was suffering she had to take her cancer treatments on her lunch breaks.

I talked about the labour climate when I asked a question to my colleague for Welland yesterday. From his experience as a union leader, I asked who sets the tone. Why do we sometimes have labour disputes that end quickly where there is good morale in the workplace, and other times they drag on and deteriorate, as they have done in Canada Post?

It is because of the direction provided by who is in charge. As a school teacher, I saw it. I worked in schools where there was good morale, and I worked in schools with bad morale, and that depended on the direction of the principal of the school.

We have a deterioration of labour relations between our unionized workers of both unions in Canada Post and the management. My understanding from talking to the workers is that under the former CEO, and continuing under the present one, there are more grievances, decisions being made without consultation, and bizarre decisions.

I would ask you to picture this: I live in the community of Castlegar, which is 600 kilometres from Vancouver. If I mail a letter to my neighbour on Friday, that letter goes to Vancouver for sorting, which is 1,200 kilometres away, and it comes back so my neighbour next door can get the letter. That is because of this so-called efficiency.

Anyway, I will move on. In the film we have a comparison with other countries. We have a worker who works part-time for the liquor control board in Sweden. He is part-time and he has full benefits and free health care. Citizens get free seniors care and free child care. If a couple has a child, they get over 400 days of paternity and maternity leave. That is what we have seen. Sweden used to have strikes. There are no strikes. Everything is done through collective agreements. Why is that? It is because there is a partnership. There is a partnership between corporations, government and unions. Unions, by law, are mandated to sit on the board of directors.

We have been told that our country is somehow leading this economic recovery. Well, among the countries that are leading the economic recovery, one of them is Australia, which ironically seems to have a labour government today. But it is also Sweden. Sweden, the country that many have criticized for being socialist and having high taxes, is leading the economic recovery. Why is it doing that? It is because over 70% of its labour force is unionized. They have no strikes. People work together to come to solutions so they can have and build a just society.

Why can we not do that? What is wrong with us? Why do labour relations deteriorate? Why do we have to have these strikes? Why do we have to have this draconian legislation put in by governments such as this? This is the time we can do something for our country and bring back the kind of relationship we should have between

labour and government and corporations. I think it is the responsibility of all of us here to do that today.

• (5600)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen over the last couple of days a kind of bizarre spectacle in the House of Commons. Prior to the vote last evening just before midnight, we had 27 plus hours of repetitive argument. The result was that the NDP members of Parliament convinced the Liberal members, who had previously been supporting them, to vote against them in the vote that was held on the NDP motion.

Yet they persist, even though a number of their own members did not even bother to show up for that vote. Perhaps that means some NDP members have changed their position on this bill.

When will they end this charade, save taxpayers' dollars, and put Canada Post back to work?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that when we are fighting for something as fundamental as workers' rights, the ability to have fair and just contracts and good labour relations in our country, it is not a charade. Somebody has to nip this in the bud to ensure this kind of Draconian legislation that is happening today is stopped.

We have to speak out on this. We will speak out on this for as long as we must because what is happening is not right. It is not a charade.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was fascinated to listen to the suggestion that the increase in profitability of this corporation is actually theft of the employees. It made me think that what is happening is that by making Canada Post a profit centre for the government it is using the postage system as a form of taxation. In fact the government is forcing small business owners and others to pay more taxes through higher than necessary postal rates in order to conduct their business.

Does the hon. member have a comment on that?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, something is not right here. Other developed countries actually support their post offices in their federal budgets. We have chosen not to do so, and I think that is a good idea.

However, it is one thing to say that it must make a profit, and another thing to say that if it makes big profit the government will grab some of it as general revenue. That is what it did with some or all of the money from employment insurance so it could use it to bring down the national debt and then continue to give corporate tax cuts.

There is something not quite right here. The mandate for Canada Post should be to make a profit and use that money to improve its operations and provide a fair and just working environment for its workers. Then, everybody wins. It is a win-win situation.

However, that is not what is happening today.

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Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague and I share boundaries and I appreciate his cooperation. We have been working together on a variety of issues, and obviously one issue we both share is the fact that we have constituents who are waiting for their mail.

I would like to share with the House a couple of references to some emails that I have received.

The first writer says that he is very frustrated and upset at this whole postal situation. He says that the NDP needs to think about the rest of the country as well. He says his passport is stuck in the system and he cannot travel to India to attend to a medical situation in the family. He says he has called Canada Post but nobody could do anything. He wants us to do everything we can to pass Bill C-6.

This is another email. This person says he has been watching the debate for three hours now and he feels it is sad that this has to go on. He says that Canada Post and the union members need to be put back to work and to stop complaining about wages, benefits, pensions and so on.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we all share concerns about the labour unrest. We will not point fingers. The strikes initiated the lockout. We do not take sides.

However, the fact is that there are Canadians, small businesses, seniors and people with illnesses who are suffering. Can we pass this legislation now, get the people back to work and show we are caring and compassionate, or are you just concerned about the union bosses?

• (5605)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. As a quick reminder to all hon. members, please direct comments and questions to the Chair rather than colleagues.

The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are concerned about all Canadians. We do not appreciate this division when we are somehow labelled as supporting the union bosses.

It is very simple. There are a couple of clauses in this agreement that could be taken out or modified, legislation could be passed and these people could be back to work on Monday. That is all we have to do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the debate has been going on for several hours now. I would like to say good morning to everyone and offer the same congratulations to my colleague.

This is not easy for everyone. The most frustrating things in this debate are perhaps the gratuitous attacks or the statements that are somewhat rude, not to mention crude, made by some colleagues concerning our positions. Sixty-two per cent of the population of Gatineau sent me here to Ottawa because my campaign focused on my leadership in Ottawa on the areas of health, pension protection, seniors and social justice.

I am listening to this debate with interest because this is sort of my passion. I came to Ottawa with my background. Some may not be aware of it, but in 1984 I became a lawyer with the Barreau du Québec. This does not make me any younger, some of my NDP colleagues were born after I joined the Barreau du Québec. I specialized in labour law. I am hearing a lot of talk that we have a direct line to union leaders. During the election campaign I was attacked by my opponents who claimed that I was an evil employers' lawyer. But what is happening on the other side of the House, with Bill C-6, is a direct attack. Trust the lawyer in me that some may call an employers' lawyer, even though I also represent unions. I have no shame in being called that because I have common sense and try to contribute that to the negotiations that I take part in.

Bill C-6 poses some serious problems. As legislators and parties, we must absolutely pass bills that are not only correct, reasonable and fair for citizens, but also legal. But this bill poses some serious problems in that respect, and I will talk about that shortly.

What is also sad in this debate is that once again, true to form, the Conservatives are taking pleasure in dividing. The big bad employer against the union. Postal workers against Canadians. The big bad socialists against the fabulous Conservatives. In no way does that elevate the debate.

What is even more sad is being told that all of the hours we have spent here could have been spent with our families, celebrating the national holiday, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, or participating in activities in our riding. We are being told that we are purposely doing this just to upset people. I am sorry, but we never express our opinion just to upset people. It is a fundamental right that we have here, and we decided that we would exercise it. We will not stand back and stop talking, even though some would like us to do that, just because we do not have the numbers to win the vote.

If the Liberals want to go home to sleep for the next four years, they have the right to do so. We will be here in Ottawa to carry out the mandate we were given by voters. I will never apologize for that. If that means that we will be here until September 19, then we will do it.

The member for Gatineau will not agree to pass a bill that will fundamentally be fought before the courts and will be rejected. Who will pay for that? The taxpayers. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and I will come back to that.

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My colleagues have been talking about the problem with Bill C-6, but that does not seem to be sinking in for our friends opposite. The fundamental reason that the minister wants to see this bill pass is to solve a serious problem with the Canadian economy, since Canada Post workers are essential, a fact with which we all agree. In fact, mail in Canada is essential for a lot of people, such as seniors and small businesses. I know, because I had a small business myself and I sent my invoices by mail. My small legal firm would have suffered if I had not been able to do so.

• (5610)

That is part of collective agreement negotiations. Everything is provided for under the Canada Labour Code. If Canada Post were an essential service like the police and nurses, where it is a matter of life or death if they did not work, and it were in a lockout, the Canada Labour Code covers that. Those people do not have the right to strike.

In Quebec, Gatineau police officers do not have the right to strike. It took six years before they negotiated and concluded their collective agreement. They had the right to use pressure tactics. We ended up with police officers dressed in army fatigues and all that. Some might find that outrageous, but that was their only pressure tactic. They ended up settling the dispute. Every sector has its own way of resolving things.

We often hear the members opposite say that seniors are not receiving their cheques, but that is not true. They were receiving their paycheques, their pension cheques because the postal workers agreed to make that special delivery. The employer has the right to declare a lockout. I remember a professor of labour law, when I was studying law at the University of Ottawa, which is probably the best and greatest university in Canada, who always told us: if you work in labour law as a lawyer representing the union or the employer—let us say the union—and you represent blue collar workers in a city in Canada, take Gatineau for example, do not go on a snow removal strike in the middle of summer. It will not work.

So we know that the lockout and the strike exist to re-establish a balance of power. When the other party is not listening to us—like the Conservatives opposite—we are obliged to take more draconian measures to ignite a spark. Then, the system, be it public pressure or the other party, is going to wake up at some point and will be willing to settle the conflict.

But then the government, with its heavy-handed approach, decides to put forward special legislation that goes a lot further than it should. I am going to make a free recommendation and I will not send a bill to anyone. Anyway, the employees are locked out and my bill would never arrive.

I would be very healthy if it could be proven that the lockout, even after one day, has greatly weakened the Canadian economy and that it is necessary to force employees to return to work immediately. Well, the government could do just that, order employees back to work and ask the arbitrator to hear both parties at a formal hearing, and not impose conditions that would not allow any discussion. The arbitrator will not even be able to address trade practices or anything else. The arbitrator will have to side with one party or the other. This is exactly the Conservative's style. It is always one or the other. But law has grey areas. Sometimes it is good to water down your wine.

In this context, it would have been so much better than what the government is currently doing.

Why is the Conservatives' proposal illegal? Last night, our hon. colleague from Outremont began addressing this question. I encourage all members to read the case of *Health Services and Support—Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. v. British Columbia*. This ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada—the highest court in the land—is crystal clear. In this case, when a special bill affects workers' wages, as the government is trying to do in this case, it is going to wind up stuck in court. The Conservatives will be stuck defending this before the Supreme Court and, once again, the taxpayers are going to have to pay for it.

Let us be fair to both sides. Let us bring them back to the bargaining table and get the employees back to work—I see no problem with that—without the appalling conditions the Conservatives have included in their bill. Within the next few years, we are going to be left with a bill of several millions of dollars for something that has already been ruled on. It would be nice if the government would listen to the NDP every so often, because sometimes what we say makes sense.

• (5615)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past 35 hours or so we have listened to a lot of statements by the NDP, the same statements over and over again, as if people heard them enough times they would believe the inaccuracies. I would like to point out a few of the inaccuracies that I have heard over the last 12 to 15 hours, but I have not had a chance to ask each member a question.

Last night one of the NDP members said that most of the jobs that have been created in the last year and a half are part-time, low-paying jobs. It is obvious that they have not read the budget, because it is clear on page 30 that 90% of those jobs are high wage jobs and around 85% of them are full-time jobs.

Another member last night accused our Prime Minister of disregarding religious holidays in respect to the advance polls. The NDP should know that the Prime Minister does not set the advance poll dates. Those dates are set by Elections Canada.

This morning my NDP colleague from Timmins—James Bay said that we just want to get home for the barbecue season. On this side of the House we take our commitments to our constituents seriously. Many of us have sacrificed many opportunities to be with our constituents over these past 35 hours.

If NDP members believe in all the talk, talk, talk they have been doing for the last 35 hours, why did more of them not show up to vote last night? If they are interested in getting workers back to work, why do they not pass this legislation that we have been talking about for 35 hours?

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[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague should have listened to what I was saying. We cannot pass this bill so hastily because we respect a Supreme Court of Canada ruling in 2007 concerning BC Health. That decision is clear. What clause 12 of Bill C-6 provides regarding wages will be ruled invalid by the Supreme Court of Canada.

In all good conscience as a lawyer and the member of Parliament for Gatineau, I absolutely cannot recommend to anyone that they take part in this kind of hijacking of the legal system, because it will be overturned. In this context, that is one of the reasons for our decision. That is why, at this stage of the process, we simply cannot vote in favour of Bill C-6 in its current form.

We have been trying to explain this every possible way, but the Conservatives do not seem to understand. Furthermore, they do not seem to understand that we share their frustration about not having any mail service. Yes, it is frustrating for everyone to not get their mail. It was also frustrating when OC Transpo went on strike last year, and in years past, and an arbitrator was needed to settle the dispute. It is frustrating when police officers go on strike. However, that is part of labour relations. It is not a question of life or death. We must do things properly and in accordance with the law.

• (5620)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, being born in 1984 and as a representative of young people, I would like to know what the hon. member thinks about the special bill, more specifically about the discrimination between the new and old employees in terms of rights and justice.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

I did not have enough time to address this aspect of the issue. In my view, this is quite illegal since it means creating two separate pay scales. Under labour laws, we call them “orphan clauses”. There is already a lot of case law and doctrine on the matter. The problem is that tests have never really been done on this.

What is considered legal is giving a different salary to a person just starting a job who does exactly the same type of work as another employee. That does not pose any problems since the decision is based on experience. So pay scales are created. But, in terms of just changing things for economic reasons in order to rebuild the finances of a company on the backs of new employees, I think we are going to have some serious debates in court on those issues. In my humble opinion as a lawyer who has been practising since the time when the hon. member was born, that is totally illegal.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this morning to speak again on this important issue.

Since the issue of job creation by the government has been raised, I would like to provide, based upon Statistics Canada real data being used, the fact that in the last three years of this government, part-time employment has increased by approximately 50% across the country. In fact, 20% of all jobs are now part-time employment.

That is a record accomplishment for the government. It is actually an erosion of many of the benefits that workers accrue through full-time employment. That is why we have people working piecemeal at jobs. That is why it is very germane to this issue with Canada Post to ensure that there is going to be fairness with regard to what is happening.

Let us be clear again: this is a lockout. The minister can pick up the phone and stop the lockout right away. The workers are prepared to go back. They are prepared to deliver the mail. They can do so within a matter of hours, but they are being prevented from doing so. That is the reality right now. The workers are prepared and willing to be back at work, but they cannot do so physically because of the actions of the government and Canada Post.

That needs to be emphasized continually, because those men and women have been providing a public service of good choice for Canadians for many years. When we look at the facts of Canada Post, if we look at the profit it brings in and the benefits Canadians receive, we cannot argue with the facts.

I want to paint two different worlds here. The first world would be Canada Post. When we look at the facts, we see that it has actually had profits for the last 16 years and has contributed \$1.2 billion to the federal government in dividends and income tax over the last 15 years. It also had dividends of \$580 million. It has had income tax of around \$654 million and profits of \$1.7 billion. All of that is being rolled back into the public purse for different programs and services.

I might add that when we consider this accomplishment, we need to do it through the lens of looking at the accomplishments of other countries. Other countries have higher postage rates than we do through Canada Post. We enjoy good service, low costs and the economic benefit that goes back into whatever the government may want to do at that time, such as providing health care, but I am going to show what the government is doing with some of those profits that Canadian constituents have paid into Canada Post.

The government has made other choices, such as corporate tax cuts for the oil and gas industry. I am going to roll out a couple of those examples, because I think it is important for people to understand that Canada Post workers cannot go to work right now to bring back that profit for Canadians and their families. Also, they cannot do so in an environment that is healthy when we have a government that has basically said it supports the issue with regard to making sure our young people are discriminated against by having a lower wage for the same work, and a government that is going to actually discriminate against our youth with regard to pensions by reducing those pensions. Those are the goals that the government has set by making sure that it uses a sledgehammer on this particular issue.

Those profits that those workers have been rolling back into the coffers are very important. That is an important fact about the treasury, and we make choices about the treasury. What has been happening in the oil and gas sector in particular is very interesting, especially if we come from Ontario or Quebec, where the manufacturing sector has been hammered over the last number of years. A lot of those full-time jobs with benefits and pensions basically have been decimated to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

That value-added work is important for our youth when they look at later paying off a college or university education. Now they have to scramble three or four jobs together just to get by. We have lost that value-added work. Where has the money gone? Incredibly, the money has gone to the oil and gas sector to the tune of billions of dollars in terms of subsidies.

Yes, this is what the government has been doing. It is borrowing money right now. As we are in a deficit, it has borrowed money for the HST implementation. Around \$6 billion has been borrowed. When we pay that off, if we actually get back into a surplus, it will cost billions more in interest just to pay off that servicing debt. We are borrowing money for large corporate tax cuts right now for profitable industries and we are actually paying interest on those corporate tax cuts until we get into a surplus.

I know that my colleagues are getting upset about my talking about this—

• (5625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake is rising on a point of order.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of relevancy, could you remind the member we are talking about Bill C-6, not the budget speech?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am sitting quite close to the member for Windsor West, but I am having a hard time hearing him. My colleague from Markham—Unionville seems to be a little agitated. I do not know if he needs Ovaltine or something to calm him down. I would like to ask him to just calm down so I can actually hear the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the hon. member for Oakridges—Markham rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Paul Calandra: It is actually funny, Mr. Speaker. That member has gotten up a number of times and has said these types of things. He likes to play for the camera and pretend that this side is saying things it is not. So I am wondering if he could repeat for me, since we are being so loud, what things on this side of the House are bothering him.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. First of all, in terms of the point of order raised by the member for Selkirk—Interlake, this is feeling like déjà vu in so many ways. The issue of relevance has been raised many times and the Chair has said consistently that while there is a rule of relevance, the Chair recognizes that many members take a circuitous route to connect

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what they are saying to the business before the House. The Chair does have confidence that all members, including the member for Windsor West, will in fact do that.

Secondly, in terms of the point of order raised by the member for Timmins—James, and subsequently by the hon. member for Oakridges—Markham, the Chair recognizes there are other conversations taking place. I would urge all hon. members wanting a side conversation to either sit together or take it to the lobby.

While they are in the chamber, I would urge all hon. members to give the floor to the person who has the floor. I appreciate that we have all been here a long time, but I think it is important that we maintain decorum and mutual respect in this place.

On that note, I will give the floor back to the hon. member for Windsor West

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that advice, and I will. I think I have been.

What I am trying to demonstrate here are the economic benefits from a healthy, productive Canada Post that has paid billions of dollars back into the federal coffers and then what we are doing with that money as choices. I'll read for members a few of those choices.

When we look at the oil and gas industry, one choice is the flow-through shares tax subsidy. Another is the Canadian exploration expense subsidy. There is also the Canadian development expense subsidy. There are also the Canadian oil and gas property expense subsidy and the capital cost allowance and accelerated capital cost allowance subsidy.

The point is that when we have a healthy Canada Post and we have the opportunity to have a successful crown corporation, it is a net benefit to the rest of Canadians when the government makes choices about where those economic resources go.

Also, this lockout is so important for small business because when workers return to Canada Post, we need it to be to be a good healthy environment, not only in regard to them wanting to go to a place of work every single day and to feel that pride, to feel that they are contributing to a country and its productivity, but also to feel that it is a healthy workplace.

We know that at Canada Post, like we do for many other physical jobs for employers, we have different types of issues relating to the body. The fact is that sometimes they have to use their bodies on a repetitive basis and workers can get strains and a number of different ailments. That is why some of the benefit packages are important: to keep people healthy.

For example, I used to work for persons with disabilities. In Ontario when we saw a delisting of chiropractic services, I witnessed how the quality of life of some of the persons I used to support was reduced, because they could no longer afford to get some of that necessary preventative work done through chiropractic services. They could not afford it because the support was not there.

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That is why, when we are looking at this contract and at this lockout that is taking place, it is really unfortunate, because it is setting up an environment that is going to reduce the strength of the overall system. The strength of the overall system is really critical to ensure that we are going to have that good service for businesses. That's why some of the small businesses are hurting right now: it is because of the good quality service they were getting from Canada Post.

Yes, there are always issues in any workplace and there are always improvements to be made, but in Sandwich Towne in my riding of Windsor West, when they tried to look at closing down the post office service that had been available since the 1800s, the businesses and the seniors were the first ones I went to in order to get support to rally around stopping that closure. Ironically, it is so far the only outlet where closure has been stopped.

It was interesting. I have the documents here showing that Canada Post had gone by itself and drawn up a study to move postal services into the University of Windsor. It did not even tell the University of Windsor that. It drew up a business plan that included costs that were not even at the Sandwich Towne post office. That is important, because that was disingenuous of them to do so. Canada Post was going to present that to the University of Windsor to show the university how it could make so much money on this service, while meanwhile reducing the services at the Sandwich Towne outlet to the point that it would actually collapse upon itself.

We caught Canada Post on that, and I am so proud of the president of the university and the faculty there for immediately saying no to this, because they understood the necessity of community. They understood the connection to the business there. They understood the connection to the seniors. They said no. They would have had personal profits, but instead they said yes to the community and yes to strengthening Canada Post in Sandwich Towne and making sure that it is going to be there for another 100 years.

• (5630)

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the member for Oak Ridges—Markham might get upset when he hears some of the things that the member for Windsor West is talking about, probably because he does not understand. In fact, guess when the manufacturing business in Ontario started to decline? It was back in the early 1990s when the NDP government was led by Bob Rae—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would encourage all members to not refer to other members by their given names.

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, it was in the 1990s when the Ontario NDP government was led by the then premier who is the other NDP leader in the House. That is when the manufacturing business started to decline: when Ontario was run by an NDP government.

These subsidies to the oil and gas that the member was talking about are not subsidies, for the information of the member, but investments. They return hundreds of thousands of jobs to the Canadian economy and billions in tax revenues.

I imagine that this member makes investments in stocks and maybe in mutual funds and gets an investment back. Does he call those subsidies? If he does, then he has a misunderstanding about how his money is going in.

Third, the reason that Canada Post is healthy and profitable is that it is being run well and the people who run Canada Post are continually trying to keep it that way. It is not the federal government that runs it; it is the people who are in the management capacity.

• (5635)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I must have said something to get this member on his feet for a change.

I think what is important to recognize here, though, is that Canada Post is controlled by the crown corporation and the minister. I think it is incredibly important that they recognize their role in this.

They support two-tier wages. I wonder why the new members of the Conservative Party, when they came in during this last session of Parliament, did not accept an 18% reduction—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, order.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. We know that people are sleep deprived in here, but there is no rightful reason for that hon. member to attack someone's character. He should at least apologize for that derogatory comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Speaker agrees with the sentiment that all hon. members should show respect for their colleagues in this place. Nerves are increasingly frayed, but I would encourage all hon. members to do that.

The hon. member for Windsor West can quickly complete his answer.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to finish by saying that the hon. member suggested in his opening remarks that I was misinformed, or something of that nature, and that passed their smell test.

Hon. Ted Menzies: He did not attack the member's character.

Mr. Brian Masse: I was not attacking character in talking about the fact that the member actually got on his feet. That is a compliment, because the member actually got on his feet.

The reality right now is that we have a number of different subsidies going out to the oil and gas industry at a time when we are borrowing a record amount of money, and we are going to pay interest on that right now. I view that as a subsidy.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality here for any Canadians who woke up here Saturday morning and are watching this charade while having their coffee is that we have grandstanding between the Conservatives, who are union busting, and the NDP, who are trying to be the super heroes for organized labour.

Somebody mentioned that the Liberals were going to be sleeping at the switch for the next four years. Well, that is not so. We have a balanced approach.

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The reality for anybody watching this is that there is not going to be any mail delivered Monday because of these two parties and their charade. The Conservatives could have had better legislation. They could have limited the debate. The NDP could have worked with them on a consensus. We would have been having mail delivered in this country on Monday morning, but that is not happening. We are having grandstanding here.

Why will the NDP members not get along, put some amendments in place, and work with the Conservatives? Why will the Conservatives not step up to the plate and work together? Use the Liberal approach. The Liberal approach is the middle-of-the-road approach. Get the mail moving.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, given the criticism I have received from my colleagues across the way, I am not going to comment on the Liberal approach. I will let that pass for the moment.

What I think is important, though, is that I actually believe in what I am doing right now. I believe in what my party is doing. This is serious business.

I know the men and women who serve in the postal units in my local community, and I also know about the philosophical thing happening in putting two-tier wages on young people when they enter the workforce. We used to do that based on how people looked: their ethnicity, the colour of their skin, or whether they were woman.

We used to allow two-tier wages in Canada. It is re-entering the system, because young people are going to be entering at a lower wage for the same amount of work. I fundamentally believe that it is wrong. It is wrong to move the country that way. We have a crown corporation that is making hundreds of millions of dollars every year for this country and is contributing very strongly to the economy and productivity.

I do not believe that our youth deserve that fate. They have done enough. They have had enough hard times. They need to see some opportunity.

Why will members not take two-tier wages and benefits and pensions, when they are asking for it for the people of Canada Post who are coming into the system?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I would like to remind all hon. members that when anyone has the floor, other members ought to be listening to them.

Members are aware that another of the standing orders that applies in these cases is that members are not to do things that may cause a disruption in the House. That applies to members who are listening to speeches. That also applies to the members who are making speeches.

I would encourage all hon. members to make their points and to respect the fact that it is in everyone's collective interest that this place not descend into a talking or yelling match, back and forth. If members have conversations they would like to have with one another, I encourage them to take them to the lobby. We have lots of time to discuss those matters.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

● (5640)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend you once again for the excellent work you and the other Speakers have been doing throughout this debate. Your message is that this is the place where the issues of the people of Canada should be discussed. The discussion has to be done with a recognition of the importance of the debate. I certainly agree with your sentiment that we do not want this to be reduced to any sort of frat-house argument. I am very appreciative.

It is now 47 and a half hours before the mail begins to roll on Monday morning. There is easily enough time to address some of the key outstanding problems.

Over the weekend, I have noticed that perhaps the government has been mistaken. Perhaps there has been a plan to sort of misrepresent what has happened. When the Minister of Labour spoke on Thursday night, I was quite shocked that she continually spoke about a strike, as though this strike justified intervention.

We know that in the past there have been instances when if there was a long-term strike, government had to act in the public interest. That is what happened with the Toronto transit workers. My brother is a TTC worker. I know what it means when there is a long-term strike and there is no solution. However, the labour minister failed to tell the people of Canada that this is not what happened.

A crown corporation cut off service to the Canadian public, and the Conservative government supported it. What has happened is that people who have small businesses, people who are in rural areas, and senior citizens have been cut off from service because of the quite shocking decision by a crown corporation to deny services to the public. When the Minister of Labour gets up and blames this on the workers, it really undermines the ability to find a resolution here.

We in the New Democratic Party believe that it is unacceptable to hold the Canadian people hostage by allowing a crown corporation to deny service.

The government brought in this legislation on Thursday night. Even if the New Democratic Party acted like the old Liberal party, which come the weekend always folded its tents and went home, the mail would not have run on Friday morning. Not a single piece of mail in this country has been stopped because of what the New Democratic Party has been doing here, not a single piece of mail. Yet millions of pieces of mail have been stopped because of the failure of the Conservative government to hold Canada Post to account.

This brings us to this situation, unprecedented in recent Parliaments, of debating here on a Saturday morning. How do we solve this? This is the question.

Canadians are expecting that in this 41st Parliament, people will rise to the occasion. There will be adult behaviour. Conservatives and New Democrats disagree fundamentally on the role of public service, and we disagree fundamentally, between Conservatives and New Democrats, on protecting pensions. We disagree fundamentally, between Conservatives and New Democrats, on the right to collective bargaining. However, what we all agree on is the need to find a resolution.

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It is now 47 and a half hours until the mail can start to roll on Monday morning. The only thing stopping the mail from rolling is the unwillingness of the government to accept taking the wage rollback out of this back-to-work legislation. It is important to take that wage rollback out, because if this is allowed to stand as a precedent, it will be used in every coming labour dispute, because there will be no need for the labour bargaining process to participate with public sector workers from here on in. Employers will be able to say that they do not have to set up negotiations and do not have to go to arbitration. They can count on the government to lock out the workers, manufacture a crisis, and punish the employees by actually lowering the wages they had been guaranteed at the bargaining table. Therefore, this is a bigger issue.

The Conservative government can certainly get a great win out of this if it pulls the wage factor out of the back-to-work legislation. They go back to work. It goes to arbitration. It goes to mediation, and this thing is settled. The Canadian public can be assured that in the 41st Parliament, two parties that have fundamentally different views can actually rise to the occasion and put the Canadian public interest first.

• (5645)

I am very concerned about this act of attempting to use a parliamentary sledgehammer to push down wages and to create a two-tier system of wages in this country.

I heard the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, on the first night of debate, say that at \$12 an hour, three days a week, you should be happy to have a job—I think the term was “tickled pink”—if you are a young worker. That might be, again, one of the fundamental disagreements between the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party.

I know what it is like in my region, where I have older people who have worked their whole lives, and some have pensions they are able to retire on. They are asking how it is that their children are never going to have the middle-class life they have, especially the younger workers, who are paying back \$40,000 to \$50,000 in debt. This is fundamentally wrong.

We have seen how this was done in Wisconsin, where they attacked and demonized the public service. They attempted to tell the people who were below public sector workers, the people who are earning \$10 an hour, the people who have no chance of having a pension, to blame the public sector workers. There is an ongoing pension crisis in the United States. There is an ongoing pension crisis in Canada. What they failed to do in Wisconsin, and what they are failing to do in the Conservative Party, is point to where the real problems lie.

Let us go back to some of the strong symbols of the pension crisis in this country: the Nortel workers. Nortel, which was one of Canada's greatest companies, was allowed to be run into the ground. The pensioners lost their pensions. The benefits for the disabled workers were denied.

The governments of every country in the western world where Nortel had operations stood up for their pensioners, but the Conservative government did not. At the same time, while they were in bankruptcy and were selling off the company, the Canadian

brain trust that Nortel was, the Nortel executives were allowed to receive \$7.5 million in bonuses. I believe that to be fundamentally criminal.

I believe that if we do not address this pension crisis in this country, and we do not stop the push for two-tiered workers, we are going to see the kind of old robber baron capitalism that existed when my grandparents came to this country.

I have heard a lot of comments, but perhaps the most audacious comment I heard last night, and I was absolutely gobsmacked when I heard it, was from a new member, a former diplomat, who accused us of being communists. He even used the word “Moscow”.

Charlie Angus came from Hawkhill in Dundee, Scotland. He was called a red a whole bunch of times. My family was never afraid of being called red, because they knew what that meant.

When Charlie Angus went to work at the Hollinger gold mine, it was the richest gold mine in the western world. The average life expectancy of an underground miner was 41 because of the silicosis.

They had a two-tiered system there, too. If you were a Catholic or an immigrant, you worked down in the most dangerous gold stopes. Unless you had the Mason's ring, you were not allowed on the surface. Charlie Angus came over from the Hawkhill, and he had the Mason's ring, because you could not work in Scotland unless you were a member of the Orange Lodge. My grandmother used to say that Charlie Angus came over here to get away from the bigotry in the old country. He came over here because he thought all workers should have fair rights.

He remembered what it was like seeing the Croatian and Bulgarian miners sent underground under the gold stopes.

They called him a communist. Do you know why? It was because they started to organize. Charlie Angus walked the picket lines with my mill, and he walked the picket lines with the steelworkers.

They could not get help at a bank, so they created the workers' co-op and the consumers' co-op. I remember talking to a woman in South Porcupine who said that her father was a Finnish miner. He broke his back underground, and not a single bank would touch him, so he had to go to the workers' co-op. She said that they called them communists on the streets.

I thought that was ancient history until I came into this House of Commons. I see that we are being called communists.

We have to get back to what this issue is. By Monday morning we should settle this. We are calling on the Conservative government to stop using the language of “communists” and “reds”. Next they will be calling us North Koreans. We can settle this and put the Canadian public first.

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Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray is famous for many things, including 7% of the GDP of the country. What I like to brag about the most is that I have more union members than anywhere else in the country. I am proud of that. These members are from all across the country. They are from that member's riding. They are from some of the ridings in Quebec. They are from all across the country. Newfoundlanders make up the majority.

I am glad to see that the NDP have identified, in the last three speakers, that they no longer are representing workers but are representing the elite from Canada Post's union. We understand that now. That is very clear, especially in regard to some things that have happened. I think they recognize, with all the mail coming in against this NDP filibuster, that they have to step back a bit from this. I am glad they are beginning to see common sense.

Our economic action plan actually saved Canada from the worldwide recession. The NDP voted against that, and the member for Windsor West especially. I want to hear from this particular member why the member for Windsor West would vote against the economic action plan. It provided almost \$2 billion to his riding. It has done so much good for Canada. We see these signs all across country.

Why would the NDP vote against the economic action plan? Was it because the elite union bosses told them to?

• (5650)

Mr. Charlie Angus: There we go again, Mr. Speaker, with the big, evil union bosses. We have heard about the union thugs and the communists. We should be debating the issue instead of name-calling.

I find it fascinating to hear my friend from Fort McMurray—Athabasca talking about all the workers in Canada being in his riding; damn right they are. Does he know why they had to leave Timmins? Does he know why they had to leave Smooth Rock Falls? Does he know why they had to leave Opatatika and Kapuskasing?

They had to leave because the Conservative government did nothing for the forestry industry. Entire towns have been devastated. The government's only solution was for these workers to take a bus to Fort McMurray. They can take a bus to Fort McMurray because the government has been pumping billions of subsidies into that city.

We have been saying all along that we now live on the petro dollar, because the Prime Minister said he was going to put a firewall around the Alberta oil industry. All of our workers are being sucked into Alberta, where they have to compete against workers coming in from Pakistan on short-term jobs.

I know what is going on in Fort McMurray because I get letters and emails from folks in Fort McMurray who want to come back. They ask me why the government will subsidize Fort McMurray and the oil sector to the hilt when the forestry sector was left devastated. The manufacturing sector was left devastated. The textile industry in Quebec was left devastated. All of these folks had to go off and work in that member's riding.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, about half an hour ago I received an email from a person who watched my speech.

He said, "I am from Miramichi, New Brunswick, and I have been watching you guys debate for the last few hours. Thank you for informing the audience and MPs of what exactly could be done instead of what they are trying to do now. I think it's just terrible that this government is mandating this and getting in the way of employer-employee negotiations. This seems communist, not democratic, and it's very scary to watch Canada circle the drain while [the Prime Minister] promotes the rich getting richer and the middle class getting poorer. I hope you guys filibuster until the Prime Minister comes to the House with a reasonable solution. This is not the Canada I know."

Would the member like to comment?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have been receiving emails from people across Canada who are watching this. Many of them are not union workers. Many of them are not Canada Post workers. They recognize, however, that there is something fundamentally wrong. They have seen the pension crisis. They have seen the ridicule that the government has had for people who fall on hard times.

I would like to remind people what the present Prime Minister said when he quit Parliament to take over the National Citizens Coalition and run the campaign to de-unionize the workforce. At that time he was the rabble leader for the coalition. In Montreal, in June of 1997, he said, "In terms of the unemployed, of which we have over a million-and-a-half, don't feel particularly bad for many of these people."

I think that is an appalling statement for any elected official to make, especially someone who is now our Prime Minister. He does not feel bad for unemployed workers. He does not feel bad for people who are trying to get by.

We can solve this with a bit of goodwill. The Conservatives will have to raise their game up a little and put the public interest first rather than have this ideological crusade against people in the two-tier—

• (5655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to try to clarify a few things this morning. As we have said repeatedly, as recently as last year, in 2009, Canada Post made some \$281 million in revenues. Over the past 15 years, Canada Post has made \$1.7 billion in profits and has paid the federal government \$1.2 billion. The Canadian postal service is profitable, we can all agree on that.

That being the case, why are the workers being asked to make these financial sacrifices? Need I remind the House that it is thanks to them, thanks to their dedication, determination and hard work, that Canada Post can operate and make such profits?

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I would like to know why these workers, who are simply trying to enforce their rights, should be the only ones to compromise and make sacrifices in this whole affair.

This government must understand that it does not have the mandate to take the place of Canada Post management. The employees indicated that they wanted to continue working during the negotiations under the same working conditions as before.

Why did the government not let the negotiations continue out of mutual respect for both parties until an agreement could be reached?

Once again this morning, I rise here to repeat that these thousands of men and women who work tirelessly for us day in and day out deserve better than what this special bill is offering. Canada Post employees deserve better than to be so rudely discriminated against based on their age. Reducing the wages of new employees in such a draconian manner sends a clear message to the workers of my generation: their work is worthless and their contribution is not up to snuff. They will never be recognized for their true worth.

Let us imagine what would have happened if, when the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage was first elected in 2000, that he had been told, “congratulations, but we are going to pay you less than your predecessors”. He would have disputed that, and rightly so.

Imposing these vastly inferior working conditions on new employees will create a gulf between the generations. It will drive a huge wedge between the young and not so young. It is also likely to create a tense and dismal work environment for employees of different ages when the mail service resumes.

Now more than ever, we need to support and defend young workers. The following was posted on canoe.ca on June 14, 2011, and was based on a very recent study by the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada:

Canadian families face ongoing balance-sheet battle...According to the report, household debt has reached a new all-time high of \$1.5 trillion...“The report confirms that more than half of indebted Canadians are borrowing just to afford day-to-day living expenses like food, housing and transportation,” adds Anthony Ariganello, President and CEO of CGA-Canada. “For these individuals, there is little hope for improved financial condition.”

It is unacceptable that at a time when households are carrying so much debt, the government wants to refuse to provide young workers with a decent wage to meet their needs and the needs of their families. They can continue to accumulate debt; they can continue to pay huge interest rates to credit card companies. Is that really the message we want to send my generation?

The article continues and reveals that:

Some 27 per cent of non-retired Canadians commit no resources whatsoever to savings, even for retirement. More Canadians are carrying debt into retirement, with one-third of retired households carrying an average debt of \$60,000 and 17 per cent carrying \$100,000 or more.

In light of all of this, how can the government want to impose such harmful measures on workers' pensions?

Why does it want to punish the workers, who have been reasonable and who showed good faith by holding a rotating strike—a way to put pressure without seriously affecting mail operations?

Why did Canada Post decide to lock its doors, affecting a large number of vulnerable people and small businesses, as the members on the other side of the House remind us so often.

Most importantly, what message does the government want to send by imposing wages that are lower than what was offered by Canada Post?

The government did not need to interfere in this labour negotiation between the employer and its employees. The reality is that Canada Post employees want to get back to work as quickly as possible. They are probably the ones who most want this dispute to resolved as quickly as possible. Right now, it is impossible for them. The employer locked the doors to their workplace. Canada Post is currently forcing a lockout that is hurting everyone. They must let the employees return to work.

• (5700)

Let them continue to provide services to the public as they have faithfully done for so long. Stop punishing them because they have exercised their legitimate rights and take immediate action to correct the situation with respect and dignity for all.

I do not know if you remember the evening of this past May 2 when the Prime Minister celebrated his new government that came into power with a little under 40% of the votes. He then made a promise, noted by many in the media, that he would govern for all Canadians.

This week, the mask has come off. The hon. members on the opposite side of the House will not hesitate to set unionized workers against non-unionized workers or young workers against the not-so-young to achieve their ideological purposes.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my hon. colleague across the way. I understand that we may have slightly different points of view on this issue.

There is another issue that gives a glaring example of union leadership out of control. We all know that CUPW membership does not decide what they are going to do. The union leadership decides what they are going to do. In this case, both sides have been at the table long enough. It is time to go back to the union membership—not to the leaders, not to the member's own colleagues, who are all former union leaders, but to the membership—and ask them to vote again on the offer.

I believe if they went back again and voted on the offer, Canada Post would be back to work.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I believe that 94% of employees were in favour of those pressure tactics, so I do not see what the point is here. The employees clearly want to work. It is the employer that is preventing them from working. I do not understand the point that is being made, because that is what is happening.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her very thoughtful remarks.

I would like her to elaborate a bit more on the impact of Canada Post's demands and the demands by the federal government on young people. I understand that the starting wage being demanded is 18% below the current starting wage. At the same time, Canada Post has been profitable for more than 15 years. The CEO is the highest-paid of any crown corporation at half a million dollars with a 30% bonus. I am sure he gets a healthy defined benefit pension plan.

The message to young people may be that not only are they paid less at a time when they have greater debt than ever but that there also may be no pension for them. What kind of message does that send to the member, particularly as a young person herself?

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question. Personally, that is what affects me the most in this conflict because what I see is a bill that is trying to impose measures on young people to really show them that they will never be able to have a salary that is equal to what it used to be. So many people have fought for decent wages to ensure they were sufficient to meet the needs of their families. But when the young people come along, they are being told that they are not entitled to that, that they do not have the same rights as those before them, that their work is worth nothing, that their work is second-class. I think the message is very sad.

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, one of my friends who was also a candidate, Mr. John Markus, had a little saying that went like this: "You know that socialism is all finished when the socialists have finished spending everyone else's money."

That is what we are hearing throughout this debate. We have been hearing over and over again about what the president of Canada Post makes. I wonder if my friend across the aisle could tell us what the president of CUPW makes.

● (5705)

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, he certainly does not make \$500,000. In any case, we can agree on that. Frankly, I have no idea.

An hon. member: Less than \$100,000.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Apparently he makes less than \$100,000. In any event, the important thing in this case is that Canada Post makes a profit. It is a profitable corporation. There is no reason to cut the workers' salaries. I do not understand why they would do that when this corporation makes millions of dollars in profits every year.

[For continuation of proceedings see Part E]

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, June 23, 2011
(Part E)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 23, 2011

[Continuation of proceedings from part D]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (5705)

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will answer the hon. member later as to the salary of the president of CUPW.

According to the House, today is still June 23 and we are respecting our commitment to Canadians to defend the rights of the public and CUPW workers.

In my riding of Hull—Aylmer, this is a big weekend full of festivities to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste day. I would once again like to take this opportunity to wish my constituents a very happy holiday. Enjoy it. Have fun with your family and friends. It is very important.

I would really like to join them this weekend, but the government has made decisions that go against a fundamental principle of natural justice: the right to free expression, the right to organize, the right to a fair and decent pension, the right of young workers to the same rights and not to a two-tiered society.

These young people will have different conditions within the same work environment. Is that fair? No. That is why we are here today and will be tomorrow and in the coming days if necessary.

The decisions made by this government and Canada Post management affect one specific group of workers. That is true, but if we accept these decisions, who will be next? That is the question. It will be you, me and everyone else, unionized or not.

Let us recap. We have an obligation to advocate for the rights of the public, to represent the public in cases that affect them—that is our obligation.

The management of Canada Post simply cannot argue that it does not have the money to pay its employees. Would the chairman of the board of Canada Post Corporation agree to the same increases, rather than receiving compensation commensurate with that of the best CEO of a crown corporation? Contrary to what has been suggested, the chairman of CUPW currently earns less than \$100,000. I can guarantee you that.

Will the chairman of Canada Post Corporation turn down his 30% bonus to help the public and the corporation, and lead by example?

No, he will not. If you ask the public whether they support the bonuses given to the heads of banks and big corporations, they will tell you that they do not, that much is certain.

What is the government doing? Is it not time for it to take action against the bonuses paid out in banks and big corporations? No, instead it launches an attack on public service and crown corporation employees. Do they take pleasure in going after workers?

Canada Post made \$1.2 billion in profit over the past 15 years. At the same time, Canada has the lowest tariff structure of any industrialized country in the world.

In Germany, it costs 78¢ to send a letter. In Sweden 95¢, and in Canada, only 59¢.

This government and the management of Canada Post is sending a clear message to workers: we do not appreciate these negotiations and do not wish to waste our time respecting you and your right to bargain; we do not agree with the decisions made by the 55,000 workers, nor do we accept their right to strike. I should point out that it was a rotating strike, which meant Canadians continued to receive their mail.

This government quite obviously took sides, allowed Canada Post to put a lock on its door thereby denying Canadians an important service: delivery of their mail.

This government is denying small businesses the same service. The government tries to justify its actions. It tells us that the economy is at stake and that the service is essential.

Yes, we agree: mail carriers should be able to work and that is what they want to do. They also want their collective agreement to be upheld. The fact is that this very same employer—who is depriving employees of their rights, who locked the door, and is depriving Canadians of an important service, namely delivery of their mail—is telling us that this service is important.

I would like to ask a question. Where was this government when services were cut over the past 10 years?

• (5710)

I have a quote on this subject:

In recent years, we have seen dramatic cuts to service as senior managers have focused on commercial rather than public interest objectives. Post offices have been closed, red mailboxes have been removed from our streets and rural mailbox delivery has been taken away; all with very little in the way of notice or consultation.

Government Orders

Additional attacks on our public postal service will occur if management continues in this current direction. Canada Post is investing \$2 billion in a modernization program that further threatens services and jobs. The corporation also plans on privatizing the National Philatelic and customer contact centres. These actions all run counter to our collective role in providing a quality public postal service.

I would also like to add that at the last strategic review meeting, the advisory committee noted that Canadian public opinion was unambiguous on the following point: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. It was remarked that the privatization and deregulation of postal services in other countries was not successful and that Canada should not experiment with other options or solutions when the current approach works. Somebody even remarked that he liked reliable, recognized, affordable and universal postal services.

It is my opinion that the federal government is trying to fix something that already works well. One of the main reasons Canadians support Canada Post and the current postal system is that they know it is reliable and it guarantees the security and confidentiality of their correspondence, a point that was made in several briefs.

Today, we are asking for the locks to be taken off, for a return to the bargaining table, and for respect for the current collective agreements and for workers across Canada. Let us be proud of our public services and of what the workers, unionized or not, have achieved over the years.

I would also like to mention another item that was raised: the vote. The Minister of Labour can, at any time, call for a vote. Why has she not done so? That answers one of the questions asked this morning.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that this government has acted shamelessly. What does the government want to privatize? Canada Post—and while they are at it, every other public service—thereby depriving the public of well-run and essential services? At the same time, the government allows the CEOs of big companies, as I said before, to receive exorbitant bonuses on top of their salaries. Is that what we want to leave our children, our grandchildren and society in general? That is not part of my value system. That is not what I want to leave my children and grandchildren. I am convinced that the general public does not want our youth to inherit that either.

• (5715)

[English]

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I patiently listened to the opposition members over the period of this action taken on behalf of their union bosses. I have heard many words, some good words like “respect”, “rights”, “equality”, and speaker after speaker claims to believe in these words, and I suspect that they do.

The member opposite and her comrades continue to apply these words in the narrowest of context, and I think that represents their very narrow interests.

I would like to know, why can the hon. member and her comrades not support those Canadians they are leaving out, those Canadians who cannot run their small businesses, those Canadians who now have to lay off their employees, who may or may not be unionized?

Why can the hon. member and her comrades not support all Canadians and not just the union elite?

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that the New Democratic Party, its members and its workers have a great deal of respect for small businesses. Incidentally, we had an opposition day to discuss the future of these businesses.

We are asking for the resumption of talks between the parties. We agree that the collective agreement of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers should apply so that mail can be delivered. But Canada Post, with the support of this government, locked the doors.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): I am not sure who all these union bosses are. What I do know is that the leaders of unions are democratically elected by their local membership. You are talking about the most democratic institutions in our country when it comes to unions, which is more than what I can say for the 20 vice-presidents of Canada Post, who are the bosses, who were not elected but appointed. They are pulling in, God knows how many, hundreds of thousands of dollars.

That aside I would like to ask the member something, because we have heard the Conservatives say over and over again how concerned they are about the impact on small businesses. I wonder where were they when Canada Post was eroding services in small communities and cutting down depots that serve small businesses in urban centres. We heard from the member from Windsor West who has had a fight in his community to keep local services that have helped those local businesses. Where were those members when those cuts were going on?

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from British Columbia for her question.

As a matter of fact, I raised this in my remarks. The board of directors of the Canada Post Corporation was certainly not present when cuts in rural and remote areas were discussed, at a time when the corporation was profitable. Canada Post has brought a universal benefit to Canada. At the same time, the board of directors does not answer to the general public. And unlike union leaders, directors are not elected. I used to be a union leader. I was elected every three years by all members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and I am very proud of that.

Where was the board of directors? Maybe the Conservatives should ask this question and hold the board to account for the future mail delivery, both in rural and in urban settings.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

I thank the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer. In the last few hours of this debate, we heard words like “communism” and “socialism” being used with a great deal of emotion.

Government Orders

[English]

I am concerned we are throwing names around. One of the things that has occurred to me is I remember once someone was asking if there was a threat that capitalism would collapse. The answer is no because socialism will always bail it out; the big three auto makers and the banks in the U.S. From the Green Party point of view we are not really very concerned about the socialism, communism, capitalism debate. It is very old. We are much more concerned about the sustainable, economic development that provides the wealth society needs.

I would like to ask the hon. member if she has any thoughts on how socialism bails out capitalism.

• (5720)

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to have half a day to explain the difference between the two. Personally, I think I am a socialist. I represent and advocate for the rights of workers, unionized or not, and of the general public, like disadvantaged people or the unemployed. This is my goal, and those are the principles and values I was taught by my parents.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night, after my work day, I went back to my hotel room, but I did not go to bed right away. I surfed the Internet and visited social networks like Twitter. I would like to share some of what I found. Unfortunately, I noticed that some people do not have a very good idea of what is going on in this labour dispute between Canada Post management and the workers. Lots of people are talking about a strike. This is the first myth I would like to dispel. There is a lot of talk about that, and I know people are watching CPAC today.

In the media right now, after Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, this debate is the big event on television. I would just like to set the record straight. This is not a strike. Initially, there were rotating strikes, a process that made it possible to deliver people's mail. But more recently, Canada Post management decided to lock out the employees, thus stopping mail delivery completely. That is the reason why the mail that is being sent now, such as cheques to charities and bills to customers, is not reaching its destination.

First, Canada Post wrongly declared a lockout. Then what happened? Everyone agrees that the country's mail needs to be delivered. The government introduced this bill, but it is based on a very nasty principle. The bill penalizes workers. But during this dispute with their employer, the workers made sure that the mail got delivered for the well-being of Canadians.

Yet, this bill would cut their wages by 18%. And we all know that Canada Post is a very profitable company that contributes millions of dollars to the government every year. In fact Canada's Conservative government owns Canada Post. That is why we, the NDP members, want employees to return to work quickly. That is why we are fighting night and day—literally—to come to an agreement with the Conservatives.

There are many debates in this chamber, and we know that there are many debates between NDP and Conservative members outside this chamber, in the hallways. I want Canadians to know that, even though they see many people taking sides and seemingly not

wanting to understand the other party, we really are trying to find a compromise to narrow the scope of the Conservative bill. That way, people can get back to work as quickly as possible, mail service can resume, your grandmother can get her birthday gift and that little girl in northern Quebec can get her glasses. That was one example that was given a few days ago.

My position differs slightly from that of my NDP colleagues. I am very happy that the NDP has been acknowledged as the family and workers' party. I am proud to say that some of our members are great examples of union leaders; the member for Hull—Aylmer is one such example.

My background is a little bit different. I have never belonged to a union but I am against the way this bill is worded. I will explain why. I have never been unionized because I have been self-employed. Before becoming a full-time member of Parliament, I owned a business. Some Conservatives say that the NDP does not understand small businesses and entrepreneurs. They also say it is important to send invoices and receive cheques from customers. As an entrepreneur, I understand that. The NDP agrees with the Conservatives: the workers must go back to work as quickly as possible. We want the mail to be delivered.

• (5725)

However, we disagree with the Conservatives on one point: we do not feel that the workers should be penalized because of a dispute provoked by Canada Post, which declared a lockout and thus interrupted mail delivery.

I wanted to clear up this misunderstanding because people on the Internet are often referring to the strike when, in actual fact, it is a lockout that is blocking the mail. Others are blaming members of the NDP. They are saying that the NDP is preventing the workers from going back to work when all we want to do is to find a solution, whether it be here or with our leaders outside the House. We want the bill to be amended and passed so that the workers are not penalized.

The bill also affects Quebec workers. As a member of Parliament from Quebec, I must represent the interests of Quebecers who voted overwhelmingly for the NDP in the most recent election. Letter carriers in my riding want to go back to work. Ethically, I cannot agree to allow the government to impose an 18% pay cut on workers. We have spoken about this at length. Young people and new workers are the ones who will be affected by this pay cut, which would create second-class employees.

As for the collective agreement, the workplace is still unsafe. There are still too many workplace accidents. I am a chiropractor and I have treated Canada Post employees who have been injured on the job. Their workplace is not yet safe. Management and the union must find solutions.

Government Orders

Most of the debate focuses on a matter of principle. The NDP believes in social justice, the family and protection for all workers. Last week or a little earlier, the Conservative government wanted to interfere in the Air Canada labour dispute. This week it wants to interfere in the Canada Post strike by passing a special law that is clearly detrimental to the workers. Where will this end?

Yes, the Conservative government has a majority and it can pass any bills it wants. However, Canadians, especially Quebeckers, voted overwhelmingly to send NDP members to the House to stand up to the Conservatives when they make bad decisions and roll back the rights of all workers. In the debate on this bill, we are defending the rights of unionized Canada Post workers, but it affects all other workers, unions and employees.

How can we be sure that, after gradually destroying the rights of unionized workers, the government will not interfere in non-unionized workplaces, taking the side of management, keeping wages as low as possible, and forcing people to work more and to hold down more than one job?

There is a great deal of talk about not lowering the standards of Canadian society. Yes, we are in an economic downturn and we must tighten our belts. In the proposed bill, only the workers will tighten their belts. Canada Post's CEO will not be tightening his belt: he earns a paltry \$497,000 per year, and a bonus of 33% of the large profit he generates.

The President and CEO of Canada Post does not want to tighten his belt, yet the government is cutting workers' salaries by 18%. This makes no sense. It is actually a conflict of interest. The government and Canada Post executives are in cahoots. With the lockout and back-to-work legislation that penalizes workers, the executives will be well paid and millions of dollars of extra profits will flow into government coffers. So the government is in a conflict of interest.

● (5730)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my fellow entrepreneur to the House of Commons, having been a businessman my whole life.

There were two things that came through in his comments that were stark and that have come up before. It is the contrast between socialist thinking and entrepreneurial free enterprise thinking.

The principle of someone starting a job at a lower pay grade and working their way up, showing through achievement that they deserve that promotion, is something that is used not only in the private sector, but also in the public sector.

My daughter is a teacher and had a much different pay level at grade two when she started, than where she is today. She did not start at the pay grade of the 20 year experienced teacher. The same with my son-in-law who is a police officer. As well, I have two nephews and a niece who are postal letter carriers and they tell me that their job is a good paying job with great benefits. That is highly sought after in our community. However, throughout this debate members are saying that the workers are not getting what they are worth.

I would like the member to answer a question specifically about the different elevations of when a person starts a job until they get

some experience down the road, yet the NDP, as socialists do, want to have everyone earning the same.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, I have to correct something my Conservative colleague said. I am not a socialist but a social democrat. That is an important distinction.

As a businessman, I completely agree that workers with more experience deserve to be paid more. Yet the way the bill is worded, it will drive salaries down. I definitely want to see Canada Post's older workers who mentor younger workers earn more money in recognition of their experience.

Using the hon. member's reasoning and according to my values as a social democrat, the wages of older workers should be increased. I think they make \$24 per hour, so their wages should be increased a bit rather than penalizing the younger employees.

To extrapolate from what the member said, should the pay of Canada Post's new recruits be reduced to minimum wage when they are hired? Why not, in his opinion? And if the Conservative government decides to reduce the minimum wage, should that be enforced as well? Just how low will wages go?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member, whom I respect, said that he went home last night and watched *The Social Network*. He bemoans the fact that Canadians do not seem to quite understand because they are still calling this a strike.

I would suggest that Canadians do understand what is going on here. They do understand that they are not receiving their mail. They do understand that many seniors are being pushed into paying a bill over the Internet, something they do not feel comfortable with. They do understand—

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I want to help because I know my colleague is looking at the clock, which says that this is Thursday, normally a day the mail runs. However, this is Saturday so people back home are not getting their mail. They would not get their mail until Monday. This is why we are here and hopefully—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. This is not a point of order.

The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Madam Speaker, let me say that the member stands on a point of order time after time simply trying to disrupt debate in the House, playing ridiculous games that he is well known for doing.

Back to my point, that individual seems to still bemoan the fact that Canadians do understand what is going on. They understand that it started with revolving strikes.

● (5735)

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt. I hope this is a legitimate point of order.

Government Orders

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I just want to make it clear because I have been speaking throughout the debate and I have excellent respect for the Chair's rulings, but I think the Speaker would agree that most of the points of order I have been raising have been in asking people to be civil in the House. It is somewhat demeaning to think that asking for civility is ridiculous.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that, but again, that is a point of debate. I would ask the hon. member to wind up.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Madam Speaker, again, the same guy stands again the House and you keep allowing it to go on and on. All he is trying to do is disrupt the House when we are trying to debate and question a fairly good speech.

The Canadian public understand that we have gone through four years of deep recession. Many people have been without work and many are just getting back into the workplace. When they see revolving strikes and lockouts and all these things happen, they want to see people get back to work. They also want to see a government that will act in the best interest of Canadians.

We know my colleague is standing here in the stead of unions and for the side of the union, but why will you not stand and take a look at where we are headed in this—

The Deputy Speaker: Order please. I would ask all members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin: Madam Speaker, my colleague seems to be asking two questions. As to the emails last night over the Internet, it was disappointing that people did not understand the issue. Yet a lot of people support us in our efforts. Let me read a message I received on Twitter an hour ago from Steph Aubry, “Congratulations on keeping up the fight. Down with Bill C-6! Employees’ and citizens’ rights must be protected.” Indeed, this affects not only workers but the entire population.

As to the second part of the question, we are just coming out of a recession and people have to understand that. But the issue is people’s right to strike as well as management’s right to impose a lockout. The government can nevertheless decide to end the lockout whenever it wants to. Is it prepared to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We have to continue with the debate.

The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was not supposed to be here today. I was expected back in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl to speak at what is predicted will be the largest rally in years, a rally on the St. John's waterfront, the size of which has not been seen in my home province in decades since the fall of the fisheries in the early 1990s. Thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are expected to turn out.

The rally is in protest of the closure of the Marine rescue centre in St. John's. The centre handles marine distress calls, more than 400 per year, 25% of which are actual at-sea emergencies. The

Conservative government plans to close the search and rescue centres in St. John's and Quebec City next year, transferring the jobs to Halifax. People fear the closure of the rescue centres will endanger lives.

I have stood in this chamber in recent days—

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate the comments that my hon. colleague is making across the way, but they have nothing to do with the point of debate that we are on.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, members of the government have stood for the last number of hours insisting that this debate is essentially on the stability and restoration of the well-being of the economy.

I would like to point out for members of the House that the stability and the well-being of the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, of maritimers across the entire country, depends on access to proper services.

If the essence of this debate is to instill stability and security to the economy of all Canadians, the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl is making a very valid case as to why all matters must be addressed by the House. He is putting in perspective a matter which is not receiving the attention of the House because the government has banned collective action by Canada Post employees by locking them out from work.

I ask that the line of comment and questions being brought forward by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl be allowed to continue because I feel they are relevant.

● (5740)

The Deputy Speaker: I have heard enough comments on this. I have just come in the chair, but the debate this morning is on the previous question. There is a certain amount of latitude. It is fair to give members time to make their arguments. Let us all calm down and have some respect for each other. I will be attentive, however, it is not up to the Speaker, without reference to the blues, to speak to the question of repetition.

On the question of relevance, there is a fair amount of latitude on this issue in this particular debate.

The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Madam Speaker, I have stood in this chamber in recent days and used words like “senseless”, “reckless”, “hasty” and “indefensible” to describe the actions of the Conservative government. We have one of the worst search and rescue response times in the world. We should be improving our services, not cutting them. Most of the great fisheries of Newfoundland and Labrador are endangered. Now our people are in danger.

Government Orders

The cost-cutting move by the federal government will reportedly save \$1 million. I mentioned that in a question this past week for the Prime Minister and the exact same thing happened: a member opposite clapped. In that case, it was the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca. Hundreds and thousands of Newfoundlanders have moved because of the destruction of our fisheries. The Conservatives have closed our marine centre and lives are endangered, and he clapped.

What price is the Government of Canada prepared to pay to put on the value and safety of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? The shores of Newfoundland and Labrador are about as far away from Ottawa as one can get in the country. Rallies such as today's in St. John's send a clear signal to the Government of Canada there is no price too high to pay for the lives of our mariners.

I was expected to be in St. John's today, but I stand before members today representing the people of my riding, of my province, on another front, in another battle that has been waged by the Conservative government against the Canadian labour movement, against the workers of our country and all they stand for and all they work for, against the pensions and benefits that make Canada one of the most enviable countries in the world. It seems the Conservative government is content to leave labour stranded at sea with our mariners, stranded in a sea of uncertainty.

The legislation we debate in the House would force the 48,000 locked out postal workers back to work for less money than was offered by Canada Post, back to work with a two-tiered wage and benefit package. For new workers who join the federal crown corporation, they would have to work five extra years to qualify for a pension.

If the Conservative government will attack the pensions of the 48,000 workers of Canada Post, who will they attack next? Whose pensions will they go after? Federal public servants, will they be next? Are they safe? The employees of other crown corporations, will they be safe? Who is next? If this contract is allowed to be imposed on the postal workers of our country, which labour union will be next?

This is just the beginning. Look off to the horizon. Do members see the job cuts off in the distance? They are there, make no mistake.

The rally today on the waterfront of St. John's, a rally that will be held within sight of one of the wonders of my world, The Narrows, the entrance to our 500-year-old port, will draw more than worried mariners and their families. It will draw more than fishermen and fisherwomen, the ones we have left. The rally will also draw worried members of one of the federal government's largest unions, the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The PSAC is holding its Atlantic Regional Convention in St. John's this weekend. The union fears the closure of the search and rescue centre signals the start of cuts to the entire public service, as many as 1,000 job losses in the Atlantic region alone. Whose job will be next? They, too, the workers of our country, are sending out a distress call and it falls on deaf Conservative ears.

On Friday afternoon, I spoke on the telephone with the two labour leaders of the 850 locked out postal workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. Their

membership is not prepared to live with a two-tier pension plan, one pension for existing workers and another less attractive pension for new employees. If the Conservative government has its way, the postal workers will carry the burden of diminished benefits, on top of the mail.

● (5745)

The union leaders told me Friday that, as of 2010, their pension plan was fully funded, to the tune of \$15.3 billion. Why are the workers being broadsided? Why is their pension plan being targeted when Canada Post made \$281 million in 2009? Why?

The Conservative government talks about how billions of dollars in cuts are imminent. The Maritime rescue centres, the pension packages, the federal jobs. Who is next? Where will it end? I asked that question on Friday of the union leaders in St. John's and they had an interesting answer. They said that the only people left were their children. They said, "If we don't stand up and fight for our younger workers right now, there will be nothing to fight for in the future".

One of the union leaders in St. John's told me about a senior postal worker, a woman with 30 years seniority. She does not need to be on the picket line. She can retire any day because her pension is safe. However, she heard the Leader of the Opposition's speech in the House of Commons on Thursday and it motivated her to walk the line.

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member for questions and comments.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Out of respect, I wanted to wait until the member finished his speech.

I want to address a point that he made in his speech. I realize the member is new to the House. He made an insinuation about the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca. I can assure him that the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca has been a strong advocate of workers' safety, particularly the workers across the country that go to his riding.

I want to give the new member a chance to show respect, to stand in the House—

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the comment, but that is a point of debate.

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of State for Transport.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, this is the first time I have risen in the House on a point of order. I have not risen to make a point of debate. This is a proper point of order.

Government Orders

Standing Orders 16(2) and 18 have been repeatedly violated during the time the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl was speaking, but it is not the first time. The level of decorum is getting rapidly worse. Standing Order 16(2) says that when a member is speaking, no member shall interrupt him or her. Standing Order 18 says that no one shall have offensive words used against them.

We are losing the thread here and I ask the Speaker for help to ensure we maintain the higher level of decorum that we had at the beginning of the 41st session.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the comments of the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. She is correct. These are part of our Standing Orders. Order in the House is dependent on the goodwill of all members and the debate must occur with respect to all members in the House. I would ask everyone to remember that as the debate continues and I will certainly enforce the rules of order.

The Minister of State for Transport.

• (5750)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the economy. If the member was—

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could you confirm with the desk officers that I actually received 10 minutes? I do not think I did.

The Deputy Speaker: I am advised that, despite the interruptions, the hon. member has received more or less 10 minutes. However, I want to add that it becomes disjointed when there are continual points of order that are really not points of order, but questions of debate. I ask everyone to be mindful of that as well.

The hon. Minister of State for Transport.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to jobs. We are approaching a work week on Monday. This Canada Post work stoppage has caused significant damage not only to Canada Post and its future but also to the economy of Canada. If the member were really interested in preventing jobs from being lost, we would get this legislation done over the weekend.

We get their point now, loud and clear, that the NDP are beholden to big labour. We understand that. If there were any doubt before, it is abundantly clear that the NDP are holding on to their biggest link in Canada, big union bosses. However, there is a bigger picture here, the needs of Canadians and small businesses to get on with their lives. What the NDP are doing this weekend in this filibuster is preventing normal life in Canada from occurring.

Could the member not simply allow the legislation to move forward? We get the point of the NDP, but we need to get on with the bigger picture, and that is to be here in Parliament for Canadians.

Will the member support the government's legislation?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Madam Speaker, if the Conservatives got the point, they would take the legislation off the table. Let me answer the question with the end of my speech, that the attack on postal workers must not be tolerated, that the attack on rescue centres must not be tolerated, that the attack on Canadian labour must not be tolerated.

Our way of life, the Canadian way of life, must be defended. I was not supposed to be here today, but the line has been drawn. I could be nowhere else.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his eloquent speech to the House today and for the passion he brings in representing his community and to this issue.

Given that this is a lockout by the employer, in fact a strike by the employer, in which the government has now chosen to intervene and take the side of the employer, could the hon. member give us his opinion of what the long-term impact will be on collective bargaining, not just for postal workers but for any groups of working people in the country, as a result of this very damaging bill before us today?

• (5755)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Madam Speaker, let me answer that question with another part of my speech that I did not get to because I was interrupted by the Conservatives opposite.

I had a conversation yesterday with two union leaders in St. John's, one of whom told me a story about a senior postal worker, a woman with 30 years' of seniority. She does not need to be on the picket line. She can retire any day because her pension is safe, but she heard the speech of the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons on Thursday and it motivated her to walk the line. It motivated her to continue the fight, because what is so important and what long-time workers see as so important are the pensions and benefits for the people coming behind them. That is what is so important.

I hope that answers the hon. member's question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Madam Speaker, mind-boggling, unacceptable and outrageous are some of the adjectives used to describe the government's attitude and the way it is handling this matter. I do not know whether the government has really not understood anything or it is just trying to prevent Canada Post workers from continuing to provide services to the public. The sole purpose of that action is to create a precedent that will enable the government to impose its vision every time.

Today, I am asking this Conservative government to put the interests of Canadians ahead of partisanship and ideologies. This government, elected by only 40% of Canadians, has a duty to serve the interests of the whole population, as it has promised many times before and after the May 2 election. I do not understand why this government, which made so many promises before the election, is now depriving Canadians of services and seriously harming the Canadian economy.

Government Orders

It should be noted that Canada Post subsidiaries and its joint venture annually spend \$2.8 billion on goods. Therefore, we are not just talking about the businesses that no longer have access to Canada Post services, but about Canada Post itself, which provides those services, thereby creating 300,000 additional jobs that are currently being threatened. The economy is a daily topic of discussion. There are 585 domestic flights scheduled for Canada Post services. There are also 100 delivery vehicles and 18 rail services. All that money is being lost because the Conservatives have shut down our Canada Post services.

Job-creating small businesses are waiting for postal services to resume, so that they can send their bills and receive their cheques. The government could end this crisis immediately by allowing the employees to return to work, resume services and negotiate with their employer in good faith and on an equal footing.

From the beginning of this crisis, the government has not just interfered and imposed its vision; it has run a propaganda and smear campaign demonizing Canada Post employees. Once again, as my colleagues have pointed out many times, the government is trying to polarize matters, create conflict and divide Canadians.

The Conservative government knows full well what it is doing. Its plan is clear: cut services, privatize Canada Post and create a precedent. In the meantime, this government has no qualms about depriving people of services and putting a squeeze on family budgets. The government keeps saying that we are responsible for this situation even though the government, and the government alone, can put an end to the lockout and let Canada Post employees resume the work they never wanted to stop doing. But that has never been the government's priority. It is perfectly obvious that its priorities are elsewhere. The government is there to serve the CEOs of large corporations, banks and oil companies. The government is asking employees to make concessions and tighten their belts, as if Canada Post were truly in trouble, and all the while, its CEO is collecting a salary in the neighbourhood of \$500,000 with bonuses. That is insulting; it is a slap in the face to all Canadians.

Today, the hon. members across the way have targeted postal workers. Tomorrow, they will target other public servants. And the day after that, will they take aim at all workers? Yes, the Conservatives must make their friends happy. It is much more enjoyable to go off and play golf with the heads of big business than to mix with the average Canadian and the real workers who make our economy go round.

Apparently, this government, with its irresponsible policies, is oblivious to the pride Canadians have in their postal service, one of the best in the world, one of the most efficient, one of the most accessible, a service provided by the Crown, a service that is not yet in the hands of the private sector. But for how long?

Canada Post employees have always done an excellent job serving Canadians from coast to coast, rain or shine, at an extremely reasonable cost. I really do not know how the hon. members across the way will be able to look their letter carrier in the eye after passing this special legislation. Nor do I know whether they could have taken this approach prior to the May 2 election. It is a classic move. They disregard Canadians and serve the interests of their cronies at the

beginning of their mandate, and then, come election time, they claim they are going to help the economy.

This government has the power and the duty to put a stop to this crisis immediately. It can intervene right now so that employees can go back to work and negotiations with the employer can resume.

At this time, the population is being held hostage for ideological reasons and partisan purposes. This government has to act. Yesterday, while we were debating here, the Prime Minister was not even in Ottawa, but he just had to add insult to injury. And even though he prevented the members of this House from returning to their ridings to celebrate the national holiday, he went to Quebec himself.

Be that as it may, it is not stopping: the calls keep coming in, and I continue to get emails from worried citizens who are asking us to continue our work. I think that this government is distancing itself even further from the population, and isolating itself. It has been completely blinded by its partisan goals. This government, which has no consideration for workers, is conducting a veritable disinformation campaign by continuing to accuse us, while all of the power rests with it: all it has to do is lift the lockout and send the parties back to discuss what would be best for both of them and their new collective agreement.

• (5800)

I wanted to add that a few hours ago Martin Victor sent me a message saying that he had been sleeping on his couch for two nights in a row in order to follow the debates on Bill C-6, and he added that he was willing to die on that couch in order to see this bill defeated.

There was a 64% turnout in the last general election. At this time, the population is worried about the debate and constituents are getting in touch with us to tell us about their concerns. My colleagues across the way say that they are only receiving emails from small businesses. That is logical, because the people in their ridings are writing to us, because we listen to them.

People from Prince Edward Island, where no NDP members were elected, unfortunately, are writing to us to thank us for our honesty and solidarity. Scott Gaudet wrote to me to say he was happy to see a new way of doing politics in Canada. He said he was disgusted with this harsh law.

The NDP is asking the government, which is accusing us of delaying the process, to order an end to the lockout so that employees can return to work and their collective agreement can be ratified in the manner agreed to.

For a while now, much has been said about the eight months of talks that have taken place. Personally, I am still looking for information about that matter, but I would like to know how many rounds of talks took place over these eight months. How much time was spent at the bargaining table? It is all well and good to say that the parties negotiated for eight months, but if they only met a few times over the course of these eight months, then the Conservatives are waging a public disinformation campaign. I am quite tired of all of this and I am also anxious to go home, but I am extremely proud and pleased to be here defending my fellow citizens.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will just read this email. It says:

Members of Parliament:

I am following the debate on ParlVu, and it seems frustrating to me that in trying to follow some of the things that some of the Hon. members are discussing, it seems like the majority of them have not read Bill C-6..

I know this is a lockout....

Can the members not read that the very first provisions require the EMPLOYER to end the lockout? That the very next subsection prohibits the EMPLOYER from impeding employees from returning to work? Can they not read that C-6 requires the EMPLOYER to resume respecting the collective agreement until a new one can be put in place?

Can they not read section 13 which states that nothing in the act precludes the Union and the Employer from agreeing on a new collective agreement before the bill comes into force?

I find that some honourable members are wasting our time and tax dollars by not reading Bill C-6 and properly interpreting its intent.

Will the NDP quit constructing straw man arguments and focus on the bill?

• (5805)

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

We have all read the bill many times over. We have also familiarized ourselves with the measures proposed in this special legislation. Of course we support an end to the lockout, but we certainly do not support basic wages that are 18% lower, an increase in the retirement age and reductions in annual leave entitlements.

We oppose the so-called “orphan clauses” pursuant to which newly hired young persons from my generation would enjoy fewer benefits than workers already in the labour force. Obviously, the NDP cannot support two-tiered systems. While we do want the lockout to end, we certainly do not want it to end under these conditions, with special legislation that will deny these new workers their rights.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her passionate speech.

To answer my Conservative colleague's question, I would simply say that maybe the person who sent him the e-mail should read clause 16 in its entirety. The clause reads as follows:

[English]

Nothing in this Act is to be construed so as to limit or restrict the rights of the parties to agree to amend any provision of the new collective agreement, other than its term as provided for in subsection 14(1) or the salary increases referred to in section 15—

[Translation]

Perhaps my colleague could explain to the person who sent this e-mail to the Conservative member that we are well aware of the many orders issued to the employer. However, there was also a restriction with regard to clause 16. That is what we have been trying to get across to the Conservatives for several days now.

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her remarks. Actually I am reading the same clause myself. They say we have not read the bill. That shows just how the

Conservatives view the public: as ignorant people who do not do their work.

Excuse me, but we also do our work. Yes, we have read the bill and many other documents. We are informed and we do indeed have sources. We would not accept clauses like that.

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, we all know how technology has changed the requirement for mail delivery in Canada. Many of us sit here with our computers. I listened to the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking last night talk about having no access to Internet and wanting more Internet services in her riding.

According to the NDP platform on the web, the NDP is actually advocating for broadband access for everyone, something with which I agree, but it would reduce the number of people employed in the postal service.

While it is all well and good to grandstand about more services and pay, could the member tell me which job she advocates eliminating in her riding?

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has 30 seconds left.

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Madam Speaker, I will keep it brief. Under the current offer to letter carriers, the time they spend delivering the mail will increase from four hours to six hours because the machines will sort the mail for them. This will lead to a reduction in the number of employees.

Our proposal is designed to encourage these jobs and get the workers back on the job as quickly as possible. I certainly do not think that our proposal would reduce jobs that much when compared to this offer.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Madam Speaker, where are we now? That is the question on everyone's mind this morning. What facts have been established thus far? What facts do we agree on?

The first thing we agree on is that Canada Post management decided it did not want to negotiate the renewal of its employees' collective agreement because it felt that the workers' demands would compromise the growth of Canada Post, keep it from reaching targets, harm its competitiveness and derail attempts at streamlining. In the face of this refusal to negotiate, the workers decided to put pressure on their employer, Canada Post. In addition, these pressure tactics, rotating strikes, were not intended to disrupt services offered to customers but simply to disturb Canada Post management's peace of mind.

Government Orders

As in all collective bargaining, pressure tactics are intended to force a compromise, to highlight the importance of employee co-operation to ensure that the company is operating well. And it has been established that the employees' union had more than 9,000 workers on standby to ensure the continuation of essential services. These employees, conscious of the needs of the customers who are dependent on Canada Post's services, did not want to harm the public, neighbours, friends, business owners, family members, etc.

It has been established that the impact felt by Canadians since the start of this dispute was not caused by Canada Post's employees, but by the actions of its management. We have said it often enough that no one can deny it any longer: things started to deteriorate for the public when Canada Post management declared a lockout.

This measure, which is hardly novel, is different because it affects a sector of the public that is dependent on postal services, which have a near-monopoly. It has also been established that the government acted hastily by intervening in this dispute, by appointing itself judge and jury, when there was no indication that the situation was degrading to the point of immobilizing the postal service. Again, there was no indication, before the lockout or before this bill was introduced, that public services would be compromised.

For days the government has been saying that Bill C-6 was necessary. Day and night we have demonstrated, and we will continue to demonstrate, that this is untrue. The government is content to repeat, like a broken record, that the collective agreement expired eight months ago and that the situation could not continue. Do eight months of negotiations, if they can even be called that, really represent a critical delay given that the employer was not even co-operating?

Many examples of past negotiations to renew expired collective agreements show that a delay of eight months is nothing out of the ordinary. In Quebec, we have seen much worse without the government getting involved. Take, for example, Quebecor and the *Journal de Montréal* dispute. The lockout lasted over a year—not just several months; over a year.

The government claims that the difference is that Canada Post offers an essential service. That argument does not hold water because, and I will say it again, the unionized workers at Canada Post planned to have 9,000 employees available to work and provide services. Unionized City of Montreal employees, police officers, firefighters and other professional bodies offering truly essential services have been negotiating for over a year without a collective agreement. Eight months is not enough; it is not a justification and it does not threaten the delivery of essential services to the public.

● (5810)

Eight months of negotiations do not justify the government's intervention, particularly when the unionized workers have committed to continue providing services. Eight months is not even a significant precedent, never mind a length of time that requires government intervention.

These are the arguments that the government has been presenting for days to convince us to allow Bill C-6 to pass. These arguments do not hold water and the government and the opposition parties both know it.

So what is the truth? What is the justification for this situation? What is the government's plan?

The government is saying that it wants to find solutions. So why does it not tell us the truth, show us its plan and Canada Post's plan, and tell the House today the real goals of this charade?

Is the government allowing this exceptional process that is keeping us in the House for a historically long period simply for ideological reasons, or does the government have a larger motive? I am prepared to give the government the benefit of the doubt and assume that it is not making the Canadian public go through this simply to satisfy its ideology. That would be too sad. But if that is not the reason, then what is?

Since September 2010, there have been discussions in England about the future of the Royal Mail. The government is talking about rationalization and the possibility of privatizing the postal service because it is losing money.

In Germany, 20% of the postal service was privatized in order to pad the coffers of the government corporation that was losing money. In Belgium, postal services were privatized because they did not make the desired profit. In Denmark, postal services were privatized because their performance did not live up to expectations. It was the same thing in Finland. Even Japan is currently considering privatizing its services.

However, Canada Post has generated a profit of \$1.7 billion over the past 15 years. Then why are we having this debate today? Why are we taking our cue from countries with services that lost money when not only does Canada Post make attractive profits, but it provides exceptional service for less than what is charged in Germany, Switzerland, New Zealand, England, Japan, Australia and the United States? Why are we attacking Canada Post workers when, unlike all the postal services I mentioned, our crown corporation's performance is exceptional?

Should we not instead be thanking and recognizing these employees who make Canada Post successful? Is the real issue the fact that, in this wave of privatization across the globe, Canada Post is one of those rare, profitable public corporations and this makes it very appealing to private investors?

Can the government state today in the House that it is not subjecting Canadians to this ordeal simply to pave the way for the possible sale of Canada Post? Can the government state that it is not doing all this to break the union, lower wages, increase profits and make the product more attractive for private investors?

● (5815)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is remarkable that here we are a couple of days in and we still hear the exact same arguments. In fact, I am sure I have heard that same speech before.

Regardless, we have heard a number of members talk about the wages being paid to the executive at Canada Post.

Government Orders

I received a number of emails from local postal workers in Peterborough. They had no choice about joining the union. It is mandatory. One postal worker wrote to me, and I will just read the part where he said:

This union is corrupt!

This union charges \$80 a month in fees and is not accountable to anyone on where that money goes.

This union organizes union conferences for its top brass in foreign countries like Fiji and Maui.

That exact same union will not allow its members to vote on Canada Post's last offer. That union member had no choice about being a member of the union. Now he would like a choice as to whether or not he could accept Canada Post's most recent offer. The NDP is standing in the way of that. Would the NDP not encourage CUPW to allow its membership to vote on the most recent Canada Post offer?

• (5820)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Madam Speaker, I am not sure that the hon. member has understood correctly. I am talking about the salaries paid to Canada Post executives. I think that he has simply got the wrong person.

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to let my colleague know that I really enjoyed her speech, as it shed light on the situation for me. I also want to ask her a question, as I am not sure I understood correctly. If my understanding is correct, the situation is very serious.

Am I right in my understanding that this government has fabricated a situation from beginning to end in order to push Canada Post workers into being incredibly productive, so that the government could sell Canada Post to the private sector in the long run? Did I understand that correctly?

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Yes, that is correct, Madam Speaker.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, this debate has been going on for quite some time, and my constituents are very interested in having a resumption of mail service. They are not really interested in whether it is management that is at fault or if it is the union that is at fault. All they know is that they are not getting their mail. They need their mail for the good of their businesses. They need it for the health of their economy. They need it to meet payrolls.

Families need those payrolls to be able to put food on the table. The New Democratic Party is carrying on a filibuster that is preventing a law that will allow workers to go back to work.

I hear in the hon. member's speech that it is because the New Democratic Party members think there is a wage decrease in the proposed legislation. I counted it up. There is a 7.5% wage increase in the legislation. That is an increase in excess of what many of the people in my constituency are receiving.

Has the hon. member looked at the bill? Is she aware that there is a 7.5% wage increase?

Would the member not agree that it is a good idea to give workers the opportunity to go back to work, have the benefit of that wage increase and allow our economy to have the benefit of the mail service, rather than having our economy crippled at this fragile time?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Madam Speaker, the lockout should be stopped, so that the union leaders can negotiate with Canada Post. It is up to them to resolve the situation.

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have just heard the government House leader wonder why the filibuster is occurring.

It is becoming readily apparent to members of this chamber that the government exercised options here. The government exercised options in its tabling of the rules for how this debate would proceed. It did not set any limits on the time period for the debate.

The standing orders established what the time of speeches would be. Unlike other bills the government has introduced, for which it set limits on the time for debate at each stage, for this bill the government did not do that.

It did it for the HST debate. It did it for the budget implementation act. It did it for the mega-trials bill. It did not do so in this particular instance. It could have when it tabled government Motion No. 3, and it did not.

Why not?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Madam Speaker, the other side has the answer. The question should be put to them.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, the big question here, as we know, is why the Conservatives are backing the lockout by Canada Post and why they are intervening in such a biased way in something that should be a labour dispute between employer and workers.

Labour disputes happen in virtually all modern market-based economies. They are a fact of life, and it is a normal situation for market-based economies. Therefore, I am surprised at the government. It says it is in favour of small government, yet we see it intervening in this way and as we know, the Conservatives are anything but small government.

The Conservatives have formed the largest government we have had in the history of Canada. It has the largest deficits and the largest number of cabinet ministers. It is a heavy-handed government that is interfering in our collective bargaining process.

Whatever happened to the supposed Conservative goal of small government? It is not there, not that I can see.

Now the government is interfering in labour market negotiations in a way that is nothing less than a violation of the Charter of Rights for Canadians.

Government Orders

If the Conservatives do this now on this issue, where is it going to end? Are they going to step in every time there is a dispute in the marketplace? Are they going to legislate every time two sides do not agree on something? It is worrisome.

Let us be very clear. We have no postal service right now because Canada Post shut down the service completely, backed by the government. It has locked its workers out, encouraged and backed by the government. It seems clear to all of us.

Instead of introducing legislation to end this lockout, to resume rotating service and negotiation, to get both sides back to the bargaining table and to get the mail moving, the government has decided to interfere with the rights of collective bargaining and impose a settlement even below what management had originally suggested.

Canada Post is being rewarded for shutting down the mail service that so many Canadians rely upon. This is a dangerous precedent, regardless of the particulars in this labour dispute or any other.

Knowing the mindset of the government, from now on will any large corporation in Canada, whether crown corporation or other critical corporation, simply refuse to negotiate and just wait for the government to interfere and legislate people back to work? Will Canada Post be encouraged in the future to just hold our postal service hostage and hold Canadian mail recipients hostage any time it does not feel like bargaining?

This is a dangerous path the Conservatives are leading this country down. It is one that can lead us to more entrenched positions; more, not less, labour unrest; and more, not less, interruption of services that Canadians use. In the future, what incentives will there be for corporations to bargain in good faith or to settle?

The government should not be in the business of imposing labour contracts for businesses or workers. It is not free or fair collective bargaining. It is not letting the process work. It is not the way it has been building and developing for decades. It is wrong-headed.

I am also left wondering if this has something to do with the government's desire to increasingly privatize Canada Post services and reduce services to Canadians, as they have been reduced in my riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North to small communities. It is Canadians living in rural and remote areas who are going to suffer the most. My riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North has 31 communities, one large one and 30 small ones, and they have been increasingly impacted by Canada Post's reduction in services. The people in those communities feel threatened by this trend.

Canada Post insists it is still respecting its so-called policy of not shutting down rural services itself, because it can just throw up its hands and say there is no alternative. The government is supporting Canada Post in that.

● (5825)

The irony here is that Canada Post is profitable. It does not need to shut down rural services any more than it needs to privatize or walk away from the bargaining table in labour negotiations. As we know, it has been highly profitable for many years. The CEOs are well

paid. Some would say they are quite overpaid. They have been getting much larger increases than the workers have been asking for.

I can agree with one thing that the Conservative government has been saying inside and outside the House, which is that we want to see the mail moving again. Both sides want to see the mail get moving. It is a shame that we have this impasse and that we have to have this impasse. It is mostly within the government's power to do something about that, quickly, in an hour, a day or a couple of days at the most. I hope it will reconsider.

I am a small business person. My businesses, like many across the country, rely on the post office for services. Many businesses rely on the mail to ship their products, including mail-order businesses. Many of them are waiting to send or receive cheques.

Canada Post's lockout and shutdown of all services has negatively impacted small business more than it has most Canadians, although all Canadians are negatively impacted.

It is also impacting the workers who want to work but who have been locked out of their jobs in the same way that Canadians have been locked out of their delivery services.

Let me talk about a worker from Red Deer who has worked for 37 years and used almost no sick leave during his entire career. Then he became very ill just as the lockout was happening. He was denied benefits, of course, because Canada Post locked him out.

My office has also talked to workers in my own riding. There is a single mom of two children, a 20-year veteran who has worked Canada Post, who needs medication to stay alive and be able to support her family. Like many Canadians, she has a mortgage to pay, but because Canada Post has locked her out, she can no longer afford to pay both. Her family either has to give up their house or give up the life-saving medicine.

It is our duty as parliamentarians on both sides of this House to figure out how to get the mail moving again and how to get people in these kinds of situations back to work so that they can receive the benefits they sorely need.

The other thing I would like to comment on is a big issue, but I am not going to go into it in big detail. It is the pension issue.

There is a real problem here in Canada. The Conservatives need to decide what they are going to do about seniors in Canada. They were resistant to the idea of giving us a CPP system that people can live on.

Government Orders

The NDP suggested basically a doubling of benefits so that people could actually live on CPP. If the government is not going to do that, in the short term it should at least allow a defined benefits program for crown corporations, public service workers and other workers in Canada who need sufficient money in retirement and need the security of knowing that it is coming and they will actually be able to live on it.

What is at stake here is much more than just the way the government has handled this one labour dispute. It is about the precedent set by interfering with the collective bargaining process. The right to organize and the right to collective bargaining was affirmed and reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada, most recently in 2007.

The court ruled that collective bargaining was a right, not a privilege, protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Collective agreements are central to freedom of association, according to the courts.

The court also said that substantial interference with collective bargaining over essential rights violates Canadians' freedom of association. In 2007 the court found that the charter gives the same protection for collective bargaining as is contained in the international labour conventions that Canada has ratified internationally.

In interfering with free collective bargaining and imposing its ideology, the government is dangerously close to violating fundamental freedoms that generations of Canadians have fought hard for.

• (5830)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do take issue with what the member had to say and I want to be very clear. The Minister of Labour and this government are acting in the public's interest on the Canadian economy and for Canadians to get mail delivery restored.

There were a couple of questions that have been raised with respect to Bill C-6. This member raised them and some others throughout the morning have raised them.

With respect to pensions, I encourage the member opposite to take a look at subsection 11(2)(a):

(a) that the solvency ratio of the pension plan must not decline as a direct result of the new collective agreement;

The fact is that this legislation includes guiding principles to provide direction to the arbitrator that the desire of the government is to see that no increase in the unfunded portion of Canada Post's pension plan moves forward. Our government's desire is to ensure that Canadian taxpayers are not left with the bill for Canada Post's pension plan.

The second issue I raise, and I ask the members to take a look at, is the wage issue as it has been noted with respect to two-tier wages. Again, I would like the member opposite to explain to me exactly where those two-tier wages are. I do not actually recognize them in this legislation.

• (5835)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, I would like to respond by saying that I am somewhat an expert in management, but I am not an expert in negotiation, union contracts, or collective bargaining. Therefore, I will decline to comment on the specifics of what should be a collective bargaining process.

However, I do not think that this is the level of detail we should be getting into in the House at all, going back and forth by either side. We should be empowering both parties to go back to the table and do that collective bargaining. Let the workers go back to work. Let the mail be delivered. Let us empower and encourage them to solve the situation themselves.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government, during the course of the debate, has accused the New Democratic Party of filibustering this particular debate. However, I would like to point out that the closure motion, which was tabled by the government, has interesting implications.

The government did not set any limit whatsoever on the time allocation of each stage of the bill. It used standing orders to set times for each individual speech by each individual member, but each stage of the bill was left without any special consideration. This is not how the government treated the HST bill in the previous Parliament, or the Budget Implementation Act in this Parliament.

In the previous parliaments and in this Parliament, the government had set, through government business specifically under Motion No. 3, a specific limitation on the time allocation for each individual stage of the bill. Actually, in the HST debate, the entire debate lasted six hours according to the government's own motion of closure.

If the government is so incensed about filibustering, why did it invite the New Democratic Party to do so and enable it by establishing rules for a filibuster?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte for his incisive question. I have wondered this myself.

A cynic might say that this is a wonderful opportunity to hold the Canadian public, postal workers, the system and House process itself hostage, if you will. It is to give only the appearance of caring about the delivery of service from the postal department to Canadians.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak in the debate on Bill C-6. We are now in almost the 39th hour of debate on the bill. There are about 46 hours left before mail service could resume on Monday morning. The government does not have to pass this bill to have that service resume. In fact, Canada Post workers have volunteered to go back today. They could go back within the hour if Canada Post, with the support of the government, would take the locks off postal stations and post offices around the country. We could have our mail resumed and postal workers could go back to work if the locks were taken off. We still have lots of time to encourage the government and Canada Post to do what is right and resume our postal service.

I represent the urban riding of Parkdale—High Park. It is a riding with a lot of small businesses and a lot of seniors. Our community cares a great deal about our postal service. It supports it and understands the importance of it.

Government Orders

There is a postal substation in my riding on Keele Street near where I live. I make a practice of going in there periodically and thanking the people who sort our mail and the people who deliver our mail. I know I speak for our community when I say we appreciate their hard work and their efficient service. We get our mail on time every working day, and they do an excellent job.

We have had some demands in our community. There was the threatened loss of a postal outlet in the junction in my riding. After huge community opposition to the closure of that postal outlet, we were successful in keeping it.

There are some new condo developments in my community. The placement of post boxes seems to be lagging behind the condo development, so people in the condo have to organize and push to get a post box.

People support their postal service. They care about it and they are concerned about it.

Our postal service is a success story. Our postal service has pumped profits and taxes into government coffers for more than 15 years. We have one of the best postal systems in the world. It is good value for money. We pay 59¢ for a letter, which is among the best prices in the industrialized world. Our postal service is fast and efficient.

Canada Post does have a top heavy management structure with 20 VPs, as my colleague from Vancouver has pointed out, who I am sure are generously paid. It also has the best paid CEO among any Canadian crown corporations, who receives huge bonuses.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers, which represents the people who work at Canada Post, has managed to negotiate, through very hard work, a decent wage for the people who work there. It is not exorbitant. It is in fact the average industrial wage for difficult work. Letter carriers are out in all seasons. We get a taste of that during elections when we go door to door, when we run up and down stairs and are out in all kinds of weather. We get a little taste of what letter carriers face day in and day out every day of the year. They do an excellent job. They make an average wage and they get benefits and pensions.

I have been contacted by many members of my community who expressed concern because Canada Post has locked out its employees and not allowed them to deliver the mail. I have also received a lot of support for the work that their elected representatives across the country are doing to try to pressure Canada Post and the government to resume the postal service.

● (5840)

I want to just read one letter from a constituent. She says:

I am writing to you today with a story about my family.

My aunt Diane works at the post office on Eastern Avenue in Toronto. She's locked out and on the picket line in her pink baseball cap. I called her last week and she explained to me what was happening.

"This isn't for me," she said. "Myself, I'm looking forward to retirement, but we're sticking up for the future". She explained the big issues in negotiations that concern her. The top three are an attack on pensions, two-tier wages,

which means lower wages for new hires
and outsourcing sick time.

I should just insert here that in fact because letter carriers are out delivering mail in all kinds of weather, their injury rate is actually quite high. It has one of the higher rates of injury in workplaces in Canada.

Canada Post wants to move from a stable deferred compensation of defined-benefit pension, to the crapshoot of defined-contribution pensions. This puts old people at the mercy of the stock market.

We have seen how reliable that has been for people.

My aunt is also out because of the corporation's efforts to create two-tier wages, with new hires making much less than their co-workers. These are co-workers doing the same jobs, on the same equipment. Says my aunt—"Young people today don't deserve good jobs? Says who? I know how hard it is for you guys to find good full-time work with benefits, and that just isn't right".

Finally, workers at Canada Post don't want their sick time controlled by an outside insurance company.

I'm proud of my aunt. She sorted social assistance and pension cheques as a volunteer. I'm also very proud of her for sticking up for good jobs for young people. I know she doesn't want to be out on the line in the heat and the rain, but I'm behind her all the way.

So—I know the [Prime Minister's] conservative government talks about family a lot. And what do families do? We look after our elders. We look after our kids. We take care of each other when we're sick. These sound a lot like the issues postal workers are concerned with, like pensions for old people, good jobs for young people, and provisions for sick people to stay home and get better. Frankly..., going after my aunt doesn't seem very family-friendly of our government. Could you please talk to them about that?

Yours...Jody Smith.

I want to thank Ms. Smith for her excellent letter. I am so pleased and proud that she, as a constituent of mine, took the time to write.

I have to ask myself, and it is a question really to the hon. members opposite on the government side: Why would they go after hard-working Canadians like Jody's aunt Diane? Why would they go after hard-working Canadians? What is behind this? Why are they attacking the hard-working Canadians who have built Canada Post to provide such a fine service for our country? Is it because they want to privatize Canada Post? We know in other countries, for example, where the postal service has been privatized it is a very different situation. The mail is much less reliable, but also the jobs are very different. These are not the kinds of jobs I described earlier where people have an average income with benefits. They are usually part-time, independent contractors, which is kind of a way for an employer not to be responsible for any benefits or any injuries if someone gets injured or ill.

I wonder why they would want to undermine the success story that is Canada Post, because they are certainly undermining it by poisoning the labour relations climate. I appeal to the members opposite. Let us work together. We are here. We have all been sent here by our constituents. Let us work together. Let us take the locks off the doors at Canada Post. We have 46 hours that remain before Monday morning. My constituents in Parkdale—High Park, and I believe all Canadians, want to get this great mail service at Canada Post moving again. Let us work together and get it done.

Government Orders

• (5845)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite and the member of the NDP who spoke before her asked several questions in their speeches, but they also have engaged in irresponsible and unfounded speculation.

We have been asked what kind of government we are. We are a government that believes in effective leadership. We believe in informed decisions. We believe in leadership and taking action, particularly when we are dealing with a fragile economic recovery that is threatened by a work stoppage for a crown corporation that provides, as we all seem to agree, an essential service and contributes \$6.6 billion to the GDP.

The members opposite like to use the language of compassion, but they seem to have no problem denying mail delivery to those most in need of that compassion. Will the member opposite urge her opposition colleagues to walk the talk and let the mail through?

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Absolutely. We will completely work with the members in this House to encourage Canada Post to remove the locks from the doors. Canada Post workers have said that they will come back to work with the same terms and conditions they have had. They are saying they will come back with the conditions they went out under. We are absolutely prepared to do that.

When we have a crown corporation like Canada Post that has had profits of \$1.7 billion over the last 15 years, \$281 million last year alone, and has pumped another \$1.2 billion into the federal coffers in dividends and income tax, I fail to understand why the current government wants to tamper with that success. We have a winner here. We have something that is the envy of other countries. Why is the government undermining it?

• (5850)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government members have been citing the need for expediency, referencing the essential nature of the service. They are saying this needs to be passed. The New Democratic Party is obviously taking up the challenge of the filibuster, but again I will go back to how the filibuster may have been arranged to begin with.

For those who may be tweeting this, on Thursday, December 3, 2009, pursuant to Standing Order 57, the government issued a motion regarding the implementation of the HST bill. The government prescribed very specific terms and conditions as to how that debate would be allowed to proceed should the motion be adopted by the House. The motion was indeed adopted by the House.

The motion indicated specifically:

not more than one sitting day shall be allotted to the second reading stage of the bill and, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on the day of the consideration of the said stage of the said bill...[be granted].

And then it said:

not more than four hours following the adoption of the second reading motion, any proceedings before the Committee to which the bill stands referred shall be interrupted, if required...and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the committee stage of the bill shall be put....

While the government professes to be angry about the NDP's filibuster, and the NDP is angry that the government is not responding to their requests, the reality here is that a trap was set and a trap was taken. That is what has happened here with this filibuster—

The Deputy Speaker: I interrupt the hon. member to give the member for Parkdale—High Park an opportunity to respond.

There is one minute left.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Madam Speaker, the member has pointed out something very interesting, which is that the government, if it was so concerned about the timeliness of this debate, because it sets its own rules here in this motion, could have set a time limit on the debate.

I disagree with the member's implication that defending hard-working Canadians is somehow something not worth standing on. On this side of the House, and in this party, we support decent jobs, decent wages, and the hard work that Canadians do. We are proud to stand for that principle today and any day in this House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague just spoke. I just received messages on my BlackBerry because I told my constituents that I would take the floor at 10:45 a.m. They said they would wait until I rose to speak. There are currently people watching CPAC to find out what is going on. They are gaining an understanding of what the Conservatives are trying to sneak through.

Earlier, I heard the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons speak, and I thought I detected some openness there. He said that Canadians want to receive their mail. We just have to remove the locks from the doors for people to get their mail. Before the lockout, people were receiving their mail.

When will the government realize that the NDP is not preventing postal employees from working, the Conservative Party is? The Conservatives are the ones who conspired to impose the lockout. When will the government realize that it has the power to allow the postal employees to work? With the consensus in the House, we could immediately decide to let them work.

When will the government realize that it has the power to unlock the lockout? If we had a consensus, we could put an end to the lockout right now. The NDP supports reopening post offices and getting postal workers back to work. Furthermore, when will the government realize that it has the power to unlock the lockout with a simple phone call? When will the government realize that we could require the employees to go back to work by ending the lockout, while we continue to consider the rest of the special legislation before us?

When will the government realize that small businesses could receive their mail as well as send and receive packages, that seniors could receive and send letters, cheques and gifts, that both workers and the unemployed could receive their cheques, and that all Canadians could once again have access to postal service, as soon as the government agrees that it is essential to immediately end the lockout, well before voting on this bill?

Government Orders

When will the government realize that ending the lockout is the only way to remove the threat to the economy, a threat it created, economic losses it created? When will the government realize that preserving a healthy employer-employee relationship is the only way to ensure a company's future prosperity?

When will the government realize that creating an unhealthy climate and adding to people's workload, which already is not obvious, will hurt the economy? Has it assessed how costly an increase in the number of workplace injuries will be to our society?

When will the government realize that it is flouting the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and disregarding rights that were recognized and confirmed by the Supreme Court in 2007? When will the government realize that Canada Post is a profitable and efficient crown corporation?

Is the government's objective to increase the profits of its friends at the expense of workers? Is its objective to destabilize postal services in order to privatize this sector? When will the government realize that disregarding the rights of workers will do nothing to improve their physical and moral well-being, or the economic health of the country?

When will the government realize that in order to stand up for democracy in the world, it must also safeguard democracy here at home?

● (5855)

Since being elected to power, this government has thumbed its nose at democratic rights in Canada. I am talking about the rights of trade unions, the right to associate and everything connected with union rights, party financing, voting methods, the use of the media and public funds, to give you just a few examples.

When will the government realize that members have a duty to represent all citizens? They have a duty to work for all citizens. When will the government realize that the public will not put up with this kind of behaviour for very long? The official opposition is prepared to work with the government, but the government does not appear to be listening to us. The message goes in one ear and out the other.

We have a duty to represent all citizens and to do everything in our power to preserve our vested rights. Our duty is to defend our democracy and our democratic processes, along with our young people, their future and their rights. We must work together, not merely defend the interests of a select few.

Why is the government not worried about public opinion? Just like some government members, I, too, I have been flooded with words of encouragement to continue our opposition to this bill.

But what is the cost of the Conservatives' interventionist policy? The workers are paying the price by being oppressed. Negotiations require a consensus of both parties, we recognize that. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers knows that; the law recognizes it; and the people, whether they belong to a union or not, also know it; but not Canada Post and the Conservative Party.

Finally, with regard to a brief debate that took place earlier, I, too, would like to know why the minister misled the government by

proposing this bill to deal with a strike. As everyone knows today, we are not dealing with a strike, but with a lockout. In fact, I would like her to take the time to explain this to us. Perhaps it was only the result of some confusion and not a premeditated act. She will now have the opportunity to clear this up or simply to explain things to us. But if the government was truly misled, this means it has introduced a bill for which there are no valid grounds. I simply want to ask the minister to take the time to reply, because we are debating this bill which may well have a questionable rationale.

● (5900)

[English]

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to comment on the presentation by the hon. member.

I have already heard from a lot of seniors in my riding who are feeling really depressed because we have not solved this and because we are still talking and talking and talking, without taking any real action, because the opposition is stalling everything.

We all understand that this work stoppage of Canada Post is already directly affecting the lives of many people, including seniors in my riding. Young people are waiting to get their student visas extended, and a lot of low-income seniors and other residents need their cheques, as well as all the other convenience of the mail.

Why is the member opposite not cooperating with the government to pass this important legislation? We need to make sure that both sides get back to the table so that the workers can resume their duties in service of the general public.

This is the time when they really should get back to work, instead of politicking.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Madam Speaker, let us end this lockout. Let them continue to negotiate. No one will be treated with contempt, and everyone will receive their mail.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is curious that it is Thursday in the House, but of course it is really Saturday, and it gets more bizarre after that.

It is entirely correct that the government itself set the stage in the terms of the motion we are debating today, so it's all nonsense about when will we stop. The Conservatives themselves decided not to put in any time limits.

To add insult to injury, I would point out that a lot of the questions that have been asked we cannot ask directly of government members because they are not participating in the debate. They are asking a few questions and making comments, but they are not taking any turns whatsoever to be part of the debate. So all of these questions that we have had directly from all of the members we cannot ask directly.

Government Orders

The parliamentary secretary earlier said that they are doing this, apparently, in the public interest. I would like to ask the member, what is the public interest here? Is the public interest forcing workers back to work, or is the public interest actually upholding collective bargaining in this country and allowing the parties to do the job that they need to do and to find their own solution?

• (5905)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple. The public interest means respecting the rights of everyone in the country. In that way, we will be respecting the economy and the health of our businesses.

I note that the member said this is still Thursday, June 23, 2011. We also see that on the other side they keep repeating the same things. It would indeed be desirable for us to co-operate in the public interest. We are already proposing solutions. We are simply waiting for some phone calls to be able to put an end to this lockout.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Madam Speaker, I had the chance to visit my riding yesterday. I met people who have placed their confidence in us and they asked me something. It was a young couple, Marie-Josée and Martial, who have just had a baby. They are now the proud parents of two little boys. They mailed in the documents to claim their parental leave. Everything is all tied up. This young couple needs their money to make their mortgage and car payments and to survive.

Will the member opposite work with this House to call a vote on this bill so that Quebeckers and Canadians can start receiving their mail again on Monday?

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I would like to tell my former MP—since I once lived in his riding—that I would like to work with the government and with him in our vast region. We are already bringing forward proposals. Let us end this lockout. It will all be settled and people will get their mail.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see that the members opposite are all in fine form this morning. I am also pleased to see so many ministers here. It is comforting to know that the government truly wants to end this crisis in an honourable way.

I heard the parliamentary secretary say that he went to his riding and that people support him. Oddly enough, I just read in the newspapers that 53% of Quebeckers support the NDP. Our popularity is up again in the polls. With these polling numbers, not a single Conservative member would be elected if there were an election tomorrow.

I am here to defend the rights of postal workers and indeed of all workers. They government wants to dictate the collective agreement for postal workers. The government is not even giving the two parties the chance to negotiate.

It is odd that this government—which wants to redefine the role of government and wants a government that does not intervene as much in public affairs—has used this sledgehammer to meddle in the first

labour dispute involving a crown corporation. It did not use this level of intervention to prevent the devastating crisis we were forced to endure because of all kinds of speculators in 2008. The government did not intervene then. But when postal workers want to preserve the gains of past generations, maintain their buying power, it quickly intervenes to keep them in line.

Perhaps the Conservatives are telling themselves that their actions will disrupt the labour movement, that they will scare the postal workers and other workers who are fighting to maintain their buying power. But they are wrong.

I know that many members on the government side hate unions, and they candidly admit it. They do not like our country's labour laws. They do not like the right to freedom of association; they do not like health and safety laws; they do not like minimum wage legislation. I know that some members opposite firmly believe in the invisible hand that guides the economy, the one that pushed us into the 2008 crisis and that is currently pushing countries like Greece, Spain and Iceland towards bankruptcy.

It is up to the general public and us to repair the damage that this hand, insensitive and unqualified to make society more fair, has wrought on the savings of small investors and families. The people are the ones suffering from the financial sector's lust, those small investors who lost \$40,000 billion during the crisis. But the government did not intervene then.

Canada Post is telling its young employees that it can no longer ensure that the current pension plan will be available for future generations. That is strange, is it not, Mr. Parliamentary Secretary? Canada Post can no longer guarantee pensions for future generations. Yet, our companies are making record profits year after year. Our banks are making record profits year after year. Canada Post Corporation is also making profits. So why reduce benefits for young workers?

I feel that if we cannot understand the Conservatives' objective, the objective of these ideologues, we cannot understand the situation. It is incomprehensible that a crown corporation making \$281 million in profits is asking young workers to accept lower wages and no guarantees in terms of pension plans. Where is the logic in that?

On this side of the House, we believe that pension plans are essential and that all Canadian workers should be able to have a pension plan to help them to live their later years in dignity and get out of poverty. The mere \$1.68 a day that this government is offering is not going to help our seniors get out of poverty.

On this side of the House, we do not believe that the unions are too big. On the contrary, we believe that they should continue to grow and that more unions are needed. More unions should be created in our businesses and throughout the world to provide balance and ensure that the wealth that is generated benefits everyone, that it is redistributed.

Government Orders

• (5910)

A recent study showed that the purchasing power of the average Canadian worker increased by \$1 a week over the past 25 years. People are not idiots or fools. They know that, today, it takes two salaries to support a small family. Even with those two salaries, they have difficulty buying essential commodities and paying for heating and electricity. Meanwhile, billionaires in Canada and throughout the world are growing richer. It is not normal to live in such a society. Our role, as members of the NDP, is not only to tell the government that we do not agree with Bill C-6 and the hypocritical role that it is playing in this dispute, but also to help all workers maintain and improve their working conditions.

On this side of the House, we do not believe in Adam Smith's invisible hand. We also do not believe that Canada Post negotiated honestly and in good faith. It negotiated in such a way that the government was able to introduce Bill C-6. Coming out of the election, the Conservative Prime Minister said that he was satisfied with the result because, finally, the debate would be clear. For once, I agree with him. It is true. The debate is very, very clear.

On this side of the House, it is clear. The NDP wants postal workers to maintain and improve their purchasing power, working conditions and pension fund, and it wants the young people who are hired by Canada Post to have the same conditions and benefits that have been negotiated over the years.

On this side, we want Canadian workers to have access to job security, and real protection against unemployment and illness. Clearly, our objective is not to produce more billionaires, but to increase the number of families that do not live in poverty. That is our vision for the future of Canada, and each time the government attempts, by various means, as it is doing with Bill C-6, to weaken the work world, we will be there.

Soon, we will have third reading of the bill and we will introduce amendments. I hope that the hours we have just spent here will lead the government, in good conscience, to find an honourable solution to this crisis. Each amendment could be discussed endlessly, but we will be here. We must find a solution to this crisis. I encourage the members opposite to reflect, in good conscience, and to find solutions.

• (5915)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech. He talked about how we need more and more unions and how we need redistribution of wealth, two hallmark policies of socialism. I thought when the NDP went to the Vancouver convention they were talking about removing socialism from their party constitution. I was happy to hear that, because socialism does not work.

Winston Churchill said, "Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance and the gospel of envy. Its inherent virtue is the equal sharing not of money but of misery." That was Winston Churchill, one of the greatest leaders of the previous century. He knew what socialism was and he recognized it for the dangers it provides.

The NDP also talk about democracy and the democracy of the union. Now, why are thousands and thousands of Canadians across this country forced to join unions? Why must they join a union to be a teacher? Why must they join a union to be a postal worker? If they are democratic, why can they not have a choice?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, in what a demagogic way my words have been twisted. I never said that Canadians must join unions. I said that we hope that there will be as many unions as possible. In fact, in modern western countries where unions exist and wealth is distributed, life expectancy is higher, there is less illness, and social services are well supported. Those countries have the most vibrant economies. We need only look to Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

This is the basis for my comment about the need for unions. In countries where there are no unions, people work for 10¢ an hour and have no services—no health services or social security. That is the logic behind my comments.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Rivière-du-Nord. Over the 37-hour debate, the sound of a broken record has been reaching my ears from the other side of the House. The same arguments have been brought up over and over. The Conservatives claim that the NDP is to blame for the 37-hour debate, since it refuses to accept the bill the Conservatives have tabled. There are specific reasons why we do not agree with the bill.

However, we have proposed alternatives to the bill, which the government knew we would not support. We proposed that the government replace the bill with back-to-work legislation that would not affect the workers' right to a rotating strike. We proposed that the government replace it with a bill that would extend the collective agreement by a few years, so that the two parties could come to an agreement naturally. Instead, the government presented us with a bill that imposes unfair conditions on employees and forces a return to work in violation of the free bargaining provisions. Therefore, I ask that my colleague tell me which of the three options proposed he prefers and whether that option would help us go home sooner.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, it is obvious that withdrawing this immoral and unjust bill would be the best solution. Postal workers have told us that if the government withdrew the bill and the Canada Post Corporation ended its lockout, the workers would return to work today. What are they waiting for to withdraw this bill? What are they waiting for to end the lockout? What are they waiting for to negotiate in good faith instead of pursuing a hidden right-wing political agenda? That is what we are wondering.

Canadians are wondering the same thing. Where is the government headed when it comes to workers? What does it intend to do about our rights and our existing social benefits?

Government Orders

• (5920)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the people in my riding of LaSalle—Émard and tell them how it feels to be away from my riding to discuss issues that are very dear to me. I would imagine that every member in the House feels the same way. I want to repeat how incredibly proud I am to be part of a team that is standing up to protect the fundamental rights of workers.

The legislation put forward by the government, Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services, could, in the short term, achieve the goal of getting postal service back on track. But the long-term impacts of passing this legislation are still unknown. The reason the members of the official opposition are so vehemently opposed to this bill is that they believe it will have far-reaching long-term consequences.

What bothers me about this bill is that the conditions of the new collective agreement have been decided in advance. The government is putting shackles not only on the workers, but also on the employer and on the arbitrator who will have to decide the matter. What worries me about this bill are the long-term effects of the conditions being imposed, a concern that has been raised articulately and exhaustively by my colleagues. The conditions being imposed will lead to reduced incomes and a lower standard of living for the middle class. And that includes working conditions and future pension benefits.

In the long term, this measure will jeopardize the economic recovery that is so important to the current government, as well as Canada's future economic stability. Even more troubling is the fact that this lockout and this bill will only serve to poison labour-management relations. These conditions create a two-tier system of new hires versus existing employees, something that goes against the values of fairness that Canadians hold so dear.

Canada Post is part of our daily lives. It is a public service that ensures mail delivery to every community across this beautiful and vast nation of ours. Unfortunately, the lockout and Bill C-6 send mixed messages. The job actions taken by Canada Post management—service interruption on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the lockout—were a draconian response to the rotating strikes initiated previously. The government responded by introducing Bill C-6.

What message is the government sending to Canadians? First of all, they are being subjected to the effects of a lockout, and small and medium-size businesses are suffering financially. Unfortunately, the long-term impact of this government's actions will be the erosion of the very notion of public service. Why do we need public services like Canada Post? Because they provide an affordable service that meets the needs of all Canadians, regardless of where they live across the country, from coast to coast, from the far north to the south.

• (5925)

The Public Service is also a large employer, one that offers interesting working conditions for its employees and provides them with a standard of living such that they can help the country's economy to flourish. It is also important for us to remember that as Members of Parliament, we are part of the Public Service, in that we serve all Canadians, regardless of where they live.

I am disturbed by the fact that this government is trying to turn us into a society where the legitimate right to collective bargaining to secure attractive working conditions will be denied and where collective rights will take a back seat to economic interests.

I am proud to be part of a team that stands united in its opposition to Bill C-6, which threatens the right to freely negotiate a collective agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, it seems to me that a lot of people are being harmed through this work stoppage at Canada Post. We need to go back to October. There were some eight months of negotiations that occurred, three months in January into the spring with conciliation, a month with a mediator that was appointed.

Clearly, this is a stalemate that will not be solved by the parties. We saw the rotating strikes, which cost Canadian taxpayers, who, ultimately, own Canada Post, some \$100 million. Today, the postal workers from coast to coast who are part of the losses that are occurring, postal workers in places like Peterborough and right across this country, are not being paid and some of them are on disability. If we could pass this bill, they will start being paid immediately. They will go back to work, postal service will resume and we will have put in place a solution.

the New Democrats constantly tell us to take the locks off. They know that is not a solution. They know that is simply a path to another impasse. It is more uncertainty for Canadian businesses and postal workers who just want to go to work. I keep hearing about young workers. I can say that if positions open up at Canada Post in Peterborough or elsewhere, there will be no shortage of young workers. However, I hope Canada Post does not engage in ageism because I believe new hires should be open to people of any age, not only young people.

I hope the NDP members soon come around because the pain and suffering they are thrusting upon Canadians extends to postal workers, too.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, I did not hear any question. However, I did listen closely to the comments of the government member.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the thoughtful and well laid-out arguments that my colleague made to try to explain to the public that might be watching the charade that is unfolding in front of their eyes as the Conservative government, the architect of this whole problem, stubbornly maintains its manufactured crisis and yet tries to pitch the blame on the NDP.

I wonder if my colleague would take a moment to sum up her thoughts in that regard.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. H  l  ne LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, it is important to remember that the lockout was ordered by Canada Post, a crown corporation. If government members are concerned, especially in light of the economic losses that are apparently mounting, the solution, quite simply, would be to advise the management at Canada Post that a lockout adversely affects economic growth and has a destabilizing effect on Canada's economy.

● (5930)

Ms. Fran  oise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have not had the opportunity to speak English very often, but I will give it a try. I have just received via Facebook a rather interesting message from an Anglophone, someone whom I do not know, who lives in a riding in British Columbia. He is asking the following question and I would like to pass it along to the member for LaSalle—  mard.

[*English*]

He said: "Remember when unions crashed the stockmarket, wiped out banks, took billions in bonuses and paid no taxes? No? Me neither".

[*Translation*]

Ms. H  l  ne LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, this is a clear illustration of the strength that a community that stands up for the rights of workers can have. Currently, the economy is out of control and the profits of large corporations are not being redistributed. That is partly what is being expressed here and what we want to rectify. We want to see a power relationship in which a community, where there is strength in unity, can defend the rights of workers.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government tells us that we should accept this bill because the proposed agreement includes salary increases. That is irrelevant. If the government is waiting for us to approve this bill based on that argument alone, it is going to be waiting a long time.

I even wonder if the government has read its own bill. If it had, it would have realized that we are not rejecting this bill because of a single aspect.

If we cannot make ourselves understood by the government, if it refuses to hear us because it believes it is above everything that happens in the House, let us try something else. Let us try to make the government understand that we are refusing to approve this bill because Canada Post workers are asking us to do so, and not only are they asking us to do so, but they are explaining why.

Here is an example a Canada Post worker sent me. He points out that one of the issues with the collective agreement that Canada Post is trying to force upon them is very important for future postal workers, and that is the shortage of workers and the demographics of the new workforce that we will see in the future.

First of all, the new contract would reduce the salaries of new employees from \$24 per hour to \$18 per hour. He explains that the new workers available for hire will be Aboriginal people and newcomers to Canada. These new workers will work for lower wages and reduced benefits, making them a separate class of workers and citizens. Once again, it is an insult to see co-workers being treated as second-class citizens.

There will also be retirees, and young men and women trying to support their families. They deserve a decent salary, the one that Canada Post already pays for the same work. Equal pay for work of equal value.

The many issues also include, as he points out, preserving sick leave and other benefits. In his letter this worker begs us not to let Canada Post cut their sick leave. For nearly 40 years, Canada Post has included sick leave in its offers, and the cost of this measure has not prevented Canada Post from making profits during the past 16 years.

Moreover, although the figures vary depending on the source, from 10,000 to 20,000 positions would be eliminated over the next 10 years. That means that Canada Post would have less vacation leave and other costs to pay. This worker cannot believe that, with these savings, Canada Post executives could no longer afford to provide sick leave for those whose jobs will not be cut. These sick days are a form of insurance. Some workers use them and others do not, so they are not a heavy burden on the system, as suggested by the executives.

His letter also mentions the high workplace injury rate and the many employees dealing with chronic physical ailments.

The union members are also affected by high rates of depression and mental illness, most of which are due to the high level of stress in the workplace, something that even the Canada Post executives have confirmed.

● (5935)

They even declared themselves to be champions of mental health. Despite this, they tried to cut sick leave instead of leaving current programs in place to help employees. Canada Post is saying that it wants to make the corporation a model employer, but its actions do not match its words.

Canada Post is saying that revenues are down, but it has done everything possible to shoot itself in the foot in terms of customer service. It is as though the company were purposely trying to fail on this front. It has cut the number of service counters and staff, both in rural municipalities and in large cities. How can Canada Post make money if it has no employees behind the counter to sell products and services?

There are long line-ups and not enough employees to serve customers. In the post office where this postal worker works, there used to be two customer service staff. Canada Post got rid of them a few years ago. Needless to say, sales have dropped significantly. The other service employees are trying to serve customers, but they do not have the necessary time or training, so there are no performance guarantees.

In addition, management is not available to respond to clients' needs. Clients are referred to a 1-800 number, which is now run by a private company. The employees are also required to fill out all of the paperwork required by management, which further reduces the time they have available to help customers. Customers must fill out forms themselves. High error rates slow down processing and create a lot of dissatisfaction.

The range of services needs to be increased, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses. It should not get harder for them to send parcels. Many of the problems at Canada Post have nothing to do with the work or wages of employees.

• (5940)

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to wait until the hon. member finished her speech as I did not want to interrupt. I realize that she is new to the House but I believe she is in violation of a Standing Order while wearing a prop while she speaks. I am sure she is unaware of the rule and if she could correct that we would appreciate it.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Earlier today, the Speaker made a ruling that props and visual aids are prohibited. I am therefore asking the hon. member to remove her prop.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's comments talking about the future and really that distant future. I am actually a surgeon by training and this bill does not need the three, four or five days of labour; it needs a C-section. We need to move rapidly and ensure that we do things for Canadians and for Canadian businesses today.

Based on a few of my concerns from things that were raised earlier, I wonder whether the members opposite read the Bill C-6 clauses with regard to wage increases as outlined in the bill in clause 15. We are here supporting our strong, stable national majority government and my rural postal workers would like to know whether the member will agree that there are increases outlined in Bill C-6, clause 15.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to respond to the member opposite. She is a surgeon and I am a family doctor.

A C-section is performed when a person is in pain. Agreed? When a C-section is performed, it is done to alleviate pain, not simply for the joy of cutting.

I am telling the hon. member that I carefully read her bill, and I do not think she understands what it means. This bill means that, in the future, when there are other disputes involving companies other than Canada Post, the government will systematically intervene.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has repeated its belief that urgent action is required. It was indeed the government that conducted itself with urgency when the crown corporation locked the employees out. It was the government that acted with urgency in tabling back to work legislation. Now the government says that urgent action is required to end this filibuster.

I repeat observations I made earlier in the House. The government did indeed have options available to it. When the government tabled government business Motion No. 3, there were specific opportunities missing from that motion that could have allowed expeditious passage of this bill, different sections referencing various standing orders, similar to the orders that were offered in the passage of the HST bill, the megatrials bill and the budget implementation act. They were not in the government motion.

I am asking if the New Democratic Party has engaged in any discussions with the government on amendments and if the government has accepted the New Democratic Party's offer to sit down and discuss amendments. It appears that the only way this is going to be resolved is if those two parties get together and cut a deal.

• (5945)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member please repeat the end of his question? I did not hear what he said.

[English]

The Speaker: There is very little time left. If the hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte would like to briefly put the last part of his question, I will allow a very brief response.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, that is very fair of you. I appreciate the member's frankness.

The question was whether members of the New Democratic Party have put forward options for amendments to this legislation. Has the NDP engaged in any discussions with the government? Has the government engaged in any discussions with the NDP and what is the status?

[Translation]

The Speaker: There are only 15 seconds remaining for the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, as both hon. members indicated, I am a new member of Parliament. The NDP has done a little but I assume that we will have amendments to make later. For now, we are trying to discuss this bill, which we find unacceptable and unfair for workers.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is now my turn to kill 10 minutes, so I am going to set about doing that.

Government Orders

We are all getting tired of hearing the same questions and answers back and forth. We all know we are engaged in this process to allow the parties to continue to negotiate in the absence of the draconian and heavy-handed imposition of the terms and conditions of their settlement as found in Bill C-6. However, it has been a useful exercise in the sense that over the course of 36 hours, as we get more physically exhausted, members on that side of the House are getting grumpier and are starting to reveal a little more about who they really are and what their real agenda is.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Why did the hon. member not show up for the vote? Where was the member for the vote?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, as they get crankier, they slip from the PMO's talking points and start to reveal how they really feel about organized labour—

Mr. Gerald Keddy: That was just how I felt about the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre. It's not all organized labour, it's just the hon. member.

Mr. Pat Martin:—and about elevating the standard of wages and working conditions through free collective bargaining. We get insight and glimpses about how they feel about pension plans, how they feel about defined benefit plans. We start to see what they are really trying to do here is take on some big issues.

As the media has been saying, the Conservatives have a majority government now so they better get busy and throw some red meat to their base because their base is getting itchy. They are starting to wonder why they elected them when they have compromised—

Mr. Randy Kamp: The member is one to talk.

The Speaker: Order, please. I would remind members there will be a five-minute question and comment period when the member is finished his 10-minute speech. If they have points they would like to raise or questions they would like to ask, I would be happy to recognize them at that point, but until then, if they could just restrain themselves, we could hear the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that ruling.

As I was saying, as the party of grumpy old guys gets grumpier, its base is getting grumpy as well. That party's base is getting frustrated. Every single principle upon which those members got elected by that base, the party has compromised and jettisoned overboard, thrown overside in the interests of political expediency, whether it is stacking the Senate with their cronies, which the Conservatives said they would never do, or whether it is racking up record deficits, which they said they would not do. The Conservatives' base is starting to wonder where the party is that they elected. Now that the Conservatives have their majority, now is the time to come on strong.

I would think the Minister of Finance was channelling Maggie Thatcher, if he had a sweater set and pearls. Every time I am in the men's washroom at the urinal, I expect to look over and see Maggie Thatcher right beside me, but no, it is the Minister of Finance.

The Conservatives are looking south of the border. If people liked the Mike Harris government, they will certainly like the labour legislation those guys have in mind. We are getting an inkling of what that will be like now. They take on big ticket items, such as defined benefit pension plans. Thomas d'Aquino and the 140 CEOs

in the country are who those guys work for. That party is the political arm of the Business Council on National Issues. They have said that we have to do away with defined benefit pension plans, so those guys are dutifully falling into line. They would have us put in place some American-style 401K plan, and we know how well that has worked for American workers who invested their life savings in Enron and others.

The Conservatives would have us revisit our labour laws, like the right to work laws in the United States. As they have set about trying to recreate Canada in the image of the George Bush or Ronald Reagan United States, or however limited their vision is, I do not know if they realize what a fight they will get from the official opposition.

Also there are predictable consequences. There is a point in law that says a person can be presumed to have intended the probable consequences of his or her actions. I will tell one story as a graphic illustration of the predictable outcome of the direction in which the Conservatives are taking us.

In 1913 there was a famous fire in New York City at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Hundreds of workers died because of the sweatshop conditions, et cetera. It was at that time that workplace health and safety conditions began to improve, just out of public outrage, until about the time the Reaganites said, "Enough of these union nuisances. They are holding back prosperity. We have to smash the unions". They put in place right to work states, like North Carolina, not unlike what the Harris government tried to do in Ontario.

I will tell a story about a chicken factory in Durham, North Carolina. This is a recent story. It happened in the 1990s. In a chicken processing plant, the chickens go by so fast that the poor women who work in the place have to do 40 actions per chicken per minute. They have to cut the wing tips off, cut the neck off, and so on. It goes so fast and it is ice cold in the plant, they do not know they have cut themselves until they see the blood dripping on the ground because their hands are so cold. They are paid \$7.50 to \$8 an hour. They started stealing the wing tips, the necks and the giblets that would otherwise go into hot dogs, and they would sneak them home. This is a true story. The employer padlocked the doors from the outside. The place started on fire.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pat Martin: Some members are laughing.

● (5950)

The Speaker: Order. If members want to ask questions during questions and comments, they should wait until then. Otherwise the Chair will not recognize them if they are using the time provided for the member's speech to ask their questions or make their comments. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

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Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to tell a story that happened in the 1990s as a graphic illustration of why our side gets so animated about these issues. The employer padlocked the door on the outside. Underpaid rural black women from North Carolina who largely made up the workforce were taking home wing tips so they could make soup out of it and the place caught on fire: 43 employees died and another 110 were hospitalized. This was the worst industrial relations incident since the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory of 1913 in New York City, so we have come full circle.

If anyone has travelled in rural Pennsylvania, rural North Carolina, or Florida, I think there are 60 of these right to work states, which smashed the labour union in the United States thinking it was the road to prosperity. I saw a bumper sticker the last time I was in the United States that said, "At least the war on the middle class is going well". That is the only war they are winning. They have gone from the richest and most powerful civilization in the history of the world to almost a failed state. It is a false economy.

There is no utility in forcing wages down. We are not going to shrink our way to prosperity. Fair wages benefit the whole community and the direction we are seeing revealed in the Conservatives' weaker moments when they are tired, sleepy and grumpy and their true colours start to show, scares us a great deal. It is not the Canadian way. We are 33% unionized.

My colleague argues we should be more unionized because fair wages and free collective bargaining have led to labour peace. That was the post-war compact. Right after the war there were a lot of wildcat strikes and a lot of violence on picket lines. Guys had their heads split open on picket lines, but by free collective bargaining through a prescribed negotiations process we eliminated that violence. We eliminated work stoppages with fair wages, et cetera.

The Conservatives are inviting labour unrest the likes of which we have not seen since the 1930s and they are starting with the most volatile industrial relations environment in the free world, which is the Canadian post office. Believe me, one does not mess with the Canadian post office's labour relations. One does not invite tourists to the bargaining table in that particular environment, because it is a tinderbox that is ready to blow at any given time and the government just pressed the plunger. The postal workers have offered to go back to work.

If it were not for the irresponsible, reckless, mean-spirited, inflammatory actions of the government with this unnecessary back to work legislation, the workers have agreed to go back to work with no rotating strikes. However, they want to press their agenda because it is the tea party all over again here. It is the Republican Tea Party political environment. Conservatives have to throw some red meat to their base, so they are going to take on the big, bad union of Canada Post Corporation and show it a thing or two with a stable majority Conservative Government.

The government does not know the damage and the misery it is inviting. The worst thing that could be done for an economic recovery is to invite labour unrest and that is what it is doing. Conservatives are a bunch of amateurs.

• (5955)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, I have not been in the House a long time, the last Parliament and this session, but the last

comments sounded unparliamentary and I would ask you to request an apology of that speaker.

The Speaker: I did not hear anything specifically unparliamentary. If the member is referring to the word "amateur", I am not sure if that would fall into the realm of unparliamentary.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I received a communication from the publisher and managing editor of a small business magazine. Its online survey which began on June 3 to find out how the strike was impacting small businesses in Canada has been ongoing. It has received hundreds of responses from small business people across the country.

As of yesterday, 91% of small business respondents have said the lockout has been having a negative impact on their businesses.

My question for the member opposite has to do with choosing sides in this dispute. It is clear that the official opposition is standing in solidarity with CUPW. Can the member please explain to the House how he can justify turning his back on the rest of Canadians and so clearly picking sides in this dispute and frankly, not picking the side of business where people have jobs they depend on? As the official opposition, is it not supposed to take the sides of all Canadians in this dispute?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, someone used a quote from Winston Churchill against us a little while ago.

There is a quote from Disraeli that says: "A conservative government is an organized hypocrisy".

The hypocrisy that exists here is the government that manufactured this crisis in a classic wag the dog kind of a scenario and then points to us as if we are problem here. The government picked a fight and it is a scrappy thing to do.

There are some scrappy guys on that side and they like to throw their weight around now that they have a majority. So the government picked a perfect enemy, a straw man. It decided to jump all over Canada Post's union because it has the reputation of being sort of a militant union. The tough guys here are going to take the union on, so that they show their base. As the Conservatives say, throw some red meat to their base by getting tough with big labour. They just love it. They eat it up.

What worries me is it is like the Wisconsin experience. All over the United States the public sector unions are being taken on and sure enough, the Republicans are trying to ride that into the next—

• (6000)

The Speaker: I will have to stop the member there to allow for some more questions and comments.

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Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, is the member aware that the president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives is no longer Thomas d'Aquino but former Liberal cabinet minister, John Manley, who wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in May specifically asking to do away with supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board in the agricultural sector? That shows the influence.

Second, is the member aware that in Sweden over 70% of the labour force is unionized, that it is mandatory for labour to be on the board of directors with management and it has had labour peace since that policy was instituted? And who is leading the economic recovery today? It is not Canada. It is Australia, with a labour government, and Sweden. Is the member aware of that?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, most successful western democracies have a relatively tripartite approach to their economic development: business, government and labour. Whether labour is at the table or not, their rights to negotiate fair wages are enshrined in ways that cannot be eliminated.

Again, we have a saying that fair wages benefit the whole community, but the only way to elevate the standard of wages, working conditions and working people has been through free collective bargaining. Again, we cannot shrink our way to prosperity, we believe we grow our way to prosperity. A burgeoning, healthy, consuming middle class is key and integral to our economic recovery.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the consent or approval of the members opposite to wear this small Quebec flag since I am unable to participate in Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

The Speaker: I do not think that the hon. member needs consent. It is not a prohibited prop.

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say hello to my constituents. I would have liked to have been with them yesterday. I would especially like to salute shift workers. We have come to a better understanding of their reality over the past few days. I think of them every time I get up in the middle of the night. I have a great deal of respect for them.

I would like to come back to what I consider to be the main problem with the current government's attitude. This government systematically manipulates and, in particular, polarizes the debates that are important to our society. I will present three arguments because I do not wish to make such an assertion without providing valid reasons.

The day before yesterday, the hon. Prime Minister did something that had not been done since 1964. He took the liberty of exploiting a national holiday. He rose in the House to say that the opposition needed only to vote on what was on the table if it wanted to be with friends and family on the national holiday. We have not seen this kind of contempt for such an important symbol of one of the founding nations of this country since 1964.

Did the hon. Prime Minister subsequently tour Quebec to explain his point of view? I still would not have approved, but I could have

respected his actions. Did he stay in the House to support his troops? I still would not have approved, but I could have respected his actions. No, the right hon. Prime Minister went to Thetford Mines—where asbestos is a hot topic, as we all know—to throw some oil on the fire. Once again, event after event, they throw oil on the fire and polarize the debate. That is no way to govern Canadians.

Before getting back to the bill being examined, I would like to speak about the gun registry. I am fortunate to come from a rural riding that also has some cities. There are organized women's groups. There are also organized hunters' groups, which include outstanding citizens who hunt duck. They help maintain a balance for farmers by ensuring that there are not too many ducks eating their crops.

For the past three or four years, those two groups have not needed a government that polarizes the debate. Women's groups have told me they want the gun registry maintained. The police have also told me they want to keep the registry. When two neighbours start threatening to kill each other, I am not the one who has to step into the line of fire and break it up; it is the police. The police themselves have told us they need this tool.

The hunters I often meet in the mountains tell me they do not want us to get rid of the gun registry. All they want is a few changes that would show them more respect. They do not want to feel as though they are looked upon as potentially dishonest people. That is all they have asked me for. None of the groups has told me they want to see the gun registry eliminated. Once again, polarization.

Now back to the bill before us. Yet again, the government is using this bill to manipulate and polarize the debate. The union was acting responsibly, taking reasonable job action: rotating strikes. There were workers who committed, regardless of the events, to volunteer their services to deliver important cheques such as employment insurance payments.

The union had more than 90% support for its actions. Barely a week ago, the minister herself admitted that the rotating strikes were not really creating much disruption. Then all of a sudden, a lockout. What for? When something that was not called for by anyone happens in the public domain, there is a reason behind it, a desired outcome in mind. Unfortunately, this lockout made it possible for the members of the current government to assert a falsehood: that this was a strike.

● (6005)

We are starting to get the correct message out to the national media that this is a lockout, because they have not had the decency to call it by its rightful name. This is a lockout, not a strike. It has taken us three days to get the truth out to the public.

What are they trying to accomplish? To their way of thinking, they are siding with Canadians who work hard and who are fed up with capricious unions. Thirty-three per cent of Canadians are unionized. They have brothers, they have relatives. When their wages increase, what do they do with the extra money in their pockets? Well, they buy another beer, or another item of clothing from an establishment in their community.

Government Orders

Finally, I was floored to see the union itself being vilified. I have an advantage that the Conservatives do not have. When I join workers on a picket line, they talk to me. I am still looking for the bad guy in the union who threatened these workers and forced them on to the picket line. I still have not found him.

It is time to stop manipulating the debate. Quite simply, what we are dealing with is a postal workers union that, backed by over 90% of its members, resorted to reasonable pressure tactics. The right-leaning Conservative government, in the meantime, orders a lockout to achieve its objectives.

Before we get around to discussing the unfairness of many of the provisions in the bill now before the House, there is something very basic that needs to be explained to Canadians. Given its unreasonable attitude and approach to this debate, is it possible that the government will soon no longer grant parties the right to resort to reasonable pressure tactics? Are we about to see a motion tabled in this House calling for pressure tactics to be limited to no more than three or four days? I have an idea: perhaps pressure tactics should be approved by the Minister of Labour three days in advance. There is a good idea.

I am tempted to continue in English because I see that many of my colleagues on the other side are not wearing their earpiece. I want to be very sure that everyone understands what I am saying.

• (6010)

[English]

If they respect seniors waiting for drugs, they will unlock the lockout. If they respect rural and native communities living far away from services, they will unlock the lockout. If they respect small business, and do not want to cut salaries of thousands of young workers who will then still be consumers and bring good business to small businesses, they will unlock the lockout. Workers should be allowed to come back to the table to negotiate. Doing that will fix it all. They should unlock the lockout.

[Translation]

Since I have one minute left, I would like to conclude with three or four suggestions I disagreed with, which would at least present a consistent picture.

I am willing to support a bill that would decrease the salary of all new Conservative members by 18%. Let us put that motion on the table. That would make me happy. I would vote for that.

I would like to see another motion, one to change the title of the Minister of Labour to the Minister of Lowering Working Conditions. At least that would be honest.

I would also like to see legislation put forward to prohibit reasonable job action without prior consent from the Minister of Labour. This would clearly show the true intentions of this government.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have all been here a long time. This morning I have heard members of the opposition talk about how often they speak to union leaders. Throughout this debate they seem to be repeatedly parroting the CUPW talking points. It is clear they have a hotline and are beholden

to the big union bosses. The lack of mail service is crippling small business. It is crippling the economy, and it is hurting Canadian families.

I have two questions. Number one: why will the opposition not get on that hotline or the “Batphone” or whatever they use to talk to the union bosses, and tell them to get back to the bargaining table so we can get this solved or to support our legislation so mail delivery will resume?

Number two: is the opposition repeating talking points coming directly from CUPW that are in fact on CUPW letterhead?

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, if this can reassure my colleague across the way, personally I have not even seen a letterhead from the union in question; therefore, I could not have repeated the content of such letters. I would like to clarify one thing: I have spoken to unionized workers on the street, not to union leaders. I have heard the views of these people, my fellow citizens, consumers, and my brothers-in-law. So, I could not comment on hotline.

That said, one comment comes back repeatedly: under suitable conditions, the parties could simply agree to resume negotiations while the former collective agreement would continue to apply. They are totally open to that.

The solution is not complicated. Unlock the lock-out! That is simple enough. Solutions are right here in front of us and the situation could be resolved within three hours.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the question the member just asked, I walked the picket line in the first rotating strike at the Hamilton sorting centre. I would not know the president of CUPW if he walked into the room. One thing I do know is we share solidarity in wanting to take care of the workers of Canada, and in this case particularly the workers at Canada Post. That is what we share.

Personally, I have not seen one piece of paper in this lobby from CUPW. I do not know that there are any there. The reality is that we understand the issues and we share CUPW's perspective of the issues. That is very clear.

The member says he met workers on the street. Was that on a picket line?

• (6015)

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, it was right in my riding. There is not one big centre but rather several centres: Montmagny, La Pocatière and Rivière-du-Loup. It was in Montmagny that I met about 20 employees, including a union leader. It is not my field so I do not know what his rank was, but he was an extremely nice union leader who seemed to be very well liked by his members, and not a monster that they had forced to come under some mysterious threat.

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[English]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard throughout this entire debate over the past just about 40 hours now how important and valued the postal service is to every Canadian. I have heard that Canadians have been handcuffed by this disruption and that small business is jeopardized. It sounds to me as though we are dealing with an essential service for all Canadians.

My question to the hon. member is this: Is he willing to support designating Canada Post an essential service?

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, that would be a job for another committee or another bill. I do not want to mix things up, definitely not.

The mail is very important. So important that I think that they should unlock the lockout today.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we listen to the member for Winnipeg Centre and other members, it is obvious that their true colours are starting to show and they are beholden to the union. They have forgotten about the small businesses they are crippling and about ordinary Canadians.

In my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain there has been severe flooding from Yellow Grass, Weyburn, and Estevan to Roche Percee. People are losing homes.

I got a letter from the Chamber of Commerce. It says:

As you are aware, the past seven days have been taxing for everyone in southeastern Saskatchewan.... Flood damage has forced the closure of a number of our retail and service businesses....

Many of our businesses are already in a crisis mode as a result of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers strike. Businesses are not receiving payments from many of their customers, and we fear that having more hurdles in their way at this time may cause job losses, bankruptcies, and migration of people out of our area.

Given all of that, why do these members not put the interests of Canadians at hand, ensure that their benefits are looked after, and support this bill to get the mail moving?

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, we are everywhere in Canada and in Quebec for people have suffered terrible losses as a result of floods. This is what is happening. On the other hand, the union is ready to go back to the bargaining table and is offering solutions.

Unlock the lockout.

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. I have heard both sides talk about different issues and go back and forth on a number of different things. I think what we all agree upon is a sense of fairness. I think members on both sides would agree that we want a sense of fairness. Let me try to use what happened years ago as an illustration of how we would like that fairness to happen.

In my previous life as a union elected official, I used to keep agreements. Some called me a union boss, but my members never called me that. They used to call me by my first name. I used to go to

co-op classes in schools and do a bit of a history of how collective bargaining started and show them what collective bargaining books looked like.

One of the very first books I showed them was all of about 12 pages. That was it. I used to bring in the most recent agreements, which were about eight books that had all kinds of measures and clauses in them. The one that had 12 pages had a very unfair clause in it, and I think all of us would agree with the unfairness of the clause. Let me explain what it was about.

It was about the three classes of workers, which were men, women and boys. For those three classes there were three very different wage rates, regardless of what they did. Regardless of how severe or dangerous the job might have been, men made more, women made less, and boys made even less. This was at a time when companies could actually hire boys, which meant they were under the age of 16.

I met a man, who has fortunately retired and has a decent pension courtesy of what was then the United Auto Workers and is now the CAW, who was a boy when he started working. He actually had that classification. He was the last boy ever hired in the GM plant in St. Catharines. He told me about what used to happen at the time.

There were three classifications of workers all making different wages regardless of the work they did. How were folks laid off when things got slow? I am sure people are wondering that. Men were the first to stay.

One would expect, because the wage classification was men, women and boys, they would have been laid off exactly the same way. They were not. Women were laid off first and employers kept the boys. The boys would then be made to do the jobs that the women used to do for the same wages they made doing what was termed a "boy's job", which for the most part in those days was bringing water to the assembly line because there were no fountains. They used to bring water to the men working on the line.

I heard my colleagues on the other side talk about a sense of fairness. Is it okay that new workers start with less pay in the postal service because other workers do? The illustrations that they used were about workers who would eventually move to the top rate of pay.

They talked about teachers. It is true that new teachers do not start at the same rate of pay as senior teachers. That is absolutely true in most provinces of this country. That is not what Canada Post is talking about. It is not talking about a wage rate for new employees that is lower than that of those who are already there but that over time, with experience, they will eventually get to the same rate. It is talking about the wage rate being lower for the rest of a person's working life. A person would continue to work with someone who got hired the day before the new contract came into being.

Let us say two people of the same age, 22, get hired. One gets hired the day before this new agreement and the other gets hired the day after the new agreement. Those two workers work the same number of years, because they are the same age. One will work for 18% more, and the other will work for 18% less and the one who works for less will never catch up. That is the intent. Surely, that is as unfair as the three classifications of workers.

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By the way, that was in the 1930s. It was a unionized workplace with a recognized collective agreement. It was around the Second World War, not that long ago. It seems like a long time ago, but there are members in the House who would have been alive albeit very young at the time this agreement was in place.

● (6020)

People understood that that was patently unfair and changed it over time. Surely we can see the unfairness of two workers, one hired the day before, one hired the day after a collective agreement, one working for more than the other and doing exactly the same job. Whether it be a letter carrier, a sorter, a clerk, whatever the job they happen to have within the postal service, the rest of their working days they would work for less than the other, doing exactly the same work.

Surely we see that is unfair. I think we all would see the unfairness in that. So why would we want to propagate that on those workers? If we want to have some sense of fairness we would want to actually have them all work for the same wage. I hope they would not ask me whether they should all just not take a reduction. If it is a profitable corporation, I do not see why wages should roll back.

I will give an example of what would happen. In my riding of Welland, we have lost major manufacturing like John Deere, Atlas Steel and Union Carbide. This has been going on since before the recession of two years ago. It has been going on for the last 15 years. What we see are workers, who used to make \$28, \$29, \$30 an hour, now working for \$12 and \$14 trying to raise the same family, pay the same mortgage, pay the same debts for their cars and trying to get their kids into post-secondary education but having to live on less than half the wage. What we see in Welland is folks in poverty.

The rate of poverty in my riding has gone up exponentially over the last 15 years. Families are relocating. We have seen an erosion of the middle class because the good paying jobs have been replaced by those that pay less. We see defaults on property taxes going up. When I talk to the five mayors of the communities I represent they all say the same thing. They say that they have difficulty with folks who are getting into property tax arrears.

When those folks come into my constituency office, they ask if there is any way I can help them with that. All of us know there is not. We ask them how that happened to them and they tell us that they lost their job at the Deere where they were making \$28 an hour. They tell us that they were lucky enough to get a new job but that they are only making \$14.50 an hour. Many of them have kids at home and mortgages to pay. Some have tried to sell their house but it did not move because of the mortgage.

We are having some struggling times in Welland. Yes, there are some good things happening in Welland. For the folks who are listening, I want to say that Welland is a great place to invest. Things are happening in Welland but it will be a slower recovery because it has happened over a long period of time and we have literally lost thousands of manufacturing jobs. It will take time and it will have to take that change to get there.

Ultimately, when we talk about that fairness issue, if we continue to drive wages backward, as some of my colleagues talked about a little earlier, we indeed will have an erosion in the middle class.

My father, as a young man with a young family in the U.K., was a shipbuilder who came to this country at the request of the Canadian immigration board because he had the skills but he did not have any work. He brought myself, my two sisters and my brother to Collingwood to start work at the shipyards in St. Catharines. He came to this place because he wanted to be part of the middle class. He wanted an opportunity for his four kids. It turned out to be five kids because my brother was born here. Nonetheless, he gave us the opportunity to be part of that middle class. He got a post-secondary education.

I thank my late father and my mother, who is still alive today, for the opportunity because they say that this is truly the greatest country in the world. There is no question in my mind about that. What other country in this world would allow a young kid like me who was not born here, who came with a funny accent, although I now speak Canadian, to be here. I once told my mother I would lose that accent, so I did so and now I do not have that funny voice. Nonetheless, this is the greatest place in the world that allows me to be in my place and stand up for all of us who are out there.

A member on the other side said that small businesses were saying that the lockout must end. They are right, end the lockout. The people on that side have the power to do that. They have the key to turn in the lock to open the gates of the postal sorting stations, the padlocks on those super mailboxes, and allow the postal workers, who have voluntarily put their hands up and said that if the locks are taken off they will be back to work tomorrow.

The government has the power and we ask that it please exercise that power. We will be happy on this side if they exercise that power. We will not fight if the government decides to take that key, unlock the postal sorting stations, unlock the super mailboxes and unlock the postal workers who want to go back to work. If they are allowed to go back to work they will start delivering the mail on Monday.

● (6025)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. John Deere is gone. The member's area has lost a lot of manufacturing jobs. In my area, Bundy of Canada has disappeared. Budd Automotive has disappeared. The common denominator here is unions, and we could get into that argument, but my question is not about that. We could also argue about bad employers who should go to jail and, if the NDP would support our crime agenda, maybe that too would happen. We could even talk about Jimmy Hoffa. We could go into this rhetoric.

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However, I hear about how unions are democratic. I am not talking about the right to strike. I understand that 94%, so I ask the member not to go there. Postal workers are asking to have had the democratic right to vote on the offer by Canada Post. They were denied a basic democratic right. That is very offensive to Canadians. It is not about us taking the locks off the door. It is about the unions behaving democratically in the best interest of the country, not in the historic interest of the long gone Budd Automotive, John Deere and all of these industries that cannot compete, and guess why.

• (6030)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I do not have to guess why, I will tell the member. It is called free trade and it is propagated by the member's particular government. If the member would like to ask John Deere why it left, he can go ahead and ask it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am having difficulty hearing the hon. member and he sits right by the Chair. I will ask members to wait until they have an opportunity to ask another question to make their statements.

The hon. member for Welland.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do not think I have a small voice either.

However, in response to the minister's question, and I will not use the 94.5%, the democratic structure of the union is somewhat like this Parliament. People run for office. The membership, just like a riding, elects them and empowers them to make decisions on their behalf because they were democratically elected, just like this side of the House does as the government. Elected by the people in their constituency, whatever number that happens to be, members are then empowered by them to make decisions on their behalf without having to go back to them every time with a plebiscite and asking if they are okay with it. That is what they asked them to do. That is the reality of how a democratic structure works.

This one works the same way. The unions actually looked at Parliament and structured themselves the same way as Parliament and said that they can go ahead and do that, and that is exactly what they do. When they have an offer to present to their members, they will and their members will vote on it yes or no.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member comment on how the proposed legislation would harm not only those hard-working Canadians who have union representation but also those who do not have union representation and are really struggling with a lot of part-time jobs and poor working conditions in Canada today?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park back to this House. It was a great thrill to see her come back to this Parliament. I know she was here in the 39th Parliament, then skipped the 40th because she had other things she needed to do and then came back to see us again in the 41st.

The member is absolutely right. When we talk to other workers who are non-unionized in communities around the country, they want the unionized workers to get as much as they can when they bargain because the higher their wages the more competitive it is in a wage-structure sense for those who are unorganized. In other words,

employers out there who have non-unionized places will need to compete with the unionized places for labour, which actually pulls up wages for non-unionized workers.

When it runs the opposite way and unionized workers are suppressed, put down and lose benefits and wages, the non-unionized workforce heads in the same direction, the only backstop being minimum wage. Once employees are at minimum wage, it is the law and they are not allowed to be suppressed below that. Some employers take advantage of that in different ways by making folks contractors and doing other things, but that is a debate of another kind.

Clearly, this is a fight not just for the unionized members of the postal service but for all workers across this country who are actually trying to get ahead when it comes to labour relations aspects.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will first thank all the Speakers who have been doing their rotation in the chair. I think we are all aware, as there are only four Speakers who occupy the chair, that their time off from the chair is much less than those of us who are on different and various shifts. We very much appreciate the current Speaker and all the Speakers who have been involved in this debate. Although it has sometimes been a little bit hot in the House, I think, overall, there has been very good order and the Speakers have really assisted.

I also thank all of the other House of Commons workers, whether it is the clerks or the security. There are so many people involved who keep this place going so that we can actually be here to debate. I think all of us very much appreciate the long hours people are keeping so that this debate can happen and so that democracy is alive and well in the House of Commons. I do think, regardless of our political perspectives, we all agree on that point.

As we approach 39 or 40 hours, I do not know as it is still Thursday in the House, I want to make a point. The point, which was made in the debate but maybe not well enough, is that this so-called filibuster was created by the Conservative motion that allowed us to do this. That is the reality. I hear the hon. members saying "oh, no". Maybe they are having second thoughts now about what they said in motion. The motion that they created for the debate on this bill has in effect allowed for ongoing debate because there is not a time closure and that point has been made. Maybe they thought members of the NDP would somehow just give up after a couple of hours and pack it in and that would be the end of it. I think the Conservatives are beginning to see that they have a very strong, tough and principled official opposition in the 41st Parliament. We are here to stand up for the rights of the people and we will do that job. Maybe there is a little bit of surprise over on the other side that this debate is now in its 39th hour. However, it was the government that created that optic and space to do that and we are certainly using the opportunity we have to speak loud and clear about why this back to work legislation is so offensive, not only to the members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, but also to all workers and Canadians generally.

Government Orders

After listening to the debate now for many hours, I heard two themes, at least from this side of the House. One of those themes is the need to respect and uphold fair collective bargaining versus the proposition that we have before us which is a lockout and back to work legislation.

This issue of upholding a regime, a history, a reasonable environment of collective bargaining is very important in this country. Member after member on both sides have talked about the economy, small business and our local communities, and surely part of a stable economic environment is having healthy labour relations where two parties can sit down and negotiate. That the sensible way to do things. We have had many examples put forward in the House where, in other jurisdictions and in other countries, there is an emphasis and importance around collective bargaining that the stability is there. We have had examples where workers have representation on the board, where they are part of the governance structure.

It has been a very interesting debate from that point of view to examine the things that work and the things that do not work. The sorry state that we are in right now, where we are facing back to work legislation, is an example of the direction that we do not want to take in this country. Many of us have been raising questions as to what it will lead to. What are the implications of this legislation, not only for the employees at Canada Post but other workers in this country. I think that is a very important element of this debate.

• (6035)

The second theme that has emerged is the overall impact on Canadian society because of what Canada Post has done and what this back to work legislation would do.

Many of us have been raising important issues about the growing inequality in our society. In fact, some amazing information has come forward. For example, three decades ago the gap between an average worker's salary and a CEO's salary was maybe 85 times higher. Now it is up to over 250 times higher. The income gap is growing, whether it is due to the erosion of pensions, or downward pressure on wages, or wage restraint.

Again, those of us who are standing and fighting against the legislation can see what is taking place under the Conservative regime and we are deeply concerned about it. It not just for the members of CUPW, but for all working people and what this would mean in the future.

A very important Canadian value is that sense of equality and equal opportunity. It is the sense that if people go into a work environment, they will not get less wages because they come at a later date or they happen to be younger. We faced that in British Columbia when we had a two-wage minimum wage. People were outraged. Eventually the provincial government had to get rid of it because it was such a bad fiscal, social and economic policy.

These are some examples of terrible directions that have been taken. Some of that discussion has come out in this debate over the last 39 hours.

I want to draw attention to other situations that are taking place because we are discussing and debating federal labour relations.

I draw the attention of the members to another lockout that happened a couple of days ago. About 130 attendants who work for the Rocky Mountaineer Rail Tours were locked out. They are members of Teamsters Local 31 in British Columbia. This is a very popular rail company because of what it provides for tourists and residents who go from Vancouver into Banff. A couple of days ago it locked out .

Adele and her co-workers came by my office to make us aware of what had gone on. I want to let them know that we support them in their struggle and we know what they face. As members of the NDP, we want to show our support and will do everything we can to ensure that their employer does not mirror what Canada Post and the government are doing.

When the member for Toronto—Danforth, the leader of the NDP, began this debate on Thursday night, he spoke about the implications and consequences of the legislation. He expressed his concern about what it would mean in other collective bargaining. We already see that another employer, under federal jurisdiction, has now locked out its employees and not allowed collective bargaining process to take place. We have to be very concerned about this.

I remember the huge campaign that took place on Parliament Hill to bring in anti-scab legislation. We almost got it through. I also remember going to the Ekati Diamond Mine in the Northwest Territories north of Yellowknife to visit workers who were on the picket line and faced strike breakers. A lot of areas of federal law and labour relations need to be addressed.

What is happening with the postal workers and the back to work legislation serves to remind us that we need anti-scab legislation. We need to reinforce and uphold free collective bargaining, and this debate is about that.

I am very proud of our members who have participated in this debate. I only wish the Conservatives would. They will ask a few questions and have some comments, but we have been unable to question them. We can only guess what their answer or position might be. It is a great shame that they have not participated in this debate.

• (6040)

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions. I have listened to the debate on and off, around the clock, as most members, and trying to get some sleep. The debate seems to be stuck on two different views. On the issue of fairness, I am curious to know the thoughts of members on other side of the House. There was an allusion made to hypothetical workers, ones who come in one day and ones who come in the next day.

The first question I would like answered is this. Would it be better, for example, to simply roll back wages or benefits to all workers in that scenario as opposed to having two different wages? If that is the case, it opens up all kinds of possibilities. I suspect the answer is no, but I would like to hear that from the other side.

Government Orders

If the answer is no, then let us get out of this stale debate and into the world of numbers. Canada Post has had a declining circulation rate of 17% in letter mail volume since 2006. It has a \$3.2 billion pension liability. Canada Post members receive, on average at the top year, seven weeks of vacation. Their wages are 17% higher than they are in equivalent jobs in the private sector.

If the solution is higher wages for all, or equal benefits at the high end for all, how on earth does the opposition suggest we pay for this? I do not think it is up to taxpayers across the country to pay for these lavish benefits.

● (6045)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of wage control or wage constraint, I am sure the member and other Conservatives would probably love to see that across the board. However, would they take the same position when it comes to wage restraint for the 20 vice presidents, the president, the CEO and the chairman of Canada Post who make hundreds of thousands of dollars, or the bank presidents? There is a question of basic equity and fairness. This is why we have collective bargaining.

The question begs the answer. That is why it exists, to have that discussion between the two parties as to what is a fair and reasonable compensation. This bill strikes that down. The bill nullifies that process and imposes a wage restraint that is lower than what the employer originally offered.

How could the member possibly support that?

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is a follow-up to the question from the previous member.

As a young person, my generation is entering the workforce. Along those lines, would it be fair for younger workers to be discriminated against?

Also, we know that Canada Post Corporation has recently attempted to implement employment equity, which means it is trying to recruit more persons of visible minorities, women, younger workers, persons with disabilities and aboriginal peoples.

As a result of the government's interference and support of Canada Post Corporation, does this mean these types of workers will enter the workforce and earn a lower wage rate? Would my colleague comment on that?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, Canada Post, like all other federally regulated businesses or enterprises, is required to implement employment equity to ensure its workforce reflects Canadian society at large.

We have to remember that Canada Post is a profitable crown corporation. How many times have we said that? It has a revenue of \$281 million. It is not losing money. Therefore, the idea that it would have a two-tier wage system and would discriminate between existing and new workers, again, sets an incredibly low bar. This is not about a race to the bottom. This should be about fairness, equity, free collective bargaining and the right of people to have decent wages and a decent standard of living.

I cannot understand why the Conservative members do not understand that or see it as being something that is equitable and reasonable in Canadian society.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about logic because unfortunately I think some of my colleagues on the other side of the House really need that today.

First of all, let me clarify something. Everyone wants mail delivery to resume immediately. That is wonderful; all the parties in the House agree on this point. Canada Post employees are not asking for anything more than to start delivering the mail again. Small businesses that make frequent use of Canada Post services to deliver their bills and merchandise, and all Canadians who are waiting for cheques, letters and probably postcards from their cousins who are travelling abroad also want mail delivery to resume. The mail is an essential service that all citizens rely upon.

How did we get to this point? This is where the logic really starts to unravel. To the delight of my colleagues, I will review the events in the month of June that led to the lockout.

On June 2, at 11:59 p.m., Canada Post employees began rotating strikes. On June 8, Canada Post cancelled delivery services throughout the country on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On June 10, the union proposed suspending the strike to continue negotiations and reverting to the previous collective agreement. That same day, Canada Post refused and rejected the union's offer. Four days later, Canada Post declared a national lockout. It is management that has been keeping people from getting their mail since June 14. It is management's fault that the postal service has shut down completely.

I would like to remind the members on the other side of the House and the new CPAC junkies who are currently watching the debate that Canada Post is a crown corporation. The government has the authority to act and it must do so. The government is calling for an immediate return to work with this bill that will impose a labour contract on the workers. This seems a bit inconsistent for a party that favours non-interference.

The Conservative Party need only do one thing if it wants the employees to return to work. It simply needs to do its job and request that the doors be unlocked immediately so that the employees can return to work. It is as simple as that.

It is a fundamental right for employees to be able to negotiate their collective agreement with their employer. The government wants to pass a labour contract that, as my colleague for Gatineau said earlier, the Supreme Court of Canada has deemed illegal. Imposing a labour contract and denying employees the right to negotiate their own collective agreement is completely unjust, especially after these same employees were locked out. Canadians fought too long for a just and fair workplace.

Government Orders

Let us talk about this bill, particularly its lack of logic. Canada Post was proposing a salary increase of 1.9% for the first three years and an increase of 2% for the fourth year. However, this government is proposing an increase of 1.75% for the first year and 1.5% for the second year. That is less than what the employer was offering in its most recent offer. This proposal is totally unacceptable for new employees and we will not accept it. This represents a loss of \$875.50 over four years for young families.

Where is the logic in all this? The government wants to lower the salaries of a generation that is already having trouble making ends meet. The government wants to worsen the living conditions of thousands of people simply for partisan purposes and to keep a few friends happy. It is unacceptable to diminish the quality of life of people who are just entering the labour market. It is unacceptable to cause so much disappointment for young people.

In addition, clause 15 of the bill, which imposes these salaries on employees, has already been deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the highest legal authority in Canada.

On top of all that, this same generation will have to work five years longer before they can retire. Employees will have to contribute much more than their predecessors, up to 10% more, to be able to live with dignity. This is completely illogical. They will be doing exactly the same work as the employees who were hired before them but they will have much more precarious working conditions. They will be doing the same work, but will not have the same rights. Equal conditions for equal work.

• (6050)

On May 2, the Prime Minister promised to work for all Canadians. That includes workers. It is the duty of all members of Parliament to defend their rights and to not attempt to impose an unfair contract.

This government has not used common sense in handling this dispute, and it is directly attacking my generation, the generation that is just entering the job market, by violating its fundamental rights.

I find it most disturbing that this government, with its irresponsible policies, is increasingly distancing itself from the people just a few weeks after being elected. Young people, like other citizens, have never been a priority for this government. To this entire generation, or should I say to my generation, which is disappointed in this attempt to reduce its rights, I say that I will always stand up for our shared principles. I will tirelessly defend the gains we have made and that to which we are entitled, namely freedom and justice.

I realize that, with this government, we must travel a road that will be long and hard. We have no choice and history will judge us. In closing, I will quote a poet whom I really like, Quebecker Valérie Forgues:

Caught in the trap, your life and your dreams taken hostage, your hands tied,
When you have heard what is left of that voice, some white stones, a few minutes, the
silence, this blue ray up above.

• (6055)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for South-

ern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on her speech.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate the workers and management at Cambridge Toyota auto manufacturing in my riding, which just won as the best auto assembly plant in the world. I am very proud of them. Congratulations to them. The plant is non-unionized, by the way.

Folks in my riding have written to me indicating that they would be quite happy to work at Canada Post right now. They would be happy to take a few bucks an hour less, and less benefits. They want the job and would be happy to do the job.

Based on “fundamental rights”, if I could use the member's own words, does that person, male or female, young or old, have the right to work for Canada Post and not join the union? Is that fundamental right not to join respected by the union?

Current postal workers are being denied the right to vote on the offer. Why is that not a fundamental right?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that charming question.

Gains were made in the past by people who currently work for Canada Post. What the government is doing is imposing another condition on the new generation of workers entering the job market. So we have two classes of people who are totally equal but who will have different rights and wages. That is the thing that makes no sense. Here, we are going to have equal workers who will make different wages and have to work more for the exact same thing. That is what we have a problem with.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on the last question.

The Conservatives seem to think it is justifiable to expect people to work for less money. Before the election, I noticed the Conservatives raised the severance pay for all of their high-level officials. They did this at a time when people in this country were facing a \$40 billion deficit.

This is a bloated cabinet. It is the second-largest in Canadian history. At a time of recession and restraint, there are more parliamentary secretaries and more cabinet ministers. It is always the height of irony to hear people who make \$200,000 a year ask why people cannot take less and work for \$18 an hour. It is easy for them to say that.

I also want to point out that when the Conservatives gave billions of dollars of loan guarantees to the banks, they certainly did not put the condition that the executives had to take reduced compensation.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague could comment on that double standard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question, which is very relevant might I add.

Government Orders

Yes, we have a problem. When it is convenient in other circumstances, the discussion will be different. But here, our problem really has to do with the rights and freedoms of workers across the country.

We are prepared to work together to make the bill a fairer piece of legislation. I want to ask the hon. members across the way whether their hearts tell them to come together at the table to figure out what can be done.

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP) Mr. Speaker, it was reported on the news this morning that this debate has been going on in the House of Commons for close to 50 hours, and that this was a record. I would have liked to see us agree on a settlement after going at it for 50 hours. What has happened between Canada Post and CUPW is a complete failure. When parties are unable to sit down and negotiate and when a dispute results in a strike or lockout, I call that a failure.

As parliamentarians, we have decisions to make. I am aware of what is happening in the world today. Wages are being eroded and small and medium-sized businesses are having problems. I am also well aware of what workers are experiencing. They are the ones whose wages are being eroded and who are living in uncertain times, facing the possibility of a two-tiered system. Our job is to come up with a solution. As our slogan so aptly states “Let’s work together”. If every person was willing to give a little, then we would be able to find a solution, instead of imposing legislation that comes down hard on people.

Bill C-6 will impact people’s everyday life if adopted by the House. The workers are the ones who will feel the effects. As parliamentarians, we must also think about that. We pass legislation and that is the end of it. However, these workers will have to live with the consequences of this legislation for four years. This bill will help to create an unhealthy climate. No other outcome is possible when a lockout is ordered, when a strike is called or when strikebreakers are called in. I have experienced these situations firsthand and the climate is most unsettling. One can feel the tension in the cafeteria. Disputes arise among workers, harassment occurs, undue pressure is brought to bear, scuffles break out and verbal assaults take place. What will happen next?

The number of workplace accidents will increase, because employees will be angry and will work faster. They will fall and injure themselves. The problem of workplace accidents will then need to be addressed. Workers will file grievances, because they will be dissatisfied and unhappy. More money will be spent and the climate will deteriorate even further. One can imagine what this will mean for managers and for employees forced to work in these conditions. For four years, the situation will be unmanageable, akin to conditions at the Tower of Babel. What can we do to help these people?

As parliamentarians, we have to find a solution to allow the workers to go back to work. We have to work together, democratically, without imposing legislation. We could force the two parties to sit down, negotiate and find a solution. But we are forgetting that even after we have passed a law, life goes on. And so we have to think about the people involved. We cannot get along

amongst ourselves, so how can we impose legislation on people who are not getting along either?

And so I am asking that we amend this bill, in order to get the parties to negotiate within a certain period of time, with the help of an arbitrator or a mediator. As I have said before in the House, the workers, the employer and society are going to have to pay the price for sick leave, work accidents, an unhealthy work atmosphere and the grievances that are going to follow in the wake of this. We could even see another conflict break out when the agreement expires in three or four years.

Consequently I am asking the Conservative government to put water in its wine and amend Bill C-6 so that this law is not rammed through, doing damage to everyone and making people angry. I am aware that things aren’t going well for anybody. If we want to do this, we can do it together, and if we can’t agree, this too will have failed. Bill C-6 will go through, but we will not have solved the problem. Yes, the workers will have returned to work, but we are going to create a whole other set of problems. This is not right, not logical, and not the kind of work we should be doing. Our work is to rally a strong and united country, where people work for good wages and live in decent conditions, with fair pensions.

And insofar as the two classes of workers or the “orphan clauses” are concerned, obviously it is not very pleasant in a factory or an office when one employee has this while another employee has that, and another employee does not have this or that. You can just imagine how difficult that is going to be to manage later. Think about the quarrels and the work atmosphere this could bring about. We have to look at the human side of the equation. I know that there are going to be decreases in salaries, but these people are not cattle. They are workers who pay sales taxes and income taxes and who keep Canada’s economy going.

I want to say it and repeat it, and I will beat this drum until the last possible minute in the House: this bill needs to be amended.

• (6100)

We have to come to an agreement and force the two parties to sit down. We need cut-off dates to make sure there is a positive outcome so we can overcome this impasse and so everyone will be a winner—the government, Canada Post and its workers. That is how we will get out of this crisis. We must not create a climate that would be unfavourable for us. People will be up in arms and we will pay dearly for it once again.

• (6105)

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his contribution to the discussion this afternoon.

I just want to inject some facts into the discussion. Some facts were given earlier. It is good to have passion about these issues. It is important that people have a good living and a good pension. I want to talk briefly about the Canada Post pension plan and ask a question.

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Canada's pension liability in 2011 is \$14 billion. Currently Canada Post Corporation employees receive a fully indexed defined benefit pension by age 60, including comprehensive health benefits. Good for them.

Close to 22,000 employees, about a third of the workforce, will retire in the next 10 years. Canada Post employees and the corporation pay into that pension plan. The employees contribute about 40% and the corporation contributes another 60%. Currently there is an unfunded liability in that pension plan of \$3.2 billion.

I would like to ask what helpful advice the member opposite can give to Canada Post to find that \$3.2 billion to ensure that those workers have a viable pension going forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Patry: Mr. Speaker, I come from a company that has a shortfall of \$540 million currently. Agreements have been negotiated with the employer, which over a given period will slowly inject money to make up the shortfall. We cannot ask the employer to pay that whole amount tomorrow morning. It is not possible. It is possible to make a commitment to pay an amount every year over the next 6 to 10 years to make up the shortfall. That is how we can manage this situation.

Where I come from, contributions were suspended at times in the past. Not any more. Yet the employer will inject \$98 million this year. Next year or in other years, it will pay a bit more to make it up over six years. If we can do this, so can Canada Post.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all let me thank my colleague from Jonquière—Alma for sharing his professional and life experience with the House.

On another note, a few months ago, Charles Sirois, chair of the board of CIBC, a major chartered bank in Canada that needs no introduction, spoke out against the heavy emphasis on natural resources in our economy. In his view, this is a sign of an economy that is at risk of stagnation.

Canada Post on the other hand is a crown corporation that adds a lot of value to our society, especially to the millions of small businesses that support our economy every day.

I would like to ask my colleague if he can explain why the Conservatives are so determined to reduce the quality of life of all Canadians.

Mr. Claude Patry: Mr. Speaker, what concerns me, as I said in this House the other day, is that this sends a message to private companies and others about pension funds. These days, companies are all talking about pension funds. Everybody wants to eliminate pension funds. Pension funds were not built in a decade. My father fought for them in 1957: he went on strike at Arvida to get a pension fund. In 1976, I went through a lockout and a strike to get a pension, too. I paid out of my pocket and the employer paid out of its pocket. But if the employer had paid its share every year as usual, we would not have been in the hole.

If we start doing that, we will not need to pass laws to make our people work after age 65: they are going to have to work until they die because they will not be able to retire with a decent pension.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thinking about that pension plan and looking at the holdings in the Canada Post pension plan. The pensioners, the union members, actually own shares in these companies through their pension plan: Toronto Dominion Bank, \$202 million; Royal Bank of Canada, \$185 million; Bank of Nova Scotia, \$176 million.

The NDP's stated policy is to massively increase taxes on this pension plan through those holdings. What is the hon. member's position on his party's policy of a 30% increase in taxes against this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Patry: Mr. Speaker, I am not a tax lawyer or an accountant, but I do not believe we will have to raise taxes. We might do better to cut the million-dollar or billion-dollar bonuses given to company executives and distribute them to those people. That might be a solution.

• (6110)

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to point out how totally unacceptable the approach taken by Canada Post is to New Democratic members, but also to a majority of my constituents. Speaking today on behalf of the legitimate battle being fought by Canada Post employees is a very important duty for me, because this will be an historic battle and will remain in our memory for numerous reasons. And I believe the outcome will have a decisive effect on our collective future.

First, it is essential to note that this battle is part of a long fight to preserve public services, which are too often under attack from present-day governments. We do not think that the Conservative members understand the importance to a country of strong public services.

Canada Post is in fact one of the best examples of successful Canadian public services. It is important to the Canadian public to have an excellent postal service that is accessible and affordable. Postal services are essential for all countries. This is particularly true in rural areas. Recently, in my riding, we have received letters from people who are worried about the closing of a post office in a village in the riding. People have good reason to be worried.

The post office is often the last remaining place in villages where federal public services can be accessed. As well, with our low population density and the great distances that must be travelled, how are services like these supposed to be profitable, at a reasonable cost, if a private company operates them? It is impossible. The reason we are able to provide excellent postal services to as far away as Îles de la Madeleine is because Canada Post provides them, as a crown corporation.

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The extremely lucrative Quebec City-Windsor corridor means that affordable services can be provided for people in large regions like the Gaspé and Îles de la Madeleine. The role of a government that wants to support its people is precisely to preserve a crown corporation like Canada Post.

A government with vision would use the existing infrastructures, all those many post offices, to deliver more federal services to residents of rural ridings. They would be able to obtain forms and information about passports, income tax, employment insurance, and so on. Post offices could be used as a satellite antenna for all federal services.

But instead of that, instead of this vision for the future, Canada Post's managers want to deregulate and enter into business partnerships. They are privatizing the postal services by stealth.

For example, they refuse to extend post office opening hours, so that they are open for business past 5 o'clock, or over the weekend. Instead, Canada Post favours postal outlets in pharmacies. The employees of these businesses end up doing the same work as Canada Post clerks, but with a salary half that of their Canada Post counterparts, and with no working conditions to protect them.

The union estimates that this subcontracting has led to loss of approximately 6000 wicket clerk jobs with good working conditions, replaced by jobs that are not protected and have no job security. Is a crown corporation that acts this way, and promotes job insecurity, being socially responsible? Do these indirect employees of Canada Post deserve these conditions? Of course they do not.

Canada Post's attitude, which indirectly favours privatization, is directly threatening services to the public. Private sector businesses will lobby harder and harder to privatize Canada Post's services. If the crown corporation continues to sell off its best assets, the other services may no longer be profitable, and then might disappear or become very costly.

The attitude being displayed by Canada Post management and by the government, which is in bed with the employer on this issue, is extremely obnoxious. Obnoxious, because it is an attack on public services, when in fact Canada Post is a profitable crown corporation. In 2009, Canada Post made \$281 million in profits.

Thanks to the conscientious and devoted day-to-day work of its employees, Canada Post has been raking in profits for roughly 15 years. It is, therefore, a profitable government enterprise. How can the government justify diminishing the working conditions of the employees of a profitable government enterprise? There is no rational justification. There are only ideological explanations.

In fact, the current battle being waged by the employees of Canada Post, in addition to being a fight to preserve public services, is part of a backdrop of a very long history of union battles—battles fought to improve people's working conditions, and by extension the living conditions of families and entire populations.

• (6115)

Canada would not be the country that it is today without the battles waged by workers. People in my region have been a part of this struggle for over 60 years. I would like to single out the epic

struggle by the workers of Murdochville, which remains etched in our memories.

The battle Canada Post workers are waging will not only help clerks, mail carriers, and other Canada Post employees. This struggle will be an example for other public servants and for private sector employees. This is a battle to have the rights of workers recognized.

First and foremost, it is about the right to negotiate a collective agreement. Currently, we are faced with a public institution, the government, the caretaker of the law, and yet it does not follow this law. This government does not recognize the right to negotiate and is allowing a public employer to treat its employees in a most unfair manner by denying them the right to strike and to bargain.

How can the Conservative members, in all good conscience, vote for a bill that rides roughshod over fundamental rights recognized by thousands of public servants? I would like an answer to that. Are they not aware that these employees are their fellow citizens, that they to contribute to the public purse, and that they have family responsibilities? Why is this government refusing to share Canada Post's profits with postal service employees?

Why does it accept that an increasing number of non-unionized subcontractors work in their facilities, including those who do maintenance work in post offices? Another example is the work usually done by mechanics who are qualified union members. That work is increasingly done in garages outside Canada Post facilities. These people should be unionized and covered by health and safety provisions.

In fact, the Conservative government is showing the public that it does not care about employees' working conditions. Conservative members are proposing to force postal employees to go back to work. They do not care about the plight of these men and women who work around the clock to provide this essential service to our community.

Indeed, Canada Post management wants to make the employees take many steps backward. First, it wants to impose clauses that create a double standard adversely affecting new employees, and that is totally unacceptable. It wants to raise the retirement age for these employees and reduce their annual leave. It also wants to lower their basic salary by 18% compared to that of their fellow workers. Why should new employees be treated so unfairly?

The employer is also jeopardizing workers' health and safety. That worries many people and it is highly objectionable. Workers' health is threatened through many restrictions relating to medical coverage.

Many postal employees are women and their working conditions are often not on par with those provided by provincial governments. For example, they are not eligible for preventive withdrawal when they are pregnant. That is the kind of reasonable demands that employees are making. These are not whims. It is only normal that these people would want to protect their salaries and their pensions. Their fight will help other workers, but if they back down, it will adversely affect other workers too.

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Workers have the right to negotiate and to go on strike. They did negotiate in good faith for eight months. They delivered the mail to their fellow citizens, including pension cheques. Because they did not want to drastically affect services to the public, they opted for rotating strikes.

It is the employer who took drastic action and imposed a lockout. The employer and the government are taking Canadians hostage by depriving them of essential services. They trample the rights of workers in a profitable crown corporation. Conservative members show no respect for laws or for workers' health and safety. That attitude is shameful for Canada. This is why, as the member representing my constituents, I oppose this measure and I condemn this deplorable situation.

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of the comments I have heard from this speaker and some of the others really upset me. One of the things he suggested is that we on this side do not understand the importance of a strong public service. Then he ended his speech by saying that we do not even care about their safety and all the other things. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I belonged to one of the strongest unions in the country for almost 25 years. In fact, I was part of their negotiating committee. I was asked to step down for three years and then they invited me back because they needed someone with a little common sense on their negotiating team. I was asked to step down when I questioned the huge salary increases they asked for. I was asked to leave because I asked who would pay for that. That is the question I will be coming to in a minute.

I have been here almost all night listening to the speeches. The rhetoric that is coming from my socialist friends is almost frightening.

I come from the province of Saskatchewan, and it was not until we got rid of the NDP that the province took off and became successful.

Who are the customers of Canada Post that we should be considering? Who are the people who will have to pay the bills? Who is standing up for those customers? Who is defending their needs?

• (6120)

Mr. Philip Toone: I thank the member for the question. It took a while for me to understand it, but I think I have it. Sometimes on the other side it may take a while to express it, but I think I have it now.

Over here it is clear that we are very concerned with the health and safety of workers in this country. For instance, in my riding the government has proposed in its budget to cut search and rescue services for people out at sea. I do not think that the people in my riding will take kindly to paying with their lives for the budget cutbacks that this government has proposed and passed.

If the Conservatives really want a good health and safety record, they can start right here on the Hill and start proposing health and safety for their own employees.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his intervention.

One of the things we have been trying to get across to the government is that there is an opportunity to actually get a compromise going, if they want to. We have been here for the last couple of days and we have put the offer out to take a look at what is in this legislation that could be changed. In fact, the two parties would be amenable to actually changing the legislation.

I am glad my colleague brought up the health and safety provisions, which have not been promulgated. Those who work on Parliament Hill do not have the same health and safety standards as if they are across the street, on Bank Street. That is a fact, and that should be changed.

I just wanted to know from my friend whether or not he thinks—

The Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister of state is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting.

The member suggested that the NDP has put forward some compromises. I have not seen any such thing, just demands from the NDP. So I am asking him to table those amendments and compromises.

The Speaker: That is not a point of order; it is more a point of debate.

I will allow the hon. member for Ottawa Centre a few seconds to wrap up his question.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to find a compromise here. Would that not be what Canadians want? What is reasonable and fair? That is the question that I have to my colleague.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, certainly the first thing we should be looking at is we should be negotiating collective agreements in this country, not imposing them.

There is a question here that there might be a lack of good faith if the offer that is on the table is actually inferior to what the bosses had proposed in the first place.

The law we are looking to pass here is actually a slap in the face for the workers who have worked for years offering excellent service to the Canadian public, a service that has been profitable. I consider this completely unacceptable.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to read a message from a British Columbia resident, somebody who voted for the NDP in the most recent election.

He names the leader of the NDP, and he says that he voted for his party in the last election but that now he regrets it. He says that the NDP promised they would look out for the average Canadian's interest but now they are against back to work legislation for the postal workers who are affecting average Canadians. He stated that incomes and payroll are the single most important thing to every Canadian and the postal lockout does not help at all.

He asks when did the unions become the average Canadian. Because the NDP is the opposition party, he says that does not mean they need to oppose everything that is put forward without even looking into the matter.

He says the NDP has become the crying baby—

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• (6125)

The Speaker: Order. I will have to stop the member there to allow a few seconds for the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine to respond.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, certainly I share the concerns of many Canadians when it comes to the lack of postal services.

However, we have to remember that the reason the cheques are not being delivered is because Canada Post has imposed a lockout. It is not the workers who are the problem, it is the bosses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the outset, one of the Conservatives' arguments has been that it was necessary to consider the economic stakes associated with the labour dispute at Canada Post. I am in complete agreement with them that this is something very important. What I deplore, on the other hand, is that in the context of the debate they have not taken the time to explain the full details of all the ins and outs of this economic damage. They have been content with generalities, with simply spouting slogans and constantly repeating the same questions. This is deplorable.

I will modestly attempt to put all the economic impacts of Canada Post's activities and the stakes of this dispute into perspective. First, I must say that I have had a longstanding interest in economics. I have read some classics in the genre and particularly admire the work of the Canadian-born American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith. Mr. Galbraith began his career as a member of President Roosevelt's team during the depression of the 1930s. He was on the team that created the New Deal, and made his contribution to correcting the problems arising from the Great Depression. Next, he took on certain responsibilities during World War II, and studied the effects of the Allied bombing on the German economy. He also looked into wage and price controls in the context of that conflict. So in the postwar era he was someone with the right experience to develop a highly articulate economic philosophy that could clarify the issues and the ins and outs of the decisions made by our governments, our companies and individuals themselves.

One of the conclusions he reached was that any very large consolidated company has almost total control over both its activities and its prices, and hence over its fate and its future, as is not the case for the small company or the single individual who is at the mercy of economic ups and downs. What is interesting is that it is clear that Canada Post has virtually total control over the price of its products, which are offered to all Canadians. This possibility does not prevent it from offering its products at prices which are very low relative to other countries in the world, even though it is a crown corporation. Clearly, the fact that it is a public, crown-owned corporation is an advantage.

Mr. Galbraith examined the role and the importance of the various economic players. He came to the conclusion that the state, in its interventions, had a place comparable to that of any company. Where he was much more far-sighted was in giving a central place to the human being as an economic player. It must be said that he was not the only expert to come to that conclusion.

Mr. Galbraith then wanted to understand what the effects of the major economic decisions made by the entire population of a country

might be. He observed that, for every dollar given back to the wealthiest people in a country or an economic unit, through massive income tax cuts, for example, that dollar was unfortunately not reinvested in the economy. Those people did not need the extra dollar, and so they hoarded it; in other words, they took it out of economic activity, and eventually that can lead to stagnation. On the other hand, when that dollar was given to the middle class, and particularly to the most disadvantaged people in our economy, it was immediately reinvested in the economy, since those people could not hoard it or save it, because they had urgent need of it.

• (6130)

Mr. Galbraith then came to the conclusion that investing in the population was basically the best engine of economic development, as many countries in the world have in fact proved.

Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, was a professor of moral philosophy, and his magnum opus has been widely quoted virtually everywhere. Unfortunately, it has been quoted wildly incorrectly. All Adam Smith did was observe the cruelty of life in his day. He did not make laws or principles to be applied from that; he simply observed that without safeguards and regulations, unfortunately, human beings were the playthings of the interests of the powerful.

The conclusion he reached was that it was very important to have economic ethics, to guide all the players and, ultimately, the state, should these players fail to behave properly.

It is rather unfortunate to see the ideas of such great men taken hostage to justify ideas and policies that may be harmful to all Canadians.

I am now going to change subjects. Let us come back to the present day and apply the ideas of great Canadians to the subject of current impacts and policies, Bill C-6 being basically one more step, one way of diminishing our quality of life.

Charles Sirosis, whom I quoted earlier, said this a few months ago:

We can decide to dig holes in our subsoil and pump out all the natural resources we have. We can decide that this is what will secure the future of our children and grandchildren.

However, in his opinion, the consequences of that choice will be:

Perhaps we will not be in a state of complete poverty, but we will also not be wealthy; that much is obvious. And we will not be part of the movement that can be observed all over the world, where genuine value is created through creativity and innovation, and putting them to use.

I would note that Mr. Sirosis is the chairman of the board of directors of CIBC and the former chairman and CEO of Teleglobe, a company with communications systems covering the entire world.

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A few days later, Mr. Stephen Jarislowsky, the great Montrealer and renowned investor who founded his business in 1955, was concerned about the boom in company acquisitions in the natural resources sector. He saw nothing logical in this, on the contrary. He compared the situation to the real estate bubble in the United States. The \$1300 price tag on an ounce of gold a few months prior was, in his opinion, an unfortunate harbinger of things to come. An ounce of gold now costs almost \$1600. At the same time, the TSX plummeted. These were all signs that our economy was shrinking.

All the while, the government claimed that everything was fine and dandy. That attitude is bizarrely reminiscent of the Conservatives in the 2008 campaign. Blinded by their blinkers, they were alone in failing to acknowledge the threat of a looming recession.

A quality postal service is essential to support the creativity and innovation that Mr. Sirois was referring to. As I said earlier, it is vital for the millions of small and medium-sized businesses that rely on these postal services to run their operations.

Bill C-6 is further evidence of the Conservatives weakening our economy and refusing to acknowledge the fundamental role that human beings play in any healthy economy. Standing up for the general working conditions of workers is of paramount importance to ensuring a future for our children and our grandchildren. I make this statement unequivocally, with evidence to back it up.

• (6135)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like so many of us, I have been receiving literally hundreds of emails over the last 48 hours. The emails are from Canadians across the board. Some are from small business owners who are very upset that their mail is not delivered, and some are from seniors who want to have their mail delivered.

I am also receiving emails and correspondence from postal workers. They are telling me—and I have just become aware of this over the last few hours—that they are actually not allowed to vote on the offer that has been presented.

They will not listen to Canadians. They will not listen to postal workers. It appears they are only listening to one group, the unions. They are being driven by their left-wing social ideology, which has destroyed countries around the world. When will the NDP begin to listen to everyday Canadians, including the postal workers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for having provided us with a childhood memory and for rehashing a question that has already been asked dozens, if not hundreds of times already. It reminds me of those long car trips counting different coloured Volkswagen Beetles. It helped us wile away the time when we were children.

Sadly, as I explained previously, all the complaints being levelled at us are but a mere smokescreen. In any major union organization of tens of thousands of people, it is quite normal for there to be dissenting voices. There are limits to everything however; we need to focus more on the substance of the debate.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the remarks he made in this House.

I would also like to ask him to comment on one of the central facts in this debate: that this government is denying Canadians and the representatives of postal workers the right to collective bargain. It is all very well for him to talk about the importance of collective bargaining and how it benefits our society in general. But does he not consider this but a sign of the extremely perilous times ahead for our entire country?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I think that is an excellent question which deserves our full attention and consideration.

Indeed, it is very troubling that bargaining rights are being denied for a group of workers who are members of a union where all the democratic operating mechanisms are functioning. We have had absolutely no evidence that there was a problem from that standpoint.

There have even been some virtual suggestions, though I would not want to draw any hasty conclusions. It has almost been suggested that it was necessary to limit, if not deny, the right to organize. Personally, I find that shocking.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for our colleague on the other side of the House regarding profits for small and medium-sized businesses. As we know, the present lockout has caused problems for SMEs.

I will share with the House an email from an entrepreneur in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

[*English*]

Here is the statement: “As an owner of a small business who employs a dozen people, I can tell you that the impact on our cash flow is crippling. The flow of money into our company from our many customers, most of whom are independent retailers, has basically stopped for two weeks while our suppliers, who are large businesses, are stopping shipments because cheques have been caught in the backlog of mail. We, and many other small businesses I interact with, are facing the reality of having to lay off employees, which is the very last thing that should be happening.”

What does the member opposite have to say about how his proposed solution will help small business?

• (6140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I find my the hon. member's remarks particularly relevant. As the small business critic, I am also very concerned about what is happening now.

I find it truly deplorable that this government, in supporting the actions of Canada Post management and going even further, is taking the people hostage and creating sky-high costs for our small and medium-sized businesses. I demand that the government remove the padlocks immediately so that negotiations can be started again.

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Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government says that it cannot stop the lockout ordered by Canada Post. And yet it has the power to legislate on wage increases. There is a rather flagrant inconsistency here. Either they can intervene or they cannot. If they can intervene on wage increases, maybe they can also simply put a stop to the lockout. That way everyone will be satisfied, for it is the simplest solution. What is important is that everyone comes out a winner. As I understand it, with a special bill everyone will instead come out a loser, that is, no one will be satisfied. The workers will not feel that they have bargained freely, and management will feel that its workers are going back to work reluctantly. Most important of all is that things such as the workplace climate and productivity will suffer in the years ahead with this sort of bill.

It would be so much simpler to stop the lockout, allow the employees back to work and send the parties back to the bargaining table. But that is simple. We often hear that Canada Post is autonomous. And yet the authorities at Canada Post are continually demanding more autonomy. So they must not feel all that autonomous.

The other important thing is that Canada Post is a public service. It is a public corporation. It is not a private corporation. When managing a public corporation, the priorities are not the same as for private corporation. When one manages a private sector company, one works for shareholders, and when one owns a small or medium-sized business, one works for his own benefit. However, when one manages a public corporation, one does not work for his immediate boss, namely the government, but rather in the best interests of all Canadians. That is the actual mandate of Canada Post. Its mandate is not to manage based on goals set by the employer, but rather based on the best interests of Canadian society. I do not have the impression that this is the kind of management that we have seen at Canada Post in recent months. I find it deplorable that Canada Post lost sight of the notion of public service and interest. I would love to see it rediscover this notion, because it may be the best way to serve.

Since we should manage with the public interest in mind, I am asking Canada Post, because the government cannot do anything, to have the courage to end the lock-out and allow employees to return to work, in the best interests of Canadian society. That is fundamental. It may require a bit of courage, but it is in everyone's common interest. The simplest solution would be for Canada Post to have the courage to end the lock-out. I am putting this request on the record here, in the House of Commons.

Let us get back to the bill as such. I do not like the way it deals with the notion of arbitration, because the arbitrator who might be appointed will not be free to fulfill his mandate properly. He will be bound by a series of rules. The result is that anyone could do the job, while this is actually a highly complex task. Indeed, the arbitrator is already being told what salary increases will be imposed. He is already being told whether to opt for solution A or B, and he is already being told, through guiding principles, which way he must lean. A professional arbitrator will find that this is not a very challenging mandate, because collective agreements are usually complex documents.

• (6145)

I would have liked for the arbitrator to have full authority to determine what is satisfactory, based on representations made by both sides. It should not be a matter of siding completely with one side and rejecting everything from the other side. I do not agree with that approach. I am convinced that both sides have interesting proposals, and it would be unfortunate to let four years go by without the best ideas from both parties being included in the agreement. I find that approach deplorable. It is like denying the fact that both sides can make reasonable proposals. I think there are intelligent people on both sides, and I wish the best ideas would be included in the agreement. This could only benefit Canadian society.

My other concern relates, of course, to the clauses that create a double standard regarding salaries. I find these clauses totally unacceptable. It is ridiculous to discriminate on the basis of age, as is essentially the case here, since these clauses primarily affect younger workers. We have abolished discrimination based on salary. Ever since I was young—and that was many years ago—I have heard that we should have equal pay for equal work. Suddenly, we are backtracking. I simply cannot understand that. I cannot understand why we would backtrack on such a fundamental principle in Canadian society.

I understand full well that there may be objectives, but perhaps they can be achieved in another way. Some day, these things will be redefined within Canada Post and we will have to see how that can be done, but I do not believe in solving one problem by creating another.

To give my colleagues an idea of what it means on a daily basis, over and above the fact that it is unacceptable, let them imagine trying to manage two different salary groups with different vacation time and pension funds; to someone with an understanding of management, it is already a nightmare. It is not helpful; rather, it is like shooting oneself in the foot. The savings they think are being generated will have to be reinvested to manage these problems, leaving no one satisfied. I do not believe that this is a solution, either in terms of management or morally. In fact, I believe it is truly reprehensible.

Furthermore, I fear that the orphan clauses being imposed at Canada Post will serve as an example and later be extended to other sectors. Is this a Trojan horse, bringing orphan clauses to the entire federal public service and society in general? I should hope not. I truly hope that we will not go down that road, because all we will be doing is creating resentment. I do not believe that anyone on either side of the House wants to create resentment. I do not believe that. But we must consider the consequences and the options. We need to consider where this will take us. That is why we must consider these problems from a different angle.

I truly want to believe that senior management at Canada Post is independent. People are appointed and given mandates. However, when senior managers are hired and given their mandates, perhaps they could be given real incentives not to engage in confrontation. For example, why not cut the CEO's salary during a lockout. Those kinds of things could be done. Perhaps then they would be more proactive in resolving issues.

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• (6150)

In conclusion, it is important to remember that Canada Post is a public corporation. For that reason, it must set an example in the way it treats its employees. I think that there is still work to be done and ending the lockout would be a step in the right direction.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the official opposition realizes that this chamber is not a negotiating table; it is a table.

This House is for the voice of all Canadians. We are not supposed to be mouthpieces for unions. We are supposed to represent the common people. As such, I am going to read two brief messages from the people we represent.

First, from a postal worker:

I want to deliver mail to my customers. They deserve better than this. They are the big losers in this. And for some of them, they depend on their mail for drugs and other medical supplies. Some elderly live pay cheque to pay cheque. As for myself, my wages are cut.

This one is from someone who identifies himself as a former NDP supporter:

People striking for pensions are out of reality, as hardly anybody has pensions anymore. Don't they realize that the post office could quickly be out of business due to competition? I got my CPP cheque, but no other mail. No bills, no medical notices, but I pay my bills online because of stamp prices. Maybe it should all go private. Oh yeah, this former socialist can actually say that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her remarks. She has backed up the point I was trying to make. Canada Post, as a public entity, must be able to establish policies based on the best interests of Canadian society. If Canada Post is aware of this, clearly, the first thing it should do is end the lockout and then everything will go back to normal.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really liked the hon. member's speech. He raised some very interesting points.

I would like him to elaborate on several of them. There are a number of draconian clauses in the bill before us. Take, for example, the orphan clauses. Can he tell us more about what he thinks the long-term consequences of these clauses will be for young families?

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, when a person is young—I was young once, just like everyone—one of the first things that person wants to do is to become independent, start a family, be responsible and raise children. If orphan clauses are imposed, there will be two types of consequences. First, the young people in question will be unhappy at work. They will be jealous of the older workers who are not affected by the orphan clauses. Second, it will take them longer to achieve their goals, like buying a house, taking vacations, buying things for their children, and so on. That is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am just revisiting the Canada Post pension plan.

Take a look at the companies whose shares are owned by pensioners at Canada Post: for example, Suncor, \$154 million; CNRL, \$117 million; Talisman, \$94 million; and Encana, Sunova, Chevron, Exxon Mobile, Royal Dutch Shell, all owned by the pensioners of Canada Post.

Curiously, during the election the NDP proposed a platform that would have imposed billions and billions of dollars in taxes on the holdings of these Canada Post pensioners. I am wondering if the hon. member has given any thought to the devastating impact of NDP policies on Canadian pensioners.

• (6155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for repeating this question, which we have heard numerous times.

I do not believe that we spoke of tax hikes in our proposals, as the members have suggested. What is clear is that the objective of the pension fund is to provide a nest egg for employees. It must grow as much as possible for the benefit of the workers.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you were not in the Chair earlier when people thanked the Speakers in this place for the duty you are performing for this House. I want to thank you for the many hours you are putting in.

I am rising once again to address the Conservative government's back-to-work legislation. From what I have been hearing from Canadians from coast to coast, they are waking up to what they consider the absolute abuse of power to be found in Bill C-6. The good people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek know me well, and they will tell members that I have a fundamental and profound belief in the rights of all Canadians, rights that are guaranteed by our charter.

Because of my career in the labour movement, in which every post I held for 28 years with the labour movement was unpaid, the rights of workers to be represented by a union of their choice and for free collective bargaining is especially important to me. That is the one and only way Canadian workers can improve their collective well-being.

Before I go further, we have heard all the talk about big labour bosses and whatever. We have never heard Thomas d'Aquino called a big labour employer representative. Why the language thrown at people all the time?

Another fair question to ask would be, just what has Canadians' membership in a union done for them?

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Canadian workers have seen advances in health and safety protection. They have seen improvement to their hours of work. They have had their deferred wages invested in workplace pensions, and of course increases to their pay. We had one member talking a moment ago about how there are few pensions in Canada, as if it is a good thing. It is a terrible thing.

One of Canadians' charter rights is to collectively bargain with their employer. In this House, during this debate, the members of the Conservative Party love to throw around what they consider slights: "big labour", or "big labour bosses", or "friends of big labour". They do so with a disdain that can only come from lack of knowledge. I will give you one example. I am sure most of today's non-progressive Conservatives have not only forgotten this but perhaps even their new members may not even know it. It will probably be a surprise to the younger members that one of their own groups of base supporters were the very same people who started the modern-day labour movement.

It happened in 1946 in cities like Hamilton and Windsor. It took the returning veterans from the Second World War who took to the streets of those communities, demanding fair wages and better and safer working conditions. In Hamilton, workers and veterans fought side by side in the streets, even on the waters of Hamilton harbour, for collective bargaining rights and the right to form a union. These were the very same veterans who had fought the Axis powers to a standstill. Then they had to come home and fight corporate Canada, with the same view of protecting their rights and improving the lives of all Canadians, as they had just done overseas. These brave souls were the same people who lived by such creeds as "an injury to one is an injury to all". These veterans now turned trade unionists lived by the philosophy as well that what they asked for themselves they wished for all.

That philosophical view of how to better their lives and the lives of working Canadians 50 years ago led to a grassroots prairie political party, made up of farmers, clerks, church ministers, and workers of all stripes in the CCF, to come together with those veterans turned trade unionists and other labour activists to form the NDP, a party I have been a proud member of for 35 years. So this government should have little doubt as to why our party, the NDP, will always come down on the side of the working people of Canada.

I mentioned in my opening speech in the hoist motion my history in the Hamilton labour movement and the position my local membership of Bell Canada workers at the CWC chose to vote me into, that took me into the broader Canadian labour movement via the Hamilton and District Labour Council. It was at the Hamilton and District Labour Council in the late 1970s and early 1980s, along with the member for Hamilton Centre, that I learned of the struggle of the 1946 strikers in Hamilton and Windsor.

● (6200)

I heard directly from those old timers of their sense of shame and humiliation upon returning to Canada from defending their country. They could not get decent-paying jobs, nor the respect of employers, until they finally stood up to them in 1946.

My own father worked as a section man on the Canadian National Railway. He was a low-paid labourer, and in New Brunswick in the late 1940s or 1950s, it was a secure position that he valued. I

remember well the buttons he used to wear on his cap that showed he had paid up his union dues. He was a member of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Transport and General Workers, CBRTGW. It was that union that struck CN in the 1950s to get their workers, and ultimately all Canadians, the 40-hour work week.

One of the phrases that came out of the late 1970s that epitomizes much of the way I look at the world is "Question authority". In fact, I first noticed that on a bumper sticker on a car of a delegate at the labour council.

Questioning authority has never been more important than it was in the 1970s in northern Ontario. Miners went on strike because of the extremely poor working conditions in their mine. That strike led to the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, Bill 70. That gave workers the right to do what should be obvious: the right to refuse unsafe work.

Questioning authority is exactly what the NDP has been doing in these long hours of debate. We are questioning the authority of this labour minister and this Prime Minister, because, to be clear, in our view they have overstepped their authority with Bill C-6.

I seriously doubt this will come as much of a surprise to most Canadians, who have seen this "my way or the highway" approach regularly from this government. Particularly, the 60% of Canadians who did not vote for the Conservatives already know this government has taken positions on foreign affairs and in other areas that not only surprises them but greatly concerns them. They know the shifts of policy that have taken place have led to a loss of respect for Canada in Europe and much of the rest of the world. Now, in our own country, once heralded around the world as protector of human rights and people's rights, we have the spectacle of the Canadian government prepared to shut down the collective bargaining rights of the workers at Canada Post.

I would suggest that this would lead Canadians to ponder the obvious question: who is next?

For the record, I would like to make an observation. On a recent vote on the NDP hoist motion, our good friends in the Liberal Party of Canada switched sides on that vote and cast their lot with the Conservatives. I am sure there will be a cheer that comes from the other side of the House. The workers of Canada in the last election finally came to understand the fairweather friend the Liberal Party of Canada truly is, and the result was that Canadians significantly reduced the Liberal Party caucus. Older Canadians had known for a long time that the Liberals could not be counted on to go the distance in protecting their rights, because sooner or later they would have to choose between Canadian workers and their Bay Street friends. The history of that choice is very clear.

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The NDP, on behalf of Canadian workers from coast to coast, calls on the Conservative government to simply pause to reflect on the fact that they have overstepped in this case. The posties are not your enemy. Canadian workers are not your enemies, so do not treat them as such. Use your position as the Government of Canada to further improve the lives of Canadian workers. Do not trample on their rights. Assume the responsibility of your role as protectors of the Constitution of Canada. Work with the NDP. Amend this bill. Restore the balance to labour relations for Canadian workers and end the lockout. Let us put the workers back to work.

• (6205)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know a nice lady who worked at Bundy of Canada in Cambridge, my riding. The workers went on strike and they did get some increased benefits. A couple of years later they went on strike and got increased benefits, and a couple of years later they repeated the same scenario. The company went bankrupt. The lady lost her job. To my knowledge, she has never worked since. She was a single mother of three, and I know this in such detail because I married the best looking of the three kids. No offence to Alan and Glen, but Val was the best looking.

This is what the Government of Canada is concerned about, the fragility of the public interest in this current economic climate and protecting the financial security of Canadians overall.

Why does this member continue to risk literally playing Russian roulette with the Canadian economy by filibustering?

Let us vote for this legislation and get the economy back on track.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that it was the government in consultation with Canada Post that caused the lockout. You stopped the mail. The mail was moving. There were rotating strikes. You stopped the mail.

I want to make another—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The member for Essex is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is very enthusiastic, but he should not be criticizing you. He should direct his comments through the Speaker to the members on this side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the member for his intervention. Indeed we do try to refer to members in the third person.

The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have had for years in the labour movement is a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. I want to read out what fair pay is for some people.

For Mike Lazaridis at Research in Motion, it is \$51 million. For Gordon Nixon at the Royal Bank, it is \$44 million. For Robert Milton at Air Canada, it is \$42 million.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: How much does a union leader get?

Mr. Wayne Marston: The average union leader is probably making in the area of \$150,000 a year.

Now Jim Balsillie—

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Why not release that information? Circulate it. Make it public.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Excuse me, but the figures are released, by the way. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

In the province of Ontario, the salaries of labour leaders are published.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has done notable work on human rights and in standing up for pensioners. Right now I am thinking of what happened to the workers at Nortel. I am thinking of those who were on long-term disability. I am thinking of those who had a pension. I am thinking of those who were abandoned by the government.

What can my colleague tell us about his experience working for those who are left out, and how does it relate to this debate today?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, a huge tragedy took place. Four hundred workers lost their long-term disability—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Bob Rae.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker.

There is no respect for workers in this place if somebody can talk like that at a time when we are discussing 400 workers who lost their livelihoods. They got zero, thanks to the government's inaction.

Government members sit here and make jest of that. That is a shame. That is an outrage. The reality is that at a time when the corporation had billions of dollars in cash and billions of dollars in assets, the rest of the Nortel workers lost 37% of their pensions because nobody would stand up for them.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's presentation today is yet another regurgitation of the NDP speech that we have heard some 140 times over these last hours here in the House. We completely understand, as do all Canadians, that NDP members feel obliged, given the news from their national convention that they are not true to their union roots, to use this grandstanding process as an opportunity to prove to their base that they are true socialists.

When are the members of the official opposition going to realize that Canadians across this country overwhelmingly want the postal service back? They want their mail. Seniors, families, small businesses and businesses all think it is time to vote this legislation in.

Members of the official opposition must stop this charade. They are not convincing anybody.

• (6210)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the regurgitation the member talks about was a speech I wrote at 2:30 this morning. I did not check with anybody else's notes, so if it sounds familiar, it is because people in our party come from the same place. They come from a place where workers are respected for their contributions to this country.

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The reality is very simple. If there had not been a lockout by Canada Post, we would not be here today. It is as simple as that. If you end the lockout, you will end the problem.

We have offered to work with the government. Our leaders have talked to the government, and we are prepared to end this debate the moment the government makes the right decisions on the offers made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I realize, of course, that members are probably going on little rest, but we encourage hon. members to use the best language they can in respect of their colleagues.

The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my comments on the bill, I will take a brief moment to bring to the attention of the House the recent death of Hay Mu Tha Kyu, a 15-year old resident of Ottawa who tragically drowned in a lake not far from Ottawa.

There will be a memorial service for him today. I think those who knew this young man and knew the family would certainly want us to pay our respects to him. He was a Burmese refugee. I know he was well known by people in this community and by members of this House. I wanted to take a moment to pay my respects to him and his family. It is quite a tragedy.

The bill we are continuing to debate today is fundamentally about how we are going to operate as a democracy.

I think this situation touches on things like responsible government. Yesterday I quoted two former Reform Party Conservative members who were very adamant about the use of closure. We have seen this government not only bring in closure but bring in closure before a bill was even presented, which is perhaps unprecedented.

If we go back to the 1840s and look at what responsible government meant, it meant that we would have representatives in the legislature who could speak on behalf of their constituents to be able to oversee law and legislation. When closure comes in before a bill, it undermines responsible government.

I will quote again two well-known Reform Party Conservatives. On May 12, 1998, Chuck Strahl said the following:

Brian Mulroney's government on closure was a pillar of virtue compared to what the Liberal government has done since it came to power. It continually uses this hammer. It is not a matter of negotiation. It is just too bad: "It is my way or the highway".

It is unfortunate the government has decided to go this way. It is a trend. It does not bode well for this institution that the government has decided this is the way to force through legislation, controversial or not. The government is just doing it.

That was Chuck Strahl on May 12, 1998.

On November 22, 1999, the leader of the then official opposition said the following:

Mr. Speaker, the government's idea of democratic government makes a mockery of the very concept.

It uses closure and time allocation to choke off debate in the House. It stacks committees and committee hearings.... How can such a government possibly be pretending to exercise democratic leadership in government when it behaves in that way?

That was Preston Manning. It was Preston Manning who wanted to actually clean up politics and have more accountability.

I am going to go right from what Mr. Manning said to what this government had promised in the Federal Accountability Act, Bill C-2, because what is also missing in this debate is the idea of accountability.

Right now the head of Canada Post is appointed by the Prime Minister. Mr. Chopra was appointed by the Prime Minister.

What was in Bill C-2? There was an amendment that the NDP got in, which was accepted by the government and passed. It was called the Public Appointments Commission. The Public Appointments Commission would finally bring in merit-based appointments. Appointments would no longer be based on who one knew. We would have merit-based appointments and oversight by Parliament. That goes back to responsible government.

The government never brought it into force.

We had no parliamentary oversight in terms of the appointment of the person who heads Canada Post. Who is he beholden to in the end?

It is just like the Senate. When someone is appointed solely by the Prime Minister, appointed with no oversight by Parliament at all, who will that person be responsible to? It will be the person who put him there. There is no mistake about it.

I have heard the other side talk about democracy from time to time. I leave them with the former leader of the Reform Party, the former opposition leader, who talked about closure. I asked him if this is what the Conservative Party has become.

On Senate reform we have seen half a loaf. We have seen that all their friends go into the Senate. In terms of who is appointed to agencies, boards and commissions, we have seen that accountability is really to who one knows.

• (6215)

What happened to those members of Parliament who were going to clean up politics and have accountability? Right now they would pass a bill that would not only bring in closure, but would bring in terms as well.

I am hearing the members on the other side saying that they will.

Let us look at what is in the legislation. The government would bring in not only closure, but wage demands that are lower than the offer that was on the table, an offer that been freely negotiated. I wonder what happened to the ideas of accountability and reforming democracy.

We believe it is not too late. We believe there is an opportunity, if the government wants it, to amend this legislation so that we can have a fair deal for people and make sure that for once Parliament will give Canadians what they want, which is to see people work together for the betterment of the country.

We are not seeing that today. Sadly, we are not seeing reform, but government using tactics and power.

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Finally, the government was elected by 40%. Conservatives say they got a majority, but they did not get a blank cheque.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard this theme of 60% not voting Conservative in the last election. I would point out to my friend that 70% did not vote NDP, 81% did not vote Liberal, 94% did not vote Bloc and 96% did not vote Green, all of which rates a big so what.

Since we have had more than two parties in Canada, there have been 28 elections, 16 of which have been majorities. In only five of those cases did the winning party have 50% of the vote. It did not happen during any of the three Jean Chrétien majorities or the three Trudeau majorities, so to suggest or imply that somehow our majority is not legitimate is, I think, a little rich.

I would also make a comment on the Public Appointments Commission that my colleague brought up. We had proposed a man, Gwyn Morgan, who was incredibly well qualified and would do the job for a dollar a year. However, that side trashed him unmercifully. It was a disgraceful display of vigilantism and it robbed Canada of one of the finest people that would ever have graced that position.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, the facts are the following. We still do not have a public appointments commissioner. For the government to throw the whole thing out because it could not have its way is unfortunate.

What Preston Manning came to Ottawa to do is gone. It evaporated as if the corpse of Preston Manning is lying there, and there is nothing left.

In fact, the Conservatives decided to use all the tools. I just heard the member compare the Conservatives to the Liberal Party, which used to be an example of what government should not be doing. The Conservatives say they are not quite as bad as the Liberals were.

What happened to real reform, real change and real accountability? All we see now is closure, using the big boot and, unfortunately, the undermining of Canadians. When most Canadians see what the government has done, they will wonder what happened.

• (6220)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wear on my lapel a pin depicting two shovels in memory of the union workers who passed away recently from workplace injuries and accidents.

I would ask my hon. colleague to talk about the importance of workplace health and safety. How did we arrive at the point that we now have workplaces that respect workers and their need for health and safety in the workplace?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent question, and while I am on feet I would remember Peter Kennedy, a worker here on the Hill, who passed away while working to keep us safe here. That was a tragedy, and we are still not sure exactly what happened.

The new members may not know this, but a couple of years ago there was legislation brought forward to make sure that we had health and safety laws brought into force here on Parliament Hill. However, the law was never promulgated. This means that workers here on the Hill do not have the same rights of health and safety that

every other worker in Canada has. That is up to the government to do.

We fought hard to make sure health and safety would be there for all Canadians. Sadly, on the Hill it is not.

We have to make sure we are vigilant on this issue, because health and safety are paramount. Unions fought for it, ordinary Canadians fought for it, and that is why we have it today.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to confess to my hon. friend across the way that I am not sure where he is going with this and what this has to do with the business before the House today. Every chance I get between now and when this closes I am going to keep asking these questions until I get an answer.

Delivery in Canada by Canada Post is declining. It has fallen by 17% since 2006. Its workers are well treated by the corporation yet what the members opposite are suggesting is to spend more on benefits than can be afforded over the medium or long term. Already members at the top end are entitled to seven weeks of vacation. Their pay is 17% higher than what is found in a private sector equivalent. The unfunded pension liability is \$3.2 billion. How on earth does he propose that Canada Post make up for this let alone provide additional benefits down the road when the market appears to be falling. I agree Canada Post is an essential service, albeit a declining one.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It is very simple. You actually negotiate fairly. If you follow the logic here, it is bring in younger workers at a different level of pay, and, guess what, their contributions will be less. It is not going to help them with the unfunded liability. What you can do is actually sit down with the workers and say, let us figure out this problem. You do not legislate them back to work and legislate terms. That is not how you solve a problem. That is the problem with this government, and that is the problem with this legislation.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise once again to speak to this critical issue that is before the House of Commons. Like my colleagues, I have taken my place here to represent my party during this historic debate; however, I found that even when I am not here my TV is on and I am listening with continued interest to this debate.

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My New Democratic colleagues have defended with passion the rights of workers. While we are debating back-to-work legislation that impacts on our postal workers, the core of this debate has to do with the government's pro-corporate and anti-worker attitude. The Conservative government initially undermined the collective bargaining process by making it clear early on in the process that it would not hesitate to legislate workers back to work. It brought in legislation when Air Canada was in the midst of negotiating with its workers, and it did so again a week later with Canada Post. This is not about protecting the economy, as they like to pretend, this is about undermining the collective bargaining process and reversing the gains workers have made over the years.

The bill before us is nothing short of an attack on workers. Conservative members may rise and pretend to care about workers. But the truth is Bill C-6 is not about resumption and continuation of postal services, it is really an assault on collective bargaining. No one in this room denies there is an impact on people and businesses, however, the fact that Conservative members insist on denying pension cheques are not being delivered because of the lockout is an insult to the intelligence of Canadians.

Do they actually believe Canadians do not know the difference between a rotating strike that ensures critical mail is delivered and a complete lockout by the company? Who are the naive members of this House? My constituents understand the difference. In fact, all northern Ontarians understand the difference. Northern Ontarians have the right perspective on this government's horrible piece of legislation.

As I have noted previously, many generations have made their living as miners. They have been proud members of the United Steelworkers and the Canadian Auto Workers union. I am a proud member of USW Local 6500, having worked at Inco for 34 years. I proudly held many positions in my union. Whether as a shop steward or as a picket captain, I took my responsibilities seriously. Health and safety were foremost in our thoughts because our work was so dangerous, however, these standards came about because the workers organized and pushed the government to introduce health and safety standards.

We know this Conservative government has always had a fundamental dislike for workers' rights because they have always placed corporate profits ahead of decent wages. CUPW has taken a responsible approach. The union believes in a modern postal service that is universal, public, affordable and green, that maintains, improves and expands services and promotes economic growth in our community.

Between 1997 and 2000, Canada Post has recorded over \$1.6 billion in net profits. Since 1997, Canada Post has paid over \$0.5 billion to the federal government in dividends. Throughout this time Canada Post has been among the most trusted and self-sustaining public institutions in the country. Why? Because postal workers have done their job. They have delivered the mail on time all the time. They have been professional and have worked to keep the public's faith in our public postal service.

Instead of standing up in this House and congratulating the workers for their dedication to public service, we have the Conservative government attacking their rights. Again, I feel that I

need to remind my Conservative colleagues across the way that with respect to strikes we have never taken a strike vote lightly.

• (6225)

In 1978 and 1979, my union spent nine months on the picket line. I was married with two young children. The strain on our family was severe, but at no point did my wife complain. At no point did I waver in my determination to fight for our rights. At no point did my brothers and sisters at USW Local 6500 complain. Why? Because management was unwilling to bargain in good faith, which is exactly where we are again today.

I have mentioned before how this legislation is contrary to the International Labour Organization convention. It contravenes the fundamental right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively.

New Democrats believe that this legislation is a clear signal about where the Conservatives intend to take labour relations in this country. Conservative members have refused to acknowledge that the Canadian Union of Postal Workers has been trying to bring proposals to the bargaining table and address health and safety issues around Canada Post's new sorting machines and delivery methods. And, contrary to the myth being perpetrated by members of the Conservative government, CUPW has also offered proposals for innovation and expansion of the public postal service.

Canada Post's focus on concessions has made it impossible to negotiate. Back-to-work legislation is unjust and unnecessary. It is quite clear to us on this side of the House that the government lacks a true understanding of the impact of wage rollbacks on the economy as a whole. After all, these workers are not sending their wages and pension benefits to banks in the Bahamas or Swiss secret accounts. They are spending that money at businesses in their communities.

Decent wages help the housing sector, the retail sector, the transportation sector, and help create jobs and spur the economy. They also lead to increased tax revenues for the government. It is basic economics.

Northern Ontarians understand the value of good wages. They understand the value of a defined benefit pension plan. They understand because they experienced firsthand how good wages and good pensions benefit their communities.

Canadians across the country are watching this debate. They are watching with great concern how the government is undermining the only process unions have to negotiate fair wages and pensions. This renewed trend by the Conservative government runs contrary to the values of Canadians. It runs contrary to the values of my constituents.

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I will be here, alongside my NDP colleagues, fighting for the rights of workers against a government that is blinded by ideology and influenced by corporate donors. This bill is a black eye for Canada, but it is not too late for this legislation to be amended. We just need the government to have an open mind and negotiate in good faith.

I would like to share with the House some of the emails we in the NDP have received supporting our stance and the CUPW workers. I will not read them because there are too many.

If the government was really interested in delivering the mail, all it has to do is unlock the doors. If the doors are unlocked today, the postal workers will be back to work Monday morning and the mail will be delivered, as they have done over and over again.

• (6230)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the hon. member's speech. I know he has been working on it for the last couple of days.

It is my second Saturday in Ottawa since I was elected five and a half years ago. The first Saturday that I spent here was for a wedding and it was much more enjoyable.

The question I have is very simple. New Democrats have been saying that all we have to do is call Canada Post and tell them to unlock the doors. Does that mean there is a commitment from the NDP that it will tell the union that if Canada Post unlocks the doors, the union should make a commitment not to have rotating strikes and sit down and negotiate?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I cannot do anything about the first Saturday that my colleague spent in Ottawa. It was his choice to go to a wedding.

However, he cannot blame us for this Saturday. All he has to do is to come down here, walk this way and speak to the man who is pulling the strings. Do not go talk to the puppet, but speak to the man who is pulling the strings. Then this strike would be over on Monday morning.

• (6235)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague comes from a strong labour background, which has also shaped the community I am from in Thompson, Manitoba, and here I am thinking in particular of the work done by the steelworkers.

I would like to ask him if he could elaborate on the value of having unionized workplaces. We hear so much criticism from the other side. Is it not the case that the process of collective bargaining has managed to bring so much benefit to communities across our country and truly raise the standard of living in Canada?

Rather than hearing such contempt for the work of unionized people and workers, could this member talk about the benefits of their work?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to repeat that this lockout could be over on Monday if the government unlocked the doors.

We all know what collective bargaining means. It means that the workers in those communities will have decent wages that they can

spend in their communities on a house, a new car, or at local malls, compared to workers who are not unionized, who are working at minimum wage and have to shop at food banks.

Trade unions are very important to the economy of this country.

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to many nostalgic comments across the way about the old labour movement and the unions back in 1946. I am wondering if the members opposite recognize that we are in 2011 and that we have just come through a great recession that has damaged so many countries and from which we are just recovering.

I am also wondering if they will listen to Canadians who are dealing with problems today, as well as the postal workers who want to get back to work, who want to earn money and be productive.

When will they realize that we are not in the old socialist days of the good old union? We are in 2011.

It is leadership that we need in this Parliament. Leadership looks ahead. We are not looking in the rear-view mirror at what happened in the past. We need to look ahead at what we will be dealing with in the future.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. We are in the 21st century. However, the government, along with this member, would like to bring us back to 1946.

Today, modern unions give their members the right to vote on collective agreements, unlike what the government wants to impose on workers.

As the hon. member was saying, back in the 1940s people were starving. There were a lot of people who were hungry back in those days. However, it was because of good trade unions that we were able to raise the standard of living so that people could have a good life and afford to put their kids through college or university and pay for health care. Everything is good, but the government would like to take us back to 1946.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 2, Canadians voted for change. The Conservatives like to say and let it be known that Canadians voted for the following:

[English]

a stable, strong, national majority government.

The ship should be called the SS *NMGO* from now on. That will be my name for it, shorthand.

[Translation]

It is as though Dorian Gray was admiring himself in the mirror believing that he was still young. Canadians did not vote for a majority. They voted for change, and they are disappointed because they believed that things would be done differently, here, in Ottawa. I can see the members opposite. They are tired and spent from defending this bad ideological law. Canadians deserve better than this. That is what we get when we allow ideologues to introduce their legislation and when they are not prepared.

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• (6240)

[English]

I feel sorry for the members on the other side who have to defend this sloppy legislation of their leader. I had a conversation yesterday with a member of the government. The member regrets that politics in Ottawa has become so leader-centred that members must follow party leaders in every decision he or she makes. I feel sorry for that member because I feel that our caucus is based on respect and teamwork, not the leader. We respect our leader, but he respects us too. He would not present legislation that the caucus would not support.

I truly feel sorry for all members on the other side of the House who have to follow their leader's sloppy legislation, this back to work legislation.

I do not think the members opposite believe in this legislation. They have to get up to defend this terribly sloppy legislation.

Canadians voted for change on May 2. They wanted to see Parliament work differently. The Prime Minister wanted to win the trust of Canadians. Canadians trusted him to make incremental changes. He betrayed Canadians with this legislation.

I have a message for the Prime Minister and his increasingly restive caucus, that we will not let up. In four years when Canadians see how the government legislates and betrays the trust put in them by Canadians, we will be on that side. We will be the government.

The Liberals have asked us many times what we would do to this legislation. We would take the final offer out of the legislation. It is a bad way to legislate. There are judges, academics and experts who say this is not the way to legislate. It does not work. It puts all the weight on management's side. It shows bad faith on the government's part for taking the side of management. This is not a fair way to proceed. This is not the way to legislate workers in this country.

The other thing that we would change is the wage offer clawback. The government is being so unfair to workers by offering them a lower wage than the corporation itself offered. All Canadians know that is a bad way to proceed; it is a slap in the face of all working people in this country.

Some people may look at the postal workers and say, "Oh, they have it cushy. They have a good life." These postal workers work their hardest, working their bodies to the bone. They deserve all of our respect. The government does not respect those workers with this sloppy legislation.

Apart from that, the government is sowing the seeds of inter-generational strife. It is dividing the older workers versus the younger workers. The older workers will have more benefits, the younger workers will have fewer benefits.

This is not a way to bring the country together. We need real leadership. This is not leadership but an ideological push of sloppy legislation to appeal to a very narrow base of voters. This is not what Canadians asked for when they elected a stable majority government. This is not a stable government. This is an irresponsible government because it is not taking care to properly craft legislation. It was less than two weeks ago that the Minister of Labour, at the

Conservative Party convention, said that it was too early for back to work legislation. That was less than two weeks ago.

It was too early then, but on the last day of Parliament, its last sitting day, that was the time to introduce this legislation. All of a sudden it had become time, very quickly.

This legislation has been a spoke in the wheels of negotiations between the two parties because it sends a message to the management side that it does not have to negotiate in good faith. The government has been all about divide and conquer.

• (6245)

Some people in my riding have complained about cutbacks in the infrastructure of the postal service and the fact that it has been centralized. I want to speak to that.

The government speaks a lot about reforming the postal system and how it is not working anymore. However, Canada Post made \$281 million in profits in 2009, much more than in previous years. Workers of Canada Post delivered more than 11 billion pieces of mail in 2009. It is a profitable corporation. The workers and the people who have supported all the changes that have happened deserve more than this terribly sloppy legislation.

I would like to read a letter, or in fact an email. We are not getting letters anymore. This is from a constituent: "We are writing to let you know that we support wholeheartedly the striking postal workers. It is clear that the issues in this strike go beyond the workers' immediate financial concerns. As serious as those are, there are forces at work in North America which hope to degrade the power of united working people."

The constituent continues: "Throughout this continent, unions made the benefits of industrialization available to the masses. Within Canada the postal workers have been at the vanguard of the fight for such essential and just matters as maternity leaves and reliable and sufficient pensions."

Let me say that this party will stand behind the working people of this country and will defend their rights, whether it is today, tomorrow, the next day, or the next four years. We are here to defend the rights of workers to bargain collectively.

Canada Post Corporation is not bargaining in good faith. The CEO makes more than the Prime Minister of the country, with a 4% increase every year. The union offered to stop rotating strikes if Canada Post Corporation came back to the table and reinstated the contract temporarily. Canada Post Corporation refused. Why? They knew this legislation would save them in the end. Why would the corporation negotiate in good faith if they knew that the government was going to back them up?

To the leadership and to the caucus of the government, take off the locks and let the workers get back to work.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech by the hon. member opposite.

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I would ask him to take into consideration a few things: the state of the world economy, the situation in Europe, the situation with Greece, the challenges the United States faces with respect to deficits and debt, the modest economic recovery we are seeing in Canada, and the realization that disruptions to the economy now are clearly undesirable and create further risk to the modest growth we have in the Canadian economy.

Does the member not recognize that such disruptions as this work interruption are harmful to the Canadian economy itself and are a risk that we ought not to take at this time?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I thank the hon. member for his question. I agree the recovery is slowly happening. However, we do not build recovery by stopping people from working.

There is a lockout on these workers. When working people are allowed to work, they start stimulating the economy. We have to let the system work out the way it is supposed to work out rather than intervene.

The government said it was not going to be interventionist, but obviously with this legislation it is intervening in the bargaining process. It is intervening in the ability of postal workers to get back to work. Not letting these postal workers work is actually harming the economy.

• (6250)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to intervene one more time.

In my first two speeches in this place I very rigidly tried to explain the evolution of and reasons for the trade union movement. I did this because I know that across the way not too many people really understand. I thought in fairness, to help the debate, I would try to help bring that understanding forward.

In a debate like this, with the very reasoned question that came from the Minister of Finance, the reality is that we can raise the level of debate. We can stop the silliness of name-calling or whatever. However, what concerns me is that this particular piece of legislation has a direction in it that will define an “us and them” in this country.

I referred to 1946 because this was when the workers felt they had to push back. We do not want to create a climate like that again.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the hon. member. It seems the current government is dedicated to dividing and conquering the Canadian people by separating out these postal workers from the rest of Canadians.

The New Democratic Party believes in the evolution of things, and that all these rights for workers have built up over time. We strongly believe in evolution. I do not see that belief in evolution on the other side.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot about email messages. I received a phone call from a local businessman who has an art gallery. Unfortunately, as a result of the union action and the NDP action, the flyers for a great event at the art gallery could not go out. The businessman expressed his concern, as did many others.

The longer the NDP delay this process with their filibuster—all Canadians are quite disgusted by the filibuster going on here—and

the more the NDP speak on it, the more Canadians realize that the NDP have ideologies that are basically self-serving and serving their union leaders instead of Canadians.

Why do the NDP disrespect Canadians so much, after they were elected?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, simply put, I think it is the government that is disrespecting Canadians. The member's comments show his disrespect for the democratic process. This is a democratic process we are undertaking. It shows Canadians that the Prime Minister cannot just shove through sloppy, badly written legislation.

I have sympathy with the small business owner who is unable to send his flyers out, but it is the Conservative government that refuses to intervene to stop this lockout. It is the government that is stopping the work.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity—on Thursday afternoon, June 23, 2011, according to the calendar right in front of me—to speak to the House and to Canadians who may be watching.

We do have, I think, an obligation to explain to Canadians why we are here. Why are we here on a Saturday afternoon after two days of debate? The calendar says it is June 23. It is a technicality, because we have been talking since then.

It is important to know why we are still here. We have to understand what this debate is all about. It is called Bill C-6, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services. However, it is very much a misnomer. There is no need for legislation to resume and continue postal services. The postal services are run by the government through a crown corporation.

It does not take three days of debate in the House of Commons. It does not take legislation. It does not take the kind of legislation we have here. All it takes is a phone call.

The Prime Minister needs to pick up the phone, phone the CEO of Canada Post Corporation, and say take off the locks. The postal workers want to work and deliver the mail. We do not need to be here to do that.

This legislation must be about something else. What is it about? I think Canadians are wondering what it is about.

It is a Saturday afternoon, and the post is not delivered on Saturdays or Sundays anyway. It will not make a difference if we are here one or two days. We are here trying to solve a problem. However, the government has decided they want to manufacture a crisis for a particular purpose. What is that purpose?

Parts of that purpose can be found in the legislation, but parts of it are coming out in the debate over the last couple of days. We can hear the kind of message that government members and the government itself are trying to send.

The parliamentary secretary for the Prime Minister talks about union bosses and thugs. That is part of their message. Their message is anti-union: oppose the organizations trying to improve the lot of workers. These are “special interests”, supposedly. The Minister of Finance says that is what they are.

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Let me speak about some of the special interests of the postal workers. I saw a message from one of our staffers that reminded me that if we think this is just about postal workers, we should think again.

Does anybody in this country think that we should not have maternity leave, for example, or that maternity leave is a bad thing? Where did it come from? The first maternity leave in Canada was negotiated by the postal workers with Canada Post Corporation. It is now the law of the land. Everybody takes it for granted. Where did it come from? It came from workers seeking to improve the rights of women in the workforce through collective bargaining. That is where it came from.

At the time, I am sure members opposite would have voted against it in the House. That was “special interests”: we need legislation to stop this kind of collective bargaining from going on.

That is the kind of attitude we are seeing expressed over here.

I heard a member yesterday get up and read with approval a message from a constituent complaining about how these postal workers are looking for better conditions when they have decent jobs with pensions. She was talking about her grandson, who considered himself lucky to have a job for three days a week.

I feel sorry for a person who believes that. I feel sorry for someone who feels they are lucky to have a job three days a week in a country like Canada, one of the richest countries in the world. I feel sorry for someone who feels that way.

The member opposite is now talking back. The member opposite, instead of saying that he too feels sorry, says that these people, the postal workers, should also feel lucky to have jobs.

●(6255)

I am sorry, but that is not good enough. But that is part of the message the government wants to send to the people of Canada, that they should not expect to improve their lot in life.

The government wants Canada Post Corporation to impose a two-tier system. New hires would be paid less than the people who are already there. New hires would not have the same kind of pension protection as the people who are there. There will then be two groups of workers inside the post office. That is the kind of system that is being encouraged by the government. The minute the post office is closed the government brings in legislation that not only deals with the manufactured crisis like we have but imposes a rate of wages less than what the profitable corporation had on the table.

We have a system of free collective bargaining in this country. We are supposed to have an opportunity for bargaining in good faith by both sides in a collective agreement. Bargaining in good faith means one side puts an offer on the table that it is prepared to abide by and the other side bargains back. It is a democratic process. The postal union has a mandate from 97% of its members to bargain a collective agreement. That is the kind of process that goes on in this particular organization.

A negotiation process was going on. Canada Post Corporation made \$280 million in profits last year, which it turned back to taxpayers. It was prepared to put an offer on the table to its

employees as part of that process. The government said it would impose a wage less than the one this profitable corporation offered. What is that about? Is that about the resumption of postal services? No. That is about trying to send a message to Canadians telling them not to expect to be part of this country's prosperity, not to seek a wage increase because the government will legislate it down.

One of my colleagues talked about the CEO. The CEO of Canada Post Corporation makes \$350,000 a year. Apparently he received a 33% bonus last year. He also has an automatic 4% wage increase every year. There is such a thing as sauce for the goose and sauce for the gander, but what we have instead is the government encouraging an increased wage gap. The wealthy CEOs and the higher ups get their wages increased but the people working at the bottom get their wages decreased. The government will make that gap different in one of the most prosperous countries in the world. That is wrong, but that is the message the government wants to send.

That is what this legislation is about. We are here to fight against it every step of the way.

●(6300)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct a couple of the statements made by the previous speaker.

The fact is that the dividend that Canada Post has acquired in the last little while has gone directly back into reinvesting in modernization programs at Canada Post so that it can provide efficient, effective and timely delivery of mail.

The member also suggested that the government can simply unlock the doors. The government does not get involved in the day to day operations of Canada Post. What we are trying to do here is bring together two parties that have not been able to agree. That is what the legislation would do. It would provide a vehicle to get the post moving in the country as soon as possible. That is what we are debating today.

The NDP filibuster is just delaying what Canadians want. I think Canadians regret having elected a whole lot of people beholden to the union movement. This is harming Canadians. Please let us get the mail going. Will the opposition stop the filibuster and support the government's legislation?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, we all want to see the mail moving. Nobody wants that more than the postal workers, who some days ago made it very clear that they are prepared to continue to negotiate and to continue to work under the existing agreement. It is simply a matter of taking the locks off the doors and that would happen.

I am glad to hear that over the last couple of years some of the dividends have been put back into the post office. We have a good quality post office but it could be better. Other services could be offered. That is a good use of that money. Some of it was offered to the workers and the government wants to take it back.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments from the member for St. John's East and earlier comments about the history of the unions, which some government members question.

I recall a very old retired coal miner from industrial Cape Breton who told me he must have gone into the mines very young, and he remembered how young he was when he recalled coming home one day crying and saying to his mother, “You should have told me”. He was a coal miner at the time. She said, “What should I have told you?” He said, “You should have told me there was no Santa Claus”. That is how young he was when he went into the mines.

Would the hon. member for St. John's East agree with me that unions gave us a great deal but that they must not be idealized and glorified? Everything changes over time and all unions are not perfect and all corporations are not evil. How does he respond to that?

• (6305)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am quite astonished to hear that from the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I do not recall being as idealistic as the member herself may once have been, to think that there was perfection to be found around us throughout our life, and I would not want to be accused of that. Obviously, we live in a democratic world where people disagree and people have many different degrees of idealism associated with their work.

However, I will say that more good has been brought by unions than just about any institution I can think of, over the last hundred years, in improving the lot of not only their own members but working people in society in general. Unions have brought about a great deal of progress and a greater sense of equality. Unfortunately, the government wants to put that backward instead of bringing it forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the members opposite have refused to explain the merits of Bill C-6.

In the last election campaign, I met one of my constituents with whom I exchanged tweets. He told me that he was disappointed with my position.

I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks about the current polarization of the members opposite, who refuse to talk about the dissenting opinions of their voters. They must receive them, just as I do.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is pretty clear that the government members are picking and choosing things they think will continue to divide Canadians, not things that will bring them together and hopefully see a solution to this particular situation.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here, 43 hours later, because we fundamentally believe that we as people can work together. We believe that if you give people the time and the space they can come to an agreement. They can work things out, they can negotiate, they can see each other's points of view and find the common ground and find a solution. That is what New Democrats are about. We believe people can work things out if given the chance, if given the time.

Instead, what we have is the party opposite that believes in laying blame just on the workers. It believes in dividing, that there is an us and a them. There are these union bosses, or whatever they call

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them, and then there are the ordinary people, and then there are the Canadians versus the workers.

If we continue to divide people, we just get a society that is not going to be peaceful. We are really, at the end of the day, in it together. We want our young people to have a fair wage when they start working in the post office. They should get the \$23, which is the starting wage of previous workers, rather than get \$19. That makes sense because young people are just starting this. They want to start a family. They want to maybe save enough to buy a home. They should be given a chance to do so. Let them work it out in their unions.

We also believe that there should be safety in the workplace. It is difficult to carry 35 pounds of mail from time to time and they do get injured. We know that 1 in 10 postal workers are injured on the job. Some are injured very severely. Many are disabled. In fact there have been 6,335 incidents of injuries in the last year.

We also believe, and the workers believe, that they should be given the right when they retire to know precisely how much money they are going to receive, and that it is not determined by the market but determined by how much they have contributed and how long they have worked, so that their lives can be predictable, that when they are ready to retire they will be able to do so with some sense of security. That is not too much to ask for.

What the workers are saying is “Look, give us the 2% or 2.5%; the dollar amount is not huge given that the CEO of Canada Post on average in the last few years has gotten a 4% increase in each year”.

Canada Post would have given them 1.9%, but this legislation says “No, a 1.9% increase is too rich; give them 1.5%”.

We have tried to give the space for people to come together and work together, because fundamentally those are Canadian values. That is what Canadians want us to do. Canadians believe in sharing. They believe in coming together. However, I think this is a first major test for the Conservative Party since the election. It has failed. It has failed miserably in trying to bring people together. It has failed to find common ground, failed to bring labour peace. Instead, what do their members want? They want war. They want warring parties, us and them. They prefer to bully, they prefer to put the workers in a corner, bully them some more and then blame them for not working.

They want to work. They have been saying they want to work. They just need to be allowed to go back to work. That is why we have been saying that this Conservative Party, this government that appointed the board of directors of Canada Post, should pick up the phone, call the CEO, call the board members and say “Bring them back to work”.

Allow them back to work and then they can negotiate and talk some more. No, that is not what the government wants. It just wants to push the workers into a corner, bully them and lower their wages. What a sad, lost opportunity we are witnessing here.

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• (6310)

During these 43 hours, there have been negotiations. The unions have been trying to come to an agreement, but that is not what the government or Canada Post wants. They want to impose a solution; they want to tell people what to do. They do not want people to work together. It is about rubbing salt in an open wound. It is about kicking people when they are down. It is definitely not Canadian values, and that is not how Canada should be governed.

Let me read a letter from a young person who lives in my riding. She said:

As a young worker living in Toronto, I struggled to make ends meet. Even though I gave up on my dream of a career in the arts to be “practical”, lived in a dirt-cheap basement apartment that was, frankly, quite terrible and didn't own a vehicle, I was unable to afford both my living expenses and my student loans. As a person with a prestigious degree and a full-time job, I was too embarrassed to look for help and went into default.

It took me a long time to work my way out of the financial mess I built for myself by trying to get the education I thought would help me succeed. Working a second job after you leave your full-time job and living below the poverty line with absolutely no savings isn't something I wish on any young person. I'm thankful we have public healthcare in Canada, or the situation for a young person in the same situation would be even more precarious, and in fact dangerous.

A young worker's basic expenses are not lower than anyone else's. He or she is entering a job market with less experience. Being young, unless you have the fabled “connections”, which most of us don't, means you fight harder to earn a spot in a competitive workforce as an unproven commodity. You are less confident and afraid to rock the boat with your employer, so you are vulnerable to harassment, abusive work conditions and inequality. Who wants to walk away from one of the first or only jobs they've held with the infamous “bad reference”? Who will be believed in a case of conflicting accounts, the experienced manager or a young person who hasn't made it through the trial period?

As a young worker, your time and energy aren't worth any less. Even with equal opportunities, you may find it difficult to gain the trust of many employers who may see the world very differently and place less value on your skills.

It goes on to say:

Let's not fragment our CUPW workforce and tell young workers they have to start the career race from the starting line that is far behind everyone else's. That's just not right. In many ways the postal service is a flagship, and our flagship is going to be flying a black flag for Canada's youth if this legislation passes.

• (6315)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened intently and I have been following the filibuster by New Democrats quite closely.

Earlier the member of Parliament for Vaudreuil-Soulanges tipped the NDP's hand that it will be moving amendments with respect to the wage settlement. The NDP member for Trinity—Spadina, in her intervention just now, is suggesting that 2.5% a year is a fair settlement.

Because the union strikes provoked a lockout rather than a favourable settlement, can the member confirm, one, that the NDP will turn the committee of the whole into a bargaining session with its amendments; two, did the NDP consult with CUPW on the nature of its demands; and three, will the NDP seek a wage settlement of 2.5% a year for four years?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, it is not up to me, nor is it up to members of Parliament across the way, as to what percentage it should be. I am not suggesting any percentage. I am saying that salary ranges should be negotiated between the workers and the management. I am not saying it should be imposed. I do not believe

that a salary range should be imposed. It should certainly not be imposed in the way this was done, from the 1.9% that was offered to 1.5%.

If this member cannot justify why they would lower the wages of ordinary workers, I will not even bother trying.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have conducted this debate for a number of days now, and I want to read this email into the record. It came from a constituent of mine who wrote me on the first day.

He stated, “I have emailed my comments to many members in the last 36 hours.... That being said, after having watched many hours of the debate since last night, I have to admit that my position has changed tonight.

As a small business owner, I had felt this disruption was not good for business. However, knowing that the government has brought this on by locking workers out and could easily reverse this decision, upsets me. I feel misled about this issue by my government. My mail is tied up by the government. I am disappointed, very disappointed with this Conservative government.

Despite the hardships brought on by this, I can get my business through it. I can't speak for other businesses, but I will manage.

As of this evening, I now believe the government should end the lock out so the mail can move rather than legislating members back to work.”

Does the member agree that this debate is worthwhile and it is changing Canadians' opinions about the nature of this government and its relationship to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, let the workers work. They want to work, so allow them to work. As New Democrats have said, open the doors now. Let the workers in. Let them do their jobs. Let them serve the citizens of Canada and let the mail flow now.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I referred to the incredible amount of misinformation that the NDP has put forward over these last many hours.

In a recent intervention the member for Trinity—Spadina said this legislation would lower salaries and wages. Well, nowhere does it lower salaries and wages. It increases salaries by more than 7% over four years. I know many people who would be happy to have a guaranteed 7% increase. I know of small business owners who would be happy to have that 7% increase guaranteed over four years.

In the 50 hours we have been here, we have heard the same talking points repeated, with so much misinformation. Yet when the vote was held last night, only 70%, or less, of NDP members showed up to vote. Are they really interested in getting them back to work, or are they simply going through the motions of this charade?

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• (6320)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I have the bill in front of me and it is very clear. Maybe the member has not read the bill. It is in front of me, and it talks very specifically about the new collective agreement. It imposes a salary range and it talks about when it would come into force. It would also fine the workers \$100,000 for one day if there is an offence. This is a badly written bill.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague did, I too wish to thank you, and all of the speakers, deputy speakers and staff, including the staff on the Hill, for their patience and perseverance in continuing to make sure this democratic process continues and functions. My sincere thanks to you.

Similar to my colleague the member for Trinity—Spadina, who just spoke, I suppose it is my propensity as a lawyer to start with the legislation. I looked up the legislation that gives a mandate to Canada Post. It may be of interest to the House to learn what the statute provides for Canada Post in the way it is charged to deliver the service of providing mail service to Canadians.

How do we view this bill that the government has put forward in light of the legislative mandate to that institution? Under the object section of that legislation, it states in section 5(2):

While maintaining basic customary postal service, the Corporation, in carrying out its objective, shall have regard to...the need to conduct its operations in such manner as will best provide for the security of mail;

In other words, it is to give priority to the continuing functioning of the postal service and ensuring all families, small businesses, large businesses, the House of Commons receive their mail in a timely manner.

Secondly, they must give regard to “the desirability of utilizing the human resources of the Corporation...”, in other words the postal workers, “in a manner that will both attain the objects of the Corporation”, which is to ensure that we all receive timely, effective mail service, “and ensure the commitment and dedication of its employees to the attainment of those objects.”

A reasonable person would interpret that to mean that in establishing the delivery system and its salary bases, and in establishing the rules of operation for the workers, they need to make sure they have well-paid, healthy workers who will continue to deliver the function of Canada Post.

Regrettably the actions of Canada Post in locking out its workers, and the bill before our House, I would suggest go exactly against the purposes and intents of the legislation that Canada Post is operating under.

Clearly Canada Post has the power to open the doors to its institution. Clearly the government has the power to direct Canada Post to unlock the doors and continue the mail service.

Secondly, what has deeply concerned me and many of the members in this House, the public, and the constituents we are hearing from, is the tone set for this debate.

I am used to being vilified personally by some of the members across the way. In the last Parliament I was used to being vilified

every time I stood up. The screaming and harassment actually encouraged me to speak out more.

However, what I do not have patience for is the vilification of my constituents, many of whom include postal workers. What I found particularly offensive in this debate is that I heard very few references from the other side about how we value our postal workers, how important they are to the continuation of the economic recovery of this country, and how every family member and every business in this country values those efforts. Towards the end of my remarks I am going to give some examples of the high regard my community holds their postal workers in.

Many have raised concern with the opening remarks by the Minister of Labour about setting the over 40,000 postal workers against Canadians.

I would really appreciate when the minister returns that she take back that remark, apologize, and commend the postal workers for their work by saying that postal workers are also Canadians and that we value their contribution to our society.

• (6325)

There is of course also the vilification of my fellow members of the official opposition, labelling us as communists, and labelling the senior union officers in the postal union as thugs. Only a few moments ago I had the opportunity of meeting two of those people and I could not meet two individuals further from that. I am advised that in the case of a lockout or a strike, they do not receive pay. That is hardly being a thug. They are not benefiting from speaking on behalf of their members.

I have been very disappointed by that language. Generally speaking, the dialogue has been what I would consider the type of dialogue that should occur in the House of Commons, but I found some of the language extremely distasteful, and regrettable for my constituents who have been listening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The Minister of State for Science and Technology is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: I apologize, Mr. Speaker, but I was waiting for the member to clarify the statement. No member on this side of the House made such a statement.

That was being read and was from a postal worker who called the union bosses thugs and was afraid of pushing for the right for a free vote on the offer. No member of this government used that term.

The member should apologize for yet again misleading the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I think the member's intervention is in fact on a matter of debate, although I think it is clear to hon. members that when this kind of language and these words are attributed to people or groups of people in this manner, it invariably inflames and, in some cases, can create disorder. It is a good idea to stay away from such language.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

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Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more. We of course can select the information we put before the House. Some members chose to put forward those kinds of remarks and I think they are regrettable.

Also, I think the title of the bill now before us for debate is a bit of a misnomer. It is called “An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services”. One would have thought that what the bill was provided for was to unlock the doors of the postal service. Instead, the choice is to continue to point fingers at the postal workers. Of course, we are on a weekend so we do not have postal delivery, but on Monday, the reason why there may or may not be continuation of service is that Canada Post has locked out the workers. I find the naming of the statute rather peculiar.

It also appears to pervert the very role of arbitration, which is to bring together the parties and have a determination made in a fair way and in fairness to both sides. As many colleagues have pointed out, including the colleague who spoke before me, what the government has done is step outside of what has already been negotiated and agreed to in imposing lesser benefits to the workers.

A lot of my colleagues have also raised concerns with the effect of the bill before us, in that it creates a double standard and hypocrisy. In the wake of the \$40-billion deficit created by this government, in the wake of the gift of raises to senior staff, and in wake of deeper tax cuts for major corporations, therefore leaving less revenue available to care for seniors and to provide advanced education, affordable housing, and affordable child care, many of these postal worker families are already hard-pressed. What this legislation will do is make sure that the next rung of postal workers will be even more hard-pressed and will join that class of citizens who are in debt.

In many ways, it is a manufactured crisis. We have been following a number of situations throughout North America and across the western world where we in fact have a manufactured crisis. A lot of Canadians are concerned about the manufactured crisis in health care when in fact, if our governments would intervene, we could solve access to health care, access to child care, and equitable access to advanced education.

I just want to share with the members some of the feedback I have received from my constituents. As there is limited time, I will provide one of the most heartwarming stories that was passed on to me.

One of my constituents phoned my constituency office and decried the action taken against the postal workers. She talked about last winter. We had a record snowfall and cold temperatures, and then a huge melt, with ice and major water to walk through, and still those postal workers continued to deliver the mail. She was particularly heartened and almost in tears at the fact that her postal worker kept in touch with a senior neighbour who was not picking up her mail and then managed to get neighbours to intervene. The woman was really ill and they were able to intervene.

We are talking about human beings here. They are not just numbers. They are real people who deliver an incredible service to fellow Canadians. I think that should be kept front and centre in this debate.

● (6330)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over these past hours I have been listening very carefully to all sides of this debate. It is a very sad day for Canada when we see the suffering that is happening outside of these walls, out on the streets in our cities and rural areas across this nation, because the mail is being held up. Businesses are being hurt. In here, everybody knows, as Canadians know, that the reason this is happening is that the opposition is putting in place every roadblock possible. In fact, one of my constituents called and said, “This is going to be a fine example of what an opposition could do if it ever got into government, and it never will.”

I think we need to be very cautious and start thinking about Canadians. Pass Bill C-6 and do not allow the committee of the whole to go on and on, because Canadians are watching and they are very intelligent. The only thing that has been paid attention to is political agendas from the opposition, not the good of Canadians. I made that statement because Canada is at risk in this economic downturn.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not receiving their mail because Canada Post has locked up the post office. I do not understand why there are these repeated claims. The honest reply to all of our constituents should be that Canada Post made the decision to lock the doors to the post office. Indeed, we would like to have this addressed. We have called for the removal of those locks.

As I have mentioned previously in debate here, where was the government when my constituents and many constituents were calling for the return of their mailboxes that had been removed and the reopening of the post offices that were closed? Where was the government in protecting the interests of seniors, who now have to go much further simply to mail a letter to their grandchildren?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what will come out of these discussions is the role of the Minister of Labour within the government. Historically, it has been clear that the role of the Minister of Labour was to keep the social peace, to ensure that labour disputes do not go on for too long, and to ensure that all Canadians have the right to speak, to be represented and to negotiate a collective agreement.

But, right from the outset, right from the first move in the Air Canada matter, the Minister of Labour wanted to get involved by imposing special legislation to supposedly save the Canadian economy, though the company was saying that the service was not at risk. We have found out that the Minister of Labour is now someone who is stirring up social problems.

The government will no longer be able to take action to solve a problem, because it has lost its credibility, it has sacrificed it. I think that is quite a shame, and I would like to ask the hon. member for Edmonton to tell us what kind of credibility is still attached to the role of Minister of Labour.

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• (6335)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, to respond to the issue of where the credibility is, I could share a letter from one of my constituents, written to the Prime Minister and copied to me. It says:

This is to express my disgust at the way that the postal strike has been handled. Forcing postal employees back to work at a cut in salary and a salary less than that agreed to by Canada Post can hardly be considered just and fair. Our postal employees deserve better than this. The astronomical fines they are threatened with if they don't return to work also does nothing to help the situation. Why were they locked out? They made sure that important cheques to seniors, etc., were delivered during their rotating strikes. I think this exhibited good faith, much better than that shown by the government.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start my second speech by sharing with members of the House, the constituents of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, all Quebecers and Canadians my firm intention to continue this fight beside the NDP members who have shown me, day after day, how amazing they are.

We have been gathered here for many hours to defend rights that are fundamental, in my view: the workers' right to speak, the right to dignity, the right to negotiate with an employer in good faith and, above all, the right to be heard.

What the government has been proposing is not a balanced agreement, but an imposed contract. You are putting a gun to the employees' heads and, in so doing, all Canadians—and I mean every single Canadian—are being held hostage because of this lockout. Small businesses and the public are worried about not getting their mail, and rightly so. I understand their concerns. All the government has to do is to remove the locks and let the two parties negotiate properly. It is important to recall that mail was being delivered during the strike. The union was ready to negotiate, while continuing to provide postal services, which are essential.

The government is sending a very negative message to the unions: there is no point in fighting because we will get what we want from you anyway. With this message, the government is literally trampling on the history of our country, the history of these people who fought tooth and nail during the industrial revolution and significantly improved the lives of everyone: my grandparents, my parents, the people of my generation and future generations. I do not have any children, but I am still fighting for them, for all these children, all these young people, all these young adults. I am fighting for the next generation.

What message is the government sending to them right now? Be rich, own a multinational corporation, be the CEO of a big oil company or a bank; otherwise, the government will not do anything for you because you do not matter to it. Once again, we are creating a gap between the generations, between younger and older workers. It is as if we are telling young people that we do not need them, that we prefer to pay them less because their work is not as valuable as the work of their counterparts.

This is also a struggle against social inequalities because the middle class is once more paying for the government's ideologies. I know that they are probably going to call me a nasty socialist, a

nasty unionist, a left-winger, but that does not bother me. What is important to me is the rights of the workers, of all workers.

I have always understood, but now I understand even better why the word “progressive” is no longer next to the word “Conservative”. This word is the extreme opposite of the government's ideologies. The government is not working for a better society. It is working to set society back. It is working to undo the improvements that have been made to the living conditions of all Canadians.

We are talking here about workers' rights, but this is not the first time that the government has wanted to implement policies that jeopardize the rights acquired by Canadians. Let us remember when it wanted to reject the Kyoto accord and deprive future generations of a healthy environment. Let us also remember when it wanted to refuse to sign the agreement on aboriginal rights, jeopardizing the rights of first nations children to have access to a quality education, like all other Canadians.

Let us remember all the proposals to improve employment insurance that the government rejected for no good reason, preventing unemployed workers from living with dignity. Let us remember when abortion rights were threatened, leading Canadians to fear that we would return to the dark days when some women bled to death after trying to carry out their own abortions with knitting needles. Let us remember when the government cut taxes for large corporations, again making the middle class and organizations pay by cutting programs essential to the healthy development of our country.

This crisis is a calculated crisis brought about by the government itself. And the government wants to put the blame for this crisis on us—us, the official opposition that works with, and especially for, the people.

• (6340)

The government has a hidden agenda. This is the first offensive, but the war that the government has declared on the middle and working classes has just begun. Let us make no mistake, the government regards workers, and thereby Canadians, with contempt. It is shameful to see how little the government cares for people, not just Canada Post employees, but also the waiter at the neighbourhood restaurant, who at times has to count on the generosity of his customers in order to pay his rent, the shoe store assistant who has to sell a lot of shoes in order to afford a pair for herself, the carpenter who builds houses for us with the sweat of his brow in all kinds of weather, the chef who stands over his stoves even in the oppressive heat of mid-July, and the clerk at the corner store who spends all night on her feet at her cash register and still has to keep a smile on her face.

With this attack on Canada Post workers, the government is attacking all workers, each and every one of them. It is attacking their legitimate right to negotiate improvements to their working conditions. It is attacking their right to a decent standard of living. It is attacking their right to live in dignity. It is also attacking their families' standard of living.

Government Orders

The government will find that it has the New Democrats to deal with. To show how serious my message is, how deeply in my soul it is rooted, I will end my speech in the same way as I ended my previous one.

We will fight for a fair and just country where no one—and I mean no one—is abandoned and cast aside.

[*English*]

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate for some 30 hours and I am shocked with the rhetoric and amount of socialist propaganda that fills the House. I was born and raised in communist Poland and I never imagined that I would hear this in the House of Commons. Some of that rhetoric I know by heart.

Members are hearing over and over again how determined the opposition party is to fight for the rights of workers. What about the rights of employers? Do they not have rights? Are they not Canadian? Are they not the ones that provide the workers with a place to work?

• (6345)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to inform the House that another Canadian soldier has just been killed in Afghanistan.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot read Bill C-6 because I do not really understand what we are arguing about. If we were arguing about a specific thing, it should be very clear. We are hearing stories about the labour movement in Canada at the beginning of the 20th century, but at this moment we should be focused on the bill we are debating in the House.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Yes, I have read the bill, as have all my colleagues. To suggest that we do not read our documents is almost an insult.

The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville mentioned just now that he was shocked. I too am shocked by this government's desire to privatize everything and trample on people's rights, and by its refusal to listen to what Canadians genuinely need.

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to join with my colleague in saying that information has just been received that a member of the Canadian armed forces has been found dead in Afghanistan. We sincerely convey our deepest regrets and sincere sympathies to the family.

As we progress with the debate on Bill C-6, it is evident there is a flurry of activity on the floor of the House of Commons. It appears we may be moving into committee of the whole very soon. The debate itself at second reading may be collapsing soon and there may be amendments that may come forward.

Has the New Democratic Party been able to achieve any consensus with the government that it will accept any of the amendments which the NDP may be in the process of proposing? If there has been no consensus achieved, I am wondering why we are

doing this at this point in time. From a purely tactical point of view, would it not have been better to try this at 4 a.m. when a tactical advantage could be achieved? If the NDP is doing this in the middle of the day, what exactly is the game plan?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

First, I, too, would like to express my condolences to the soldier's family. Because of the Conservative government, the troops are still in Afghanistan.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for some respect from my colleagues.

All I have to say to the hon. member's question is that we, the NDP, are asking for nothing but an end to this dispute. We want people to get their mail and workers to get back to work with decent conditions. The government simply has to unlock the doors.

• (6350)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, with all the courtesy we have come to expect from the Conservatives, they tried to make the members of the House and the Canadian public believe that they alone represent the people in the regions and the various aboriginal communities in this country. These people need postal service and often do not have access to reliable Internet service. Even cell phones and BlackBerry smartphones—which government ministers love to check during question period instead of listening to their colleagues' questions—are not always reliable in areas as remote as Kuujuaq, which is in my riding.

In remote areas of my riding, communication methods complement one another and do not compete against one another. I know that the concept is likely difficult for the Conservative government to grasp, but that is the case.

People want to have the choice of sending an email, mailing a letter or making a telephone call. The Conservatives must understand the concept of choice.

Was it her difficulty understanding this concept that led the Minister of Health to take advantage of the fact that I was not in the House to launch a personal attack against me? I do not know and I do not hold it against her. However, I would just hope that, the next time she wants to debate, she will at least have the courage to do so when I am here. I would be happy to discuss the difficulty villages have accessing clean drinking water; health, education and environmental issues; climate change; or any other issues with her. I would take the time to talk with her about it.

If it makes them happy, I will let the Conservatives continue thinking that they are the only ones representing the people living in Northern Canada. However, this is not true. In reality, the ridings of Western Arctic, Churchill, Skeena—Bulkley Valley and my riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou are all represented by members from the NDP.

Government Orders

Our main objective is to come to an agreement as quickly as possible in the labour dispute between workers and management at Canada Post. This agreement can easily be reached. To come to an agreement that is acceptable for everyone, all the government needs to do is remove the clause that sets out the salaries and does not provide the arbitrator or the two parties involved in the dispute with any flexibility.

In actual fact, the members opposite have to do only one thing to return to their respective ridings and that is to ask the Prime Minister to call on the Minister of Labour to remove the salary clause from the bill.

In short, the Conservative members must realize that they have the power, should they choose to work with us, to end all this. They have the power to ensure that Canada Post ends the lockout. They have the power to ensure that people start receiving their mail again.

Imagine. If they would stop being so stubborn, we could return to our ridings and spend time with our constituents. We will all see each other again soon enough in the fall and we will have the opportunity then to conduct more in-depth debates on issues that are of concern to all Canadians. Right now, people are waiting for us to do something about this labour dispute.

It is important to remember that the two parties in the dispute have been trying to reach an agreement for over eight months. After eight months without results, it is time to start making things happen. The workers used the tools that were available to them and that are part of their rights—rights guaranteed by the highest court in this country.

With respect to means of applying pressure, the workers decided that it was vital to ensure that Canada Post's basic mandate be maintained, that is the distribution of mail to people in all cities and regions of our country. That was the rationale for rotating strikes.

Canada Post's principal mandate is not to make a profit. It is to ensure that Canadians, no matter where they live in our country, can send and receive mail.

• (6355)

Turning a profit is not its mandate because previous governments sold off the most profitable components of this crown corporation over the years.

Nevertheless, we are talking about a crown corporation that has made millions of dollars in profit over the past few years. This is not a company that is being restructured or that must sacrifice pension plans and reduce workers' salaries just in the hope of surviving. No. We are talking about a corporation that, to avoid negotiating in good faith, locked the doors and mailboxes, preventing people from having access to the service.

Does the government realize that all it has to do to resolve this impasse is to work with us to remove the unacceptable clause on salaries contained in the bill? This clause, by the way, offers wages that are lower than those on the table when the employer decided to stop Canada's mail service.

That is the issue, the injustice visited on the workers, who had proposed extending the collective agreement while negotiations were under way. Extending the term of the collective agreement for the

duration of negotiations is also included in the bill. It is a clause that we support because it is fair and gives negotiations a chance.

The unjust clause that sets terms and conditions for the arbitrator is quite simply unacceptable. The government has no reason to step in for the employer. The government has no reason to restrict bargaining rights.

The members opposite have the choice and the power to end this stalemate if they decide to work with us.

It is time for the Conservatives to start working with us so that Canadians can have their postal service back.

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, being First Nations, and coming from a paramilitary organization, the RCMP, and having been on duty on July 7, 2006, when two members were fatally shot, and we had to bury them a week later, my thoughts and prayers are with the military family on today's loss.

What I hear today is very hypocritical. I have read that the CEP, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Local 302, from which the MPs of the NDP hire, has not had a bargaining agreement for three years.

The member for Scarborough—Rouge River is looking for someone for her office. It is a permanent full-time position at a salary of \$47,852. The salary level is subject to clauses 12 and 21 of the collective agreement. I think it is a little hypocritical to try to hire people who have a non-existent act.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comment. Since he did not ask me a question, I will take this opportunity to talk about this conflict again. I would always be delighted to do that.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the member said that there is no question there. Correct me if I am wrong, but this is for questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member from Essex is correct. It could be a question or a comment. However, I am not sure that it was necessary to point that out at this time.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I understood the comment, but I also understood the accusation of hypocrisy. That is what I understood.

So I would like to go back to a few points that I mentioned in my speech. I believe it is essential to go back to the real issues of this debate that we have been having here for several days.

It is very easy to end this stalemate. We have suggested some courses of action, and the Conservatives can accept them now.

Government Orders

• (6400)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I join with my colleague from the north in looking for solutions to some of the issues that face us today.

During the last Conservative government, we saw the government absolutely change the nature of Canada Post in the north by taking away the food mail program from Canada's north. The alternate program that has put in place does not allow people to have their choices, and it is causing great disruption in our communities.

Perhaps my colleague would want to speak about this, because of course, his communities, like mine, are tremendously impacted by these types of government decisions.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, it was indeed an important program. The trend set when the government changed the program and imposed new rules was like what they are trying to do with what we are dealing with here today. I do not accept that.

What needs to be done in this particular program for the north, which is so important, is that the government should sit down with the first nations people, the service providers, the chambers of commerce in the different regions, and so on and so forth, and iron out something that will suit everybody and make everybody happy. That is not happening.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to take a few moments to recognize all of my colleagues who are here in the House and have been up for 30 or 40 hours now, who are here to continue to fight for our party's values and to defend the interests of Canadian workers and families.

We all had events planned in our ridings for Quebec's national holiday. Yesterday, my colleague from Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek was supposed to celebrate his 11th wedding anniversary with his wife. My colleague from Newton—Delta-Nord was supposed to spend time with her family, who made a special trip from England to see her. We all want and need to go home to our families. Our families need us, but Canada's families need us more.

An even greater need has brought us here to the House, and that is the need to fight together in an effort to make this government understand that its place is beside workers and that it has a duty to render a fair and just verdict.

I would also like to pay tribute to workers across Canada who are fighting for their rights. Postal workers are fighting not only for their own rights, but also for the rights of all Canadian workers.

Since the debate started, I have heard Conservative members talk about this being a "joke". Is that how they see our commitment to defending the interests of our fellow Canadians? For them, it is a joke? Is there anything more important than being here trying to find a solution that both parties can agree to?

We have all spoken at least once to say what we think. We have heard heated, poetic and passionate speeches. Some members explained very clearly what makes Bill C-6 unlawful. Others proposed specific solutions that both parties could have agreed to. But nothing changes. It seems as though the members opposite,

already blinded by their partisan purposes, do not want to listen to us, do not want to understand Canadians and, most of all, do not want to change their minds.

They continue to cling to reasoning that defies logic. They will not let go of their beliefs, however faulty they are. But I have noticed one single half-positive point, one little sign of evolution: the hon. members opposite now dare to utter the word "lockout" in place of the word "strike". But they just mutter it under their breath, almost whispering it, as if they wanted no one to hear them say it, as if it were a swear word. But it is not a word that came from the workers; it came from Canada Post. The hon. members opposite must get used to that idea.

They would have us believe that this lockout was imposed by the union. How ironic.

How often have my colleagues and I tried to explain the difference between a strike and a lockout, between a rotating strike and a lockout?

Let me sum it up for those who have not yet grasped the difference. A rotating strike is a partial work stoppage. Let me explain "partial" very clearly. Canada Post workers decided that, in order not to harm the Canadian economy and in order for Canadians to continue receiving the service to which they are entitled, they were going to keep delivering the mail. The strike moved, in a symbolic way, from one municipality to another. In no way did the rotating strike put the country's economy in peril, since the mail continued to be delivered. The aim of the strike was simply to make people aware of the unacceptable conditions that the employer wanted to impose. It was not meant to endanger small and medium-sized business activity nor was it meant to keep cheques from seniors or from those receiving employment insurance benefits.

A lockout, on the other hand, is a work stoppage imposed by the employer. On June 3, Canada Post decided to end mail service and to put padlocks on the doors. It held its employees hostage, employees who wanted to continue delivering the mail at the same time as they were demanding their rights. But above all, Canada Post is holding Canadians hostage, since Canadians can no longer receive their mail.

Striking is a right for all workers. They have the right to negotiate their working conditions. It is not up to the government to step in for the employer, especially when we know what its goal is.

How can we possibly suggest such conditions to the workers? What image do we want to give to our young people? Canada Post employees are there every day. They accept working conditions that are increasingly difficult. They carry heavy bags that cut into their shoulders. They collapse under the weight of the mail, have to fight inclement weather and heat waves, and sometimes walk for hours. Should they also accept unfavourable wages? Why? Because their employer is not profitable enough?

Government Orders

Still, let us recall that Canada Post's most recent revenues are estimated at over \$281 million for the year. Let us also recall that the CEO of Canada Post received the modest sum of \$497,000 for his good and loyal service, and that he gets a bonus of 33%, on top of his annual salary. And we are supposed to believe that Canada Post is suffering from the recession and that that is the only reason driving the cuts to its employee's benefits? No. The real reason is that this employer knows that it is supported by the government, and so many other employers will follow suit if we do not put an end to this type of thing immediately,

● (6405)

The employer proposed certain salary increases during the negotiations, and then the government interfered and put forward a contract that offered less. This contract is, quite simply, unfair. It not only fails to meet the employees' demands, but also undercuts the salary offer made by the employer. What kind of world are we living in?

It is neither the government's role nor its responsibility to impose such contracts. What the government is proposing is, quite simply, unilateral and irresponsible legislation. It flouts the right to negotiate a collective agreement. The government's actions do not give the two parties an opportunity to properly negotiate an agreement.

The government should not interfere in this conflict, or in any other similar conflict. This debate is not only about the Canada Post issue: more than that, it is about the right of workers to negotiate with their employer.

Canadians fought long and hard for a fair and just work environment. They fought heart and soul for decent wages and basic benefits so that they could provide for their families.

Locking out these employees and forcing them to accept a contract while trying to take away their hard-earned savings will set us back many years and create a dangerous precedent. Canada Post employees refuse to be the victims of an unfair clawback scheme that will take money out of their pockets. They refuse to have their rights undermined, as well as the rights of all the people who work for other large employers and friends of the government.

They refuse to have their rights trampled on, but they are ready to go back to work. They are ready to start delivering mail to their fellow Canadians again. They just want to be treated fairly. They want to be treated in a manner befitting their work. They are asking neither for the moon nor for favourable treatment. They are asking only to be paid fairly for their work. They want to be able to feed their children and provide for their families. They want to be able to retire without worrying about whether they can make ends meet.

How will the government explain to young people who want to work at Canada Post that they are welcome to work there, but they will be paid a lower salary than employees with more seniority who do the exact same job? Are we not endangering the Canadian economy by acting in this way?

Inevitably, our young people will navigate towards companies that respect their employees, if there are any left, with this government. How will Canada's economy be able to recover when we can no longer replace workers who have retired? Is it the government's intention to jeopardize a service as essential as the post office?

The Conservatives will have to explain to us the long-term viability of such a contract. If they are really concerned about Canada's economy, they should stop telling us to pass this bill and go home. Let them make an enlightened decision for once and end the lockout to allow Canada's economy to keep running. Let them end the lockout to allow both parties to resume negotiations and come to an agreement that will satisfy everyone.

Canadians are being held hostage and they know who is doing it. Not Canada Post employees, but their employer who, together with the government, is attacking the rights and the advances that our parents and grandparents fought for. That is why Canadians support the workers at Canada Post. Why do they support them? In a word, because they know that they could be the next on the list if they let the government get its way.

The quality of life and the social justice that we enjoy in this country are indisputable rights that we will defend to the bitter end. On May 2, we were given a mandate to represent our constituents, and we will do so with honour and respect. We will stay here. We are ready to go all the way. We will stay on our feet, without complaining, and we will continue to fight for all the workers in Canada who are counting on us to represent them in this House.

● (6410)

[English]

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to add my condolences to the family and friends of our fallen soldier. They do what they do over there so we can do what we do here.

There is a clear track record on this side of the House that the government stands with working families. However, we hear a lot of speeches and rhetoric on the other side. As it is the opposition party, we all understand that.

I will highlight a couple of examples of when the party opposite had the opportunity to be in government.

In Ontario, it put a major assault on workers' rights with the social contract, which made people who were making as little as \$7.50 an hour take 12 unpaid days off a year.

In 1999, the Roy Romanow Saskatchewan government ordered nurses back to work after just 24 hours—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, they were not making \$7.50 an hour. Those were the people on welfare who were told to use bent cans of tuna to feed themselves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is not a point of order. The hon. member for Langley.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, it is a continuing pattern of that member interrupting so that he can make a statement and be involved in debate. It is inappropriate. It shows disrespect to Parliament and it should not continue.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member is quite right in the sense that points of order ought not to be used inappropriately and I would urge all hon. members not to do that. Earlier today, about 27 hours ago I believe, we had this conversation. If the member for York Centre could quickly put his question.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that last night over 30% of members on that side did not show up for the vote, is that party—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Ottawa Centre is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member is new, but he should know that he cannot say whether members have been here or not. He is referencing the fact that members were not here and it is not according to the rules.

•(6415)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. Minister of State for Science and Technology is rising on the same point of order.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, no member was mentioned. It is a public record that last night we had a vote. I urge all viewers across Canada to check it out. The NDP was missing 30% of its caucus. The member opposite—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate that this discussion has taken place for a couple of days. All hon. members know, or ought to know, that you cannot refer to whether another member was or was not, is or is not in the chamber. That is correct.

Having said that, referencing the number of votes that were cast one way or another in a previous vote does not violate that principle. I would encourage all hon. members to allow our colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes an opportunity to respond to the comment that was made by the hon. member for York Centre.

The hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Mr. Speaker, I fail to see the use of the information that the hon. member is giving us. We have all been here for many hours to support the Canada Post workers and all workers across Canada. That is the purpose of the position we are taking here.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Just to clarify for all hon. members, when you rise in questions and comments you have an opportunity to make a comment or ask a question. You do not have the right to continue to talk until you ask a question. At some point, the time may expire before you ask a question or you may in fact not be asking a question.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the postal workers have been locked out. They are trying to be forced back to work. I would like my colleague to comment on that. Has she seen this before? How does she think they feel? This is similar to having a spouse thrown out by the other spouse and the police bringing the spouse back and saying he or she must be allowed to stay in the home.

I know the postal workers had indicated they were prepared to deliver the cheques to seniors and others. Did my colleague see in the legislation that the employers were able to lock them out?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

The Canada Post workers actually want to return to work, regardless of what the hon. members opposite may say. And the lockout does not allow them to do so whereas the strike was making that possible. That is the problem in a nutshell. The dialogue seems to be going nowhere. There is a complete lack of understanding.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

•(6455)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 26*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke

Government Orders

Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Williamson
Wilks	Woodworth
Wong	Young (Oakville)
Yelich	Zimmer — 158
Young (Vancouver South)	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen

Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Fortin	Freeman
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassania
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	Layton
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)	Leslie
Liu	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathyssen
May	McGuinty
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Pécelet
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel — 112

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. The next question is on the main motion.

● (6505)

(The House divided on the motion which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 27)***YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant

Government Orders

Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
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Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
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Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Fortin	Freeman
Garrison	Genest

Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	Layton
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McGuinity
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
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Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclét
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Sagamash
Sandhu	Savoie
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Tumel — 112

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the second time and, by unanimous consent, the House went into committee of the whole thereon, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)

● (6510)

The Chair: Order, please. I would like to open this session of the committee of the whole on Bill C-6 by making a short statement about the proceedings.

[*Translation*]

This is the first time many hon. members will be participating in a debate like this, and I would like to explain how we are going to proceed.

The rules of debate are as follows.

[*English*]

No member shall speak for more than 20 minutes at a time. Speeches must be strictly relevant to the terms of the clause under consideration. There is no formal period for questions and comments. Members may use their time to speak or to ask questions, and the responses will be counted in the time allotted to that member. Motions do not need a seconder, and members may speak more than once. Finally, members need not be in their own seat to be recognized, just to make my job a little easier.

[*Translation*]

The committee will now proceed with the clause-by-clause study of the bill.

[*English*]

Before we begin, I would like to ask those members who have amendments to please bring them to the table.

Government Orders

(On clause 2)

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Chair, today I am here to address the committee of the whole regarding the Government of Canada's proposed legislation, An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services.

Before I start, I would like to sincerely thank my parliamentary secretary, my colleagues and all of our staff for their exemplary efforts. I am once again reminded of how strong a team we are on this side of the House.

This extraordinary bill has been introduced in the House as a result of an unresolved labour dispute between Canada Post and more than 50,000 employees of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers urban operations unit. Now that the work stoppage has continued, regular postal service has ceased. Canadians are turning to Parliament for a solution. That is what I am here to talk about today.

Context is important so that the extraordinary measures in the bill can be better understood. Let me start with three important points.

First, a reliable postal service without interruption is an important part of what keeps our economy running smoothly.

Second, when that service is interrupted, or when the reliability of that service is put into doubt, it does more than just create an inconvenience. Costs are incurred, and they are paid by Canadian families and Canadian businesses.

Third, many months have passed since this labour dispute began and there is no end in sight at which the parties can reach a settlement on their own.

Given these facts, Parliament has an obligation to act and to do so in the best interest of the Canadian economy.

• (6515)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Chair, in your opening statement, you told us that you would strictly apply the rule of relevance. The minister is supposed to be discussing clause 2, but she is just making a general introduction.

The Chair: I thank the hon. member but, as all hon. members know, clause 2 is quite broad and it can include these types of comments.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, after so many hours of listening intently to the debates from the other side of the House, I thought it would more than appropriate that members would take the next 10 minutes to understand.

The important part here is that Canada Post is vital to the economy. It is indeed one of Canada's largest corporations. It is a \$7.5 billion company, employing some 70,000 people right across Canada. A vast majority of them have union representation. Canadians rely on the services of Canada Post for many reasons.

Canada Post sorts and delivers 11 billion pieces of mail every single year. It remains a vital part of how we stay connected to one another as a country, but it is also important as a business in Canada.

It helps companies grow. It plays a key role in how bills gets delivered and paid on time and ensures that parcels reach their destinations.

Canada Post is an integral part of what keeps Canada in business and puts money in the pockets of many citizens. From the small business owners who invoice and get paid via mail to the companies that rely on the mail to issue bills, process orders, and receive payments, this is a service that matters a lot. Similarly, for taxpayers waiting for a tax or HST rebate to arrive or for citizens in rural and northern communities who rely fundamentally on the mail for many of their essential services and communications, Canada Post is a vital service.

For months, Canada has been dealing with uncertainty surrounding postal services. The collective agreement covering the union, the largest bargaining unit at Canada Post, CUPW, expired earlier this year and parties began their talks back in October of 2010.

In spite of there being both conciliation and mediation assistance, an agreement has remained elusive, and as of May 25 the parties acquired the legal right to strike or lock out. That presents a risk not just to mail delivery service but also to the good health of Canada's economy on the whole. That is a risk that Canadians simply do not want, nor is it one that they should have to endure.

The work stoppage at Canada Post is expected to have an immeasurable impact on our economy, resulting in losses of about \$9 million to \$31 million per week. Every day that means more jobs at risk, more productivity lost, more challenges for businesses, and more uncertainty for consumers.

My third point is that every other avenue has been tried to bring a full and lasting resolution to this dispute. Quite frankly, the time has come for Parliament to do the right thing and intervene. Consider how much has been done over the last eight months by the Canadian Government in order to resolve this dispute.

On October 4, 2010, notice was served by the union on the employer to commence collective bargaining, and they held negotiations from October to November. In January of 2011, the union filed a notice of dispute and asked Labour Canada for help in conciliation, and a conciliation officer was appointed at the end of January.

Through February and March, the conciliation officers met with the parties. On April 1, the conciliation period was extended further to May 3 in order to allow the parties to continue. During that time, the conciliation officer met with the parties.

On May 3 they were released from conciliation and on May 5 a mediator was appointed. Throughout the month of May and into June a mediator from the labour program's Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service met very frequently with the parties. Unfortunately, despite all of these efforts, the parties were unable to come to an agreement. Even as recently as eight o'clock this morning attempts were made to help the parties reach a deal and they bore no fruit. Something needs to be done and that is why we are now acting with this extraordinary measure.

Government Orders

The act itself provides for the resumption and continuation of the mail service by Canada Post. It brings an end to this growing uncertainty that has characterized much of the dispute itself for many months. The act also imposes a four-year contract and new pay rate increases. That will mean a 1.75% increase as of February 1, 2011; 1.5% as of February 2012; 2% as of February 2013; and 2% as of February 2014. It also provides for final offer selection, which is a binding mechanism on all outstanding matters.

● (6520)

Furthermore, and most important, in making the selection of a final offer, the arbitrator is to be guided for specific principles, the need for terms and conditions of employment that are consistent with those in comparable postal industries that will provide the necessary degree of flexibility for both short-term and long-term viability, and competitiveness of the corporation itself. They will maintain the health and safety of its workers and to ensure the sustainability of the pension plan.

The terms and conditions of the employment must also taken into account a solvency ratio in the pension plan that does not decline as a direct result of a new collective agreement and that Canada Post Corporation must, without recourse to undue increases in postal rates, operate efficiently, improve productivity and meet acceptable standards of service.

In other words, it is a decisive approach and it is aimed at resolving this labour dispute.

Some may argue that collective bargaining is a process that has to be left to run its course, no matter how long it takes. However, the facts tell us that the parties in this dispute have tried again and again, month after month and no agreement has been reached and, indeed, there is no agreement in sight.

So what is a reasonable amount of time to wait for a solution before we act? Well, we cannot wait until our economy is damaged, until jobs are lost, until businesses and families are actually hurt. Not only is that unreasonable, it is actually unfair to Canadians. They did not ask for the labour dispute and they should not have to pay the price for this and for having it dragged on as long as it has.

Canadians are counting on their government to provide mediation, conciliation assistance, and we did that when the parties were unable to reach a solution. Now it is up to the Government of Canada to act in the best interests of all Canadians and of our country's economy.

As I said before, this is not the Government of Canada's first choice in how we would like to see this labour dispute resolved, but this choice is the necessary one. All members of the House should join me in giving the proposed legislation the support that it deserves.

The Chair: The exception to the rule of relevance that I cited in the case of the minister's speech applies as we discuss clause 2.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Outremont.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Chair, you will not be surprised to learn that, on our side, we do not share the minister's analysis, but out of respect for your function, we will still

try to briefly talk about clause 2, which is the one we are supposed to be studying. At the same time, we would like to review what has happened over the past 72 hours because there is something fundamental about that.

The fundamental principle of acting in good faith underlies all work in matters of the relations between employers and employees.

Let me start with clause 2, which deals with the interpretation of the bill, and I will go in order. It says:

2. (1) The following definitions apply in this Act.

“arbitrator” means the arbitrator appointed under section 8.

We will have the opportunity to go back to this with our colleagues because we have some amendments to make.

[*English*]

Arbitrator means the arbitrator appointed under clause 8. That is a good place to start on our analysis of clause 2 for one good and simple reason. An arbitrator by definition is someone who will use his or her experience and ability to look at what is before him or her and come to a decision that is the fairest under the circumstances, based on all the information that is placed before the arbitrator. Interests of both sides will be taken into account and the fairest decision rendered.

The government across from us will allow no such thing. As we will see when we get to the clause, it is stacking the deck.

● (6525)

[*Translation*]

The conservative government has absolutely no intention of allowing an arbitrator to work freely and fairly under the rules. I know what I am talking about because twice in the past 72 hours we thought we were on the verge of a negotiated agreement. The minister must be extremely tired, because we heard her say in the past few hours that she never talked to us. The fact is we did talk to each other. I talked to her and my colleagues also talked to her. We did so through her staff and we tried to ensure that what is provided under clause 2(1) concerning the arbitrator would respect the tradition, the rules and the right to collective bargaining between employers and employees.

In recent weeks, similar strategies have been decried, condemned and blocked by the courts. Again this week, a binding ruling was made against the same Conservatives. In that case, the judge went through every section and paragraph and condemned the Conservatives' blatant lack of good faith in a situation very similar to the one with which we are dealing.

[*English*]

Good faith is the basis of all work that gets done in matters of labour relations. This week we had a devastating decision against the Conservative government from the Federal Court, in a fact situation quite similar to the one that presents itself here today. In paragraphs 86 to 92, we realized rather quickly that the government was again repeating the behaviour that was denounced by the Federal Court. This is the basis for labour law. This is the basis for collective negotiations.

Government Orders

As we will see, the bill contains what we call an orphan clause. It would reduce, by 18%, the entry salary and we would wind up discriminating against younger people, because they would be the majority of the new hires. We are told that this is just the way it will be in the world run by the Conservative majority.

In the same way, back in the 1960s, we would have been told, regarding a collective agreement that had one wage scale for men and a lower one for women, that this was just the way it was. One wage scale for older workers and a lower one for younger workers is just the way it is in the Conservative universe. A clause in a collective agreement that said once a woman was expecting a child she would lose her job, 50 years ago, that was just the way it was. Today, the Conservatives are trying to turn back the clock in matters of rights, and that is what we are standing up against.

Staying with our analysis of clause 2, the next definition is of “collective agreement”. It means the collective agreement between the employer and the union. In this case, we give the expiry date of the previous one.

[*Translation*]

I will state this in French. A collective agreement is supposed to be a convention agreed to by the employer and the union. One can see why they need to be reminded of that, because the bill does not allow any convention or agreement whatsoever. The conditions are being dictated by the government which, as we know, imposed a lockout. The government is preventing employees from returning to work. The Conservative government and Canada Post are working hand in hand to undermine labour relations. We also had proof of that over the past 72 hours. They blame the employees and they attack them after kicking them out. They point the finger at them and tell them there is a problem in that they are refusing to work, therefore making special legislation necessary to force back to work employees who want nothing more than to work. But it is the employer that padlocked the doors.

Let us read the next definition in clause 2:

“employee” means a person employed by the employer and bound by the collective agreement.

• (6530)

[*English*]

That is an interesting notion, being bound by an agreement collectively arrived at between employer and employee. When we respect every clause of the legislation, we withdraw conforming ourselves to the Charter of Rights and the Labour Code. We withdraw part of our work because we are trying to negotiate. The service was not interrupted, except when the employer locked the workers out. That is where the problem started.

[*Translation*]

The employer is the Canada Post Corporation. I can assure you—and my colleagues and I experienced this during the past few hours—that when we and the union were supposed to be told about the result of negotiations and discussions with Canada Post, there was interference on the part of the government.

There is no distance whatsoever on the part of the government, that is trying to send a message to all public sector unionized workers, if not to all employees in Canada, by telling employers not

to worry, that the usual rules don't concern it. They can be suspended as it pleases, it will come forward to adopt new laws to repress the rights of their employees; it will stand up whenever there is an issue, and always in favour of management.

That is the Conservative reality.

[*English*]

“Minister” means the Minister of Labour.

[*Translation*]

We are talking about the Minister of Labour. The very title is supposed to suggest equality among the parties. Instead, we have a new minister of management.

[*English*]

We have a minister of management.

[*Translation*]

Everything is in favour of management. Even when her closest associates, who are supposed to be able to represent her, caused things to move forward a little, on behalf of the government, she disavowed the work they had done. Her associates were thrown under the bus. The small steps that we thought had been made have been completely forgotten, set aside by the minister and her government because it was out of the question for the employees to gain anything at all at the end of this exercise. The Conservatives are going to use their majority to try to crush people, but there is a little surprise waiting for them. The message they are putting out has indeed been understood by the workers' movement everywhere in Canada. The government should hear the clock ticking. It is congratulating itself today. Let it rejoice, but I can guarantee that the men and women who work throughout Canada, and those who have been fighting for their rights for generations, have understood what is going on very well. Like us, they are going to stand up to the government every time it tries to use such tactics in the future.

Finally, clause 2 states that the union concerned is the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

[*English*]

Union means the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of all my colleagues, I would like to use the time at my disposal to express our appreciation and congratulations for the honesty, integrity and good faith demonstrated by the entire union team. In recent days, they made every possible effort to come to a negotiated settlement. Their efforts were thwarted by the Conservative government's clear intention to attempt to crush them.

Government Orders

That comment remains relevant in the discussion of clause 2 because the clause and its definitions lay out the approach to labour relations that we can expect in the next four years. In those four years, people all over the country will know that they now have a clear choice. Some people will suppress their rights, even rights recognized in subsection 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such as freedom of association, guaranteed by the Supreme Court in a series of decisions that culminated with BC Health Services, Fraser and the decision we had this week. But one political party will stand up for the rights of Canadians and of workers, and that is the New Democratic Party.

• (6535)

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Chair, as you indicated from the outset, clause 2 certainly gives one a fairly wide range of topics to touch on.

Over the course of the last number of hours and day this debate has gone on, we have been able to put our concerns with the bill out in the public eye and have articulated the position of the Liberal Party of Canada.

We believe, and have stated from the outset, that the legislation was heavy-handed. We thought the legislation was restrictive and would handcuff an arbitrator to come forward with a more fair and reasonable deal for workers, and we identified that throughout the course of the debate.

After listening intently to what has gone on over the last number of days in the debate, I do not know if there was much more said at 4:15 this morning than was said at 1:10 Friday morning. That is why we had called for amendments early and why we had asked to present amendments early. We articulated our amendments early on in the debate. I felt at that time that, as opposed to this bill as we might be, we all have a basic understanding of mathematics in this caucus and we have a pretty good idea as to what the outcome will be. We would have preferred to have the amendments tabled but we have presented our amendments and we look forward to the chamber ruling on them.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Chair, I wish to say a few words after the night we just had. First, I want to acknowledge and thank all the House and security staff. I think they should be applauded for spending all this time with us. This whole filibuster has wasted a lot of taxpayers' money.

The problem with clause 2 is that we have a bad bill before us and there is also this ideology of the official opposition, which wants to drag things out, even though it knows full well that, given the government's majority, this legislation will inevitably pass.

As for us, we said from the outset that, in accordance with our role, we wanted to propose amendments in a constructive fashion, so as to show that we are able to respect the right of workers, while also respecting the citizens who want to receive their mail. We did not want to drag things on, and our action was not influenced by ideology, whether from the left or the right.

The problem with this whole issue is that I heard the minister say she would rather protect 33 million Canadians than 45,000 workers.

However, these workers also happen to be Canadians. It is somewhat strange to try to divide people when we are supposed to find solutions. We could have saved a lot of time if, in the definition of "arbitrator", the minister had allowed this arbitrator to have full control. Indeed, given his or her experience and expertise, an arbitrator is capable of finding a common ground for both sides.

We could also save a lot of time, knowing full well that the employer made salary proposals but that the bill includes lower salaries. That is totally ridiculous. Our television viewers, who now number more than four or five, will finally see how this whole thing will turn out. I find it rather sad that this House was used to wage a small war between the Conservatives' right-wing ideology and the NDP's left-wing ideology.

If we want to resolve the situation and abide by the Constitution of Canada, we have to be pragmatic. In 1997, I was on the other side of the House, and back-to-work legislation was introduced, but it was after a general strike, not a lockout. And here their slip is showing, since just before that we had Air Canada, and so we have the government's pattern right in front of us: it denies workers their rights, and very certainly, every time we have a little problem, its definition is going to mean that we will have back-to-work legislation.

This is a very sad day today. I hope that on Monday people will remember on both the official opposition side and the government side that a lot of people are going to be ill-served. We could have avoided this entire debate if things had been done properly.

• (6540)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Chair, to begin with, I will say that the Bloc Québécois has also presented amendments. However, we knew from the outset of this debate that it was tainted for the simple good reason that the government is acting prematurely by introducing this special bill, which is obviously intended to muzzle the union and tie its hands.

The employees had in fact started to use pressure tactics. It must be understood that the pressure tactics were rotating strikes. Never, but never, was the public as a whole penalized, whether in Quebec or in Canada, for the short time the pressure tactics lasted before the lockout.

That is why, in my opinion and the opinion of everyone we have talked to, whether or not they support unions is of no importance. The customers as well, the people who, it seems, were sending a steady stream of email to the Conservatives, told us they had not been affected by the rotating strikes, except when the strike was at their location. But it was no worse than when there is a holiday. We had one recently, and unfortunately we were not able to participate in the festivities for the national holiday. But it is a holiday, which means there is no mail or postal services. The same thing happens when there are rotating strikes. So they could have continued the pressure tactics and, most importantly, the negotiations, without the apprehended disaster happening, the one the Conservatives have told us about throughout this long debate, involving another economic crisis. These were one-day, narrowly targeted strikes, in very different areas, from one day to the next, that lasted only 24 hours

Government Orders

The public as a whole, and the people I have spoken with specifically about this, never blamed the workers for what happened. Obviously it is never pleasant not to receive the cheque you are waiting for, and everyone is aware of that. That is why the government should immediately have taken a mediation approach, not picked up a bazooka to kill a fly. That is the big difference between the Conservatives' approach and the approach adopted by the various opposition parties who have spoken in this House.

From the outset, we knew the outcome that is unfortunately going to come about in a few minutes, after everything that has happened. As was the case for Air Canada, the government is once again acting prematurely. I do not think this was unplanned. It was entirely out of self-interest. What the government wanted is the outcome it is going to have: to come down squarely on the side of Canada Post. The shot has been fired across the bow of virtually everyone who works in the public service: watch out; unfortunately, the Conservatives have a majority.

• (6545)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Chair, I note that clause 2 is a little more vague and open to interpretation, and allows for broader issues to be discussed than other clauses, and so I rise to say a few words.

To begin with, as the official opposition critic for labour and workers, I too would like to thank those employees who have worked so hard over the last few days to ensure the smooth running of the democratic process, and for making it possible to debate these issues in the House of Commons. I am referring to the security and restaurant staff, the pages and everyone who has helped us. Singling people out often means forgetting others, which is certainly not my intention. We would sincerely like to thank every employee.

[*English*]

An hon. member: No thanks to you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That shows the arrogance of the Conservatives, “no thanks to you”.

[*Translation*]

I would like to stress the importance of this debate in the House of Commons and thank our new members. I wanted to thank the government for providing us with this forum. It has been a good training ground for new members. They have had an opportunity to deliver speeches and ask questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yvon Godin: There is nothing wrong with commenting on people who are learning how to do their job. There is nothing improper about that. I am simply drawing members' attention to one of the positive aspects of this debate. The government claimed that it did not interfere in the bargaining process. For better or for worse—and it was recorded—the postal union and Canada Post held discussions until almost midday. The postal union therefore had an opportunity to return to the bargaining table with the employer. One thing we did was to give the parties an opportunity to try and settle this labour dispute. That is what the Minister of Labour has always wanted. These people have to engage in a dialogue; we are not like

the Liberals, who just wanted to stay home and allow this negotiation not to take place. That is what matters.

What have we accomplished? I will soon leave here proud to say that we saw things through until the end and did not simply stop because we wanted to go home because July is around the corner. We have worked hard and I want to thank all members on both sides of this House. That is democracy at work, and that is what we have just seen here. The representatives of the people have had an opportunity to express their views on a very important subject.

I want the record to show that taxpayers' money was not spent needlessly. While chambers of commerce and all manner of organizations are there to protect employers, Canadians need to hear how important it is that workers have a fundamental right to be part of a union that represents them. The government referred to the unions as big bosses.

We shall talk about wages later, in the bill for the collective agreement. This is one of the government's demands or proposals. How many members would like two different salaries the day they are elected to the House of Commons—one for newcomers and one for those with the most seniority? That is what the government wants now. It wants two wage classes, as if there were two classes of citizens. Are we prepared as members to pass a bill that would give newly elected members a lower salary than members who have been here for 15 years? We would never want to pass such a bill.

So let us respect the workers. The government has this opportunity. Let it at least give an arbitrator the opportunity to make a decision that is not dictated by the Government of Canada, by the Conservatives. Let the workers negotiate their collective agreement with the conciliators or the arbitrator.

Furthermore, the Minister of Labour should remember what her title is. She is the Minister of Labour, not the Minister of Industry. The labour minister is here to represent workers, not to table bills that offer less than the employer offers. The government says it does not interfere in employer-employee negotiations, yet it tables a bill which reduces wages and management's offer. If that is not interference, I wonder what is.

• (6550)

The Conservatives may believe this, but the citizens and workers of our country know that it does not work that way. Certainly they do not believe what the government is telling them, namely that lowering the employer's offer is in the workers' best interest and that it is not taking the employer's side.

With the little changes we are asking, it is to be hoped that the government will have a heart, if only a little heart, for the worker's lot. In their speeches through all the hours that have passed here since Thursday, not a single time have the Conservatives talked about the workers. They have talked only about other people, not the 45,000 postal workers who deliver our mail. They have never congratulated them. They prefer to say that 33 million Canadians need their mail. If they need their mail, then Canada Post should take the padlocks off the doors.

[*English*]

The Chair: Shall clause 2 carry?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: All those in favour of clause 2 will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Chair: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Chair: In my opinion the nays have it.

Order, please. As this is a different kind of vote, I should like to read the procedure. I should like to remind the hon. members that the voting will begin with the Chair asking those members who are in favour of the clause to all rise, row by row. As the Clerk counts the members on my right, they will sit down, row by row, followed by those members in the rows to my left.

The hon. Chief Government Whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, if you seek it I believe you would find unanimous consent to apply the vote from the previous recorded vote to this clause, and we will follow that procedure through the rest of the clauses.

• (6555)

The Chair: Does the Chief Government Whip have the unanimous consent of the House to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare clause 2 carried.
(Clause 2 agreed to)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas 158; Nays 112)
(On clause 3)

The Chair: Shall clause 3 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: The Chief Government Whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, I believe if you seek it you would find agreement to apply the recorded division of the previous vote to this vote, with Conservatives voting yes.

The Chair: Does the hon. Chief Government Whip have unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, the NDP will vote no.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, the Liberal Party will oppose.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the members of the Bloc Québécois vote no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the Green Party votes no.

The Chair: I declare clause 3 carried.
(Clause 3 agreed to)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas: 158; Nays: 112)
(On clause 4)

[*English*]

The Chair: Shall clause 4 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, if you seek it I believe you will find agreement to apply the previous recorded vote to this clause, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Chair, NDP members will be voting no.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, the Liberals will be voting no. I ask that we add the vote of the member for Cardigan please.

The Chair: We do not record names of voting members but we will record the number.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois votes no.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the Green Party votes no.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I declare clause 4 carried.
(Clause 4 agreed to)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas: 158; Nays: 112)
(On clause 5)

[*English*]

The Chair: Shall clause 5 carry?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, if you seek it I believe you will find agreement to apply the previous recorded vote to this clause with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Chair: Does the hon. Chief Government Whip have unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Chair, NDP members will be voting no.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, Liberal members will be voting no.

• (6600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois votes no.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: The Green Party will be voting no, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I declare clause 5 carried.
(Clause 5 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas 158; Nays, 112)
(On clause 6)

The Chair: Shall clause 6 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: The hon. Chief Government Whip.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, if you seek it I believe you will find agreement to apply the previous recorded vote to this clause, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Chair: Does the hon. Chief Government Whip have unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Chair, NDP members will be voting no.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, the Liberals will be voting no.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois votes no.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the Green Party votes no.

[Translation]

The Chair: Clause 6 is carried.
(Clause 6 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27.]

(Yeas: 158; Nays: 112)
(On clause 7)

[English]

The Chair: Shall clause 7 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: The hon. Chief Government Whip.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, I believe if you seek it you will find agreement to apply the previous recorded vote to the current clause, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Chair: Does the Chief Government Whip have unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Chair, NDP members will be voting no.

[Translation]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, the Liberals will vote no.

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois votes no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the Green Party votes no.

The Chair: I declare clause 7 carried.

(Clause 7 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27.]

(Yeas: 158; Nays: 112)

(On clause 8)

The Chair: There is an amendment to clause 8 that I am going to read:

[English]

That Bill C-6 in clause 8 be amended by replacing lines 18 and 19 on page 3 with the following:

The minister must appoint as arbitrator a person that the minister

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Chair, the proposal regarding clause 8 seeks to recognize and respect the responsibility of an arbitrator. If a collective agreement of any industry, whether in the public sector or elsewhere, is violated, the parties can choose an arbitrator who, at the end of the process, will issue a ruling on the interpretation of the collective agreement.

I have never seen an arbitrator become involved in an arbitration process while knowing in advance what his decision would be. If that were the case, an arbitrator would not be needed.

The clause in the bill reads as follows: "The Minister must appoint as arbitrator for final offer selection a person that the Minister considers appropriate."

[English]

If at that time the final offer is made automatically, the arbitrator is being told what to do. The arbitrator's job is to make that decision. The arbitrator is a qualified individual. He or she is an individual who the two parties decide on together, or the minister makes a decision as to who the arbitrator will be. The person that the minister or the two parties decide to accept has to be a qualified person who understands the subject and is able to make the decision.

That is why we said that the government should not participate in the negotiations by telling the arbitrator in advance what to do or not do. The arbitrator should make the decision.

● (6605)

[Translation]

Whenever the legislation provides that the arbitrator must make a decision on a final offer, the employer wins. One only has to look at the precedents to see that. Whenever such a situation occurs, the employer always wins. This is why we are saying that the clause must be changed.

Government Orders

The bill and even our amendment provide that “the Minister must appoint as arbitrator ... a person that the Minister considers appropriate”. If the person is appropriate, why tell him to select the final offer?

In the past, because of the final offer clause, the arbitrator has always sided with the employer. Once the employer has made its offer, the arbitrator examines the situation and finds that there is too much difference between that offer and the offer made by the union and the employees. The arbitrator must then select between the two offers, and he has no choice but to select a final offer, instead of using his judgment.

Whose judgment are we talking about? It is that of the arbitrator appointed by the minister. The minister has selected a qualified arbitrator. To tell that arbitrator in advance that he is not qualified is to insult him. The fact is that he is qualified to do the job. He must be able to be fair to both parties and to society. He must take everything into consideration.

This is why we are saying there is no possible negotiation between the two parties if the government gets involved in the negotiation process by introducing in the House of Commons a bill which says in advance that the arbitrator must select the final offer. The employer does nothing and does not have to negotiate, because the government is doing all the work for him.

Even this morning, the government advised the employer to go and negotiate in good faith. The employer replied that it no longer wanted to negotiate, because it was over. In fact, the employer went so far as to say that if it were to negotiate, it would offer less than what it offered in its last offer, earlier this month. It is obvious that any new offer would be less, because the government has already introduced a bill that also provides less.

That is why the Conservatives have got it wrong. Or they have not got it wrong and they intend to hit the workers. I have said this to them several times and they did not like it. What have the postal workers done to the government for it to hate them so much? Why do the Conservatives hate the workers so much that they are asking the arbitrator to select the final offer, which is lower than what the employer had offered?

[*English*]

That is why I asked, and I said it publicly. I will say it again: when a crown corporation makes a proposal of 1.9% and the government comes in and says no, it is not 1.9%, it is 1.7%, what have those workers done to the government that the government hates them that much?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yvon Godin: What did they do to you?

What did they do? That is why the government is going to have to think about it. Is the government going to hit on the men and women, on all those workers, and all those who are coming up? People will remember that. Men and women who work hard see that their government, the one that has this big majority, this solid majority in the House of Commons, the members of the Conservative Party, will never speak for them in the House of

Commons because they do not count. In all we have done since Thursday, they have never spoken for men and women, never.

What have they done for the workers? We have a bill that is less than we had—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (6610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Bourassa on a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Madam Chair, what is the definition of “relevant”? Are we going to keep going on and on and talk about everything or are we going to talk about clause 8 and the arbitrator? If they do not like themselves, let them sort that out in therapy, but we would like to know what clause 8 is.

The Chair: Yes, clause 8 concerns the arbitrator. I would therefore ask the hon. member to alter his presentation accordingly and address his comments to the chair.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Chair, I know it is also tiring for the member from Bourassa when we talk about workers. That is his problem. I understand that, but we have rules to follow, and I am prepared to follow them. I know he finds it tiring for us to be here, and I accept that. I accept the fact that in 1997, the Liberals also forced workers back to work with lower wages than the employer had offered. I accept that, and that is also tiring for them today.

I am asking the government to show respect for the arbitrator's authority in this clause. The arbitrator is a qualified person who will be appointed by the Minister, so let the arbitrator do his or her job.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Very briefly, Madam Chair, this clause speaks to the ability of the minister to be able to appoint for the purposes of final offer selection. Final offer selection is indeed a legitimate means of arbitration. In fact, it is one that ensures the public that each party puts the best offer on the table. It actually encourages a rapid decision-making process, and indeed, when there are issues that are very much apart between the parties, it is the most appropriate method to use.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Chair, that statement from the Minister of Labour really shows a lack of understanding of how the system works, not just in Canada and not just at the federal level, but in every province and territory in this country.

The reality is that the final offer selection process was developed in professional sports in the United States. That is where it came from, so it is no surprise that the government is particularly interested in it. It worked there. One would have one employee, or maybe two to three, and a very narrow range of issues that had to be dealt with. Final offer selection worked quite well and still works quite well in those circumstances.

It is an absolute failure in a situation where we have a large workforce, as we do here, with 50,000-plus employees, members of the union, and then as well, because there are so many people, a large number of complex issues.

Government Orders

I will ask members to pretend that they are the arbitrator. One gets a list of 10 issues from the employer and a list of 10 issues from the union. One has to choose all 10 from one and reject all 10 from the other. There may be a great proposal from the employer on the pension issue, a lousy one on the wage issue and a lousy one on pay equity, but it is all or nothing. That is what the arbitrator has to do because of this clause and a number of the others, clauses 9, 10 and 11 that are forthcoming. That is why we made a series of amendments to give the arbitrator discretion.

Again, we have seen the way the government has attacked our judiciary to try to take away judicial discretion. It is doing exactly the same thing here. The bottom line on this is that the government is taking away that discretion and narrowing the ability of the arbitrator to do his or her job. The end result, and this is what all of the academic studies have shown where final offer selection is used, is that it benefits the employer to the detriment of the employee.

• (6615)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Chair, without having the background in labour relations that my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh has, I know that we have voiced our concern with regard to final offer selection.

His background in regard to the process coming from the sports arena is absolutely right, but aspects of that have bled into public service contracts, where we have seen final offer selection on an issue-by-issue basis. There may be 10 issues listed, and the arbitrator can pick and choose the best offer from management or from the union people on an issue-by-issue basis. Even that would be less egregious than this particular approach to solving this problem. Certainly we have a great deal of concern with final offer arbitration.

The Chair: Shall the amendment to clause 8 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, I believe if you seek it you would find agreement to apply the results of the previous recorded vote to this motion, with the Conservatives voting no.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Chair, NDP members will vote yes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, Liberal members will be voting yes.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois votes yes.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the Green Party will be voting yes.

[Translation]

The Chair: The amendment is defeated.

(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: Shall clause 8 carry?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Chair, if you seek it I believe you would find agreement to apply the results of the previous recorded vote to this motion, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Chair: Is there agreement to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Chair, NDP members are voting no.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, Liberal members are voting no.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois votes no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the Green Party votes no.

The Chair: Clause 8 is adopted.

(Clause 8 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

(On clause 9)

[English]

The Chair: I will read the amendment proposed by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh:

That Bill C-6 in clause 9 be amended by replacing lines 23 and 24 on page 3 with the following:

“and duties of an arbitrator under sections 60 and 61 of”.

• (6620)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Chair, just briefly, sections 60 and 61 of the Canada Labour Code provide authority to the duties and powers of the arbitrator. The attempt by the government, as drafted now in clause 9, is to limit the discretion and authority of the arbitrator.

Government Orders

I'll just mention one item. More specifically, because of the way clause 9 is drafted now, it does not allow the arbitrator in any way to conduct mediation. Anybody who has been involved in labour relations for 50 years knows the value of that tool to arbitrators. It oftentimes speeds up the process, makes it less costly, and most often achieves the result that we always want in labour management relations, which is that the parties reach a settlement themselves as opposed to, as in this case, having it thrust upon them because of the way it is drafted.

The only other point I would make is that it also allows the arbitrator to look at various methodologies in terms of when he or she is conducting the arbitration process. This provision as it is now, and the rest of clauses 8, 9, 10 and 11, will restrict the arbitrator to only using the final offer selection process, again severely limiting the arbitrator's ability to do the job properly.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, this clause is there to ensure that certain powers in the code that would be contrary to the intent of this legislation are removed from the arbitrator's abilities.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, I would urge members of this committee to think about even one small change in the way Bill C-6 is now drafted. This is reasonable. It is the Canada Labour Code, and greater flexibility in the hands of the arbitrator makes so much sense. I would hope that committee members might rethink this and that we would not just vote as a bloc again.

The Chair: Shall we apply the results of the previous amendment to this amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Amendment negated)

The Chair: We will apply the results of the previous clause to clause 9.

(Clause 9 agreed to)

[See list under Division 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)
(On Clause 10)

[Translation]

The Chair: On clause 10, an amendment has been moved by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 10, be amended (a) by replacing line 35 on page 3 with the following: "matters; and" (b) by replacing lines 38 to 40 on page 3 with the following:
of the new collective agreement.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Chair, I am going to defer.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

I am pleased to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. Our preference remains stopping the lockout and allowing the sides to return to free collective bargaining in accordance not only with the laws of our country, but also international conventions, UN

resolutions and the long and proud tradition in most jurisdictions in the western world.

The union has offered, well before this legislation came forward, to return to work and bargain under the old contract. Instead, the government moved forward with this draconian and backward bill that would tie the hands of the arbitrator and damage labour relations both within Canada Post and across Canada.

The government has seen fit to impose a contract that is bad for our postal service and bad for the people who work so hard there to make it one of the best postal services in the world. The government tried to sneak in these objectionable terms quietly, hoping that the opposition would go quietly into the summer. It is basic to our democratic system that workers are allowed to engage in free collective bargaining.

We in the NDP are serving notice that we will not let the Conservative government quietly take away the rights of Canadians. We will not let it quietly launch an assault on the rights of working people to collective bargaining.

This amendment introduced by my friend and colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh helps untie the hands of the arbitrator so he or she can do the job he or she has been tasked with doing.

I am pleased to lend my support to this amendment and urge all hon. members to respect the working people and their constituents by supporting the amendment.

• (6625)

The Chair: Shall we apply the results of the previous amendment to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Amendment negated)

[Translation]

The Chair: It seems that a second amendment to clause 10 has been proposed by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh:

That Bill C-6, in clause 10, be amended by replacing line 41 on page 3 with the following:

"(2) The submissions referred to in subsection (1) must include"

[English]

Debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Chair, I only want to make one point. In one of those series of meetings that we did not have with the minister or her staff, it came out very clearly that the government has decided that any back to work legislation is going to contain final offer selection process. The Conservatives are so ideologically driven in so much of what they do and it shows up here. This amendment would clear the final offer selection process off the desk of the arbitrator allowing the arbitrator to do his or her job properly by allowing whatever is the proper methodology that would be instituted to get settlements as rapidly and efficiently as possible.

Government Orders

I want to make this final point. The amendments we have been trying to get through, and this one in particular, do not preclude the arbitrator on a specific issue from going to final offer selection process. If we narrow the issue down enough it can work, as we have seen in the professional sports situation. But here a methodology is being used in a broad sweep that does not work across the whole sector. It is a sledgehammer approach and it simply will not work. We will see abuses constantly coming forward.

I want to repeat that the government has now decided that all back to work legislation is going to contain this clause. We are going to have a regime of really bad collective agreements as a result of it.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Chair, it is important to point out that the concept of final offer selection is the most rapid and efficient one possible. That is why we have used it. Indeed that is why it was used in 1994 with respect to the west coast ports and in 2007 with respect to CN and the resumption of its service. This is not something new. Although I may not have the length and breadth of understanding of many years of the law, I certainly understand the most recent years of the law.

The Chair: Shall the amendment carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the results of the previous amendment to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare this amendment defeated.

(Amendment negatived)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Shall clause 10 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

[*English*]

Can we apply the results on clause 9 to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (6630)

[*Translation*]

(Clause 10 agreed to)

[*See list under Division No: 27*]

(Yays: 158; Nays: 112)

(On Clause 11)

The Chair: On Clause 11, there are several amendments. We will proceed with the amendment by the Liberals. For the sake of clarity, the reference is 5114336:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 11, be amended by deleting lines 19 to 36 on page 4.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso on the amendment.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Yes, Madam Chair, that is lines 19 to 36 on page 4.

Our amendment addresses what has been talked about in several past amendments, the fact that final offer selection is of great concern. It is not a preferred way to go. Certainly the arbitrator will be handcuffed if the guiding principles in this legislation are held to.

When we see the reference to the arbitrator having to identify benefits that are consistent with those incomparable postal industries, that raises a flag, because there are no other comparable postal industries to Canada Post. It is unique in itself. There are private companies that provide very similar services, but they are not a national service provider. Certainly, if we are to apply that type of business model, then rural and remote areas that are not profitable will see no service. People in those areas will not be able to pay for the cost of those types of services. We are concerned that this compromise the unique nature of Canada Post.

As well, with respect to the short- and long-term viability of Canada Post, Canada Post has been a profitable corporation in recent years and we are not comfortable with that approach. We think it further handcuffs the arbitrator.

Finally, the taking the pension plan into account, as has been mentioned prior, we think what is at play is an obvious attack on defined benefits pensions in this country. This causes us great concern. That is the intent of our amendments and we would hope to seek support for those amendments.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Chair, we looked at the amendments that were presented by the then Liberal government in 1997, the guiding principles that were embedded in its back to work legislation for postal services. We actually improved on the language in order to ensure we had a decision in a short period of time that made sense to the parties. We also adjusted it to reflect the issues specifically in dispute with the parties today in recognizing how far apart they are, the viability and importance of Canada Post, as well as the importance and viability of the pension plan. The fact is it is the Canadian taxpayer who has the responsibility for any unfunded liabilities of the Canada Post pension plan.

The Chair: Shall the amendment carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Shall the same results apply as the previous amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare the amendment defeated.

(Amendment negatived)

• (6635)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The next amendment reads as follows:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 11, be amended by replacing lines 10 to 13 on page 4 with the following: "pute on that date; and".

Government Orders

[English]

Debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Chair, the reference is to lines 10 to 14, and not 13.

The Chair: It is my understanding that the numbering is different in English and French.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Chair, I will propose that all four of these NDP amendments to clause 11 be dealt with at once.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Therefore, may I dispense with reading these amendments?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Moved by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 11, be amended by replacing line 19 on page 4 with the following:

“(2) In making the decision referred to in subsection (1),”

That Bill C-6 in Clause 11, be amended by deleting lines 37 to 41 on page 4.

That Bill C-6, in Clause 11, be amended by replacing lines 2 and 3 on page 5 with the following:

“paragraph 10(1)(a).”

Debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh on these amendments.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Chair, we have heard the argument from our Liberal colleague from Cape Breton—Canso as to why we should be making these changes to clause 11. It very much restricts the arbitrator. As I have said before, Clause 11 is a continuation of that restriction on the arbitrator. It takes away the arbitrator's discretion, making it impossible for him or her to do an adequate job.

The Chair: Shall we apply the same result as on the previous amendments?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendments negatived)

[Translation]

The Chair: The amendment proposed by the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska reads as follows:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 11, be amended by adding after line 18 on page 4 the following:

“(1.1) Despite paragraph (1)(c), in order to settle any matter remaining in dispute, the arbitrator may make a decision that reconciles the final offers if the arbitrator is of the view that proceeding in this manner would be more equitable.”

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Chair, my comments are in support of the amendments proposed by my NDP and Liberal Party colleagues. I hope that this will help the Conservative government understand that there is a serious problem with this bill.

The new clause that you just read, Clause (1.1), will ensure that the arbitrator has some leeway in his role. It is as if the Conservative government wanted to hire referees, like those from the National Hockey League, for example, who would always lean a particular way, depending on whether, for example, the hockey managers want to see more violence or not, based on what the spectators want.

The problem is that when the arbitrator is appointed, he will have to follow criteria that are so specific that the scales will inevitably always be tipped in the favour of Canada Post.

Under the bill—and this is the issue that needs to be addressed—the arbitrator will be forced to choose between the employer's final offer and the offer made by the employees. It will not be possible for the arbitrator to engage in any mediation, or to single out specific terms, which would have obviously result in a superior agreement.

As I remarked in my speech, all of this will undoubtedly create a very toxic work environment when the employees return to work; that is, if the arbitrator is forced, based on the terms of the bill, to chose the employer's offer.

The purpose of this amendment is to ensure that the arbitrator is not obligated to choose one offer over the other, but rather to reconcile them. It is a question of compromise. I hope that the amendment is adopted.

● (6640)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, as I indicated earlier, this precedent was used in the 1997 legislation, which was the last time we endeavoured to order back to work legislation for postal service. In that case it was mediation arbitration and, indeed, it took two years for any kind of collective agreement to be reached. We have learned from that lesson. That is exactly why we have included this method of arbitration to be the final offer of selection.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like the Minister of Labour to clarify one point.

I was a member of the House of Commons in 1997 and I am now holding Bill C-24. According to clause 11 of this bill, contrary to what the minister has said, the arbitrator did not have his hands tied. I quote from this clause:

[It is necessary to establish an] agreement resolving the matters in dispute between the employer and the union arrived at before, or pursuant to, mediation;

They did not say it had to be the employer or the union. The arbitrator's role was truly an arbitrator's role. The arbitrator did his work and found grounds for agreement between the two; it was not one or the other.

I would like the Minister to explain to me how and where this was done, and so clear this up. For the Conservatives are working on just one side, instead of working to find an agreement between the two parties. I want this to be clear. Not only are we going to support the amendment, as we supported our amendment and the NDP's amendment, but at no time in 1997 were the arbitrator's hands to be tied, except on the wage issue, of which we will be able to speak again later.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, as I indicated, we used a precedent, but we improved upon the precedent. The improvement was that we would have final offer binding selection.

The ironic thing is that it seems to be the same old same old when it comes to improving on the bad decisions and the bad law-making of the former Liberal government.

[Translation]

The Chair: Is there agreement to apply the results of the previous vote to this amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare this amendment defeated.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: There is one final amendment to this clause, moved by the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[English]

That Bill C-6, in Clause 11, be amended by replacing line 3 on page 5 with the following:

“selected by the arbitrator or the decision made by the arbitrator under subsection (1.1).”

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Chair, we have moved this amendment, which refers to amendment BQ-1 and gives the arbitrator full freedom to act, simply as a matter of consistency.

[English]

The Chair: As this amendment is consequential to the previous amendments, we will simply apply the results of the previous amendment vote.

(Amendment negated)

Shall clause 11 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 11 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

(On clause 12)

• (6645)

The Chair: I assume we can apply the results of the last clause to this one.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 12 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

(On clause 13)

[Translation]

The Chair: There is an amendment to Clause 13. I will read it.

That Bill C-6, in Clause 13, be amended

(a) by replacing line 11 on page 5 with the following:

“13.(1) Subject to subsection (2),”

(b) by deleting lines 24 to 30 on page 5.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Chair, we put forward this amendment because we think it precludes both the company and the union from bargaining. They will not be able to bargain for wages that are better than what is listed in clause 15. We think the amendment would speak to clause 15.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, as we have indicated many times in the past 47 hours, the purpose of this clause is to recognize that the government has negotiated a set of wage increases with PSAC that are very fair and that have been bargained at the table. We think it is appropriate to include them in this act so there is no uncertainty for the worker and there is no uncertainty for Canada Post as to what the wage increases are. As I said, we believe these are fair.

Quite frankly it is not unprecedented that this clause be included in back to work legislation, for the purposes I just gave.

The Chair: Shall the amendment on clause 13 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the results of the previous amendments to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare this amendment defeated.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: Shall clause 13 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Shall we apply the result of the vote on clause 12 to clause 13?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare clause 13 carried.

(Clause 13 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

(On clause 14)

The Chair: I will read the amendment to clause 14:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 14, be amended by replacing 31 on page 5 with the following:

14.(1) Despite

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Chair, Liberals believe that the amendment is a housekeeping amendment, but it deals with the deletion of clause 15 in its entirety, which imposes wages.

The Chair: Shall the amendment to clause 14 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Government Orders

The Chair: Can we apply the results of the votes on the previous amendments to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare the amendment to clause 14 defeated.
(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: Shall clause 14 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the results of clause 13 to clause 14?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare clause 14 carried.
(Clause 14 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

(On clause 15)

• (6650)

[Translation]

The Chair: I shall therefore read the amendment to Clause 15:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 15, be amended

(a) by replacing line 6 on page 6 with the following:

“1.9%”

(b) by replacing line 9 on page 6 with the following:

“1.9%”

(c) by replacing line 12 on page 6 with the following:

“1.9%; and”

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Madam Chair, I rise today in this House to speak in favour of the proposed amendment. This amendment aims to correct one of the worst elements of this defective bill. If this bill is not corrected, it will impose an employment contract that includes a salary lower than the employer's final offer. This section of the bill is an attack on the principles of collective bargaining, one of the most fundamental aspects of our rights as entrenched in the Charter. This is a clear signal to all employers in the country that they are no longer obliged to bargain in good faith. Thus, if it is not possible to arrive at a negotiated agreement, do not worry, because this government is going to use a bill to negotiate even lower salaries on behalf of the employer. What the employer is unable to negotiate, Ottawa will impose on you.

This is a dangerous precedent. At this moment, all over Canada, nurses, firefighters and police officers are asking themselves whether they will be next on the list. If they do this to the postal workers, after Canada Post has made millions of dollars in profits, and the managers accept those offers, who is going to be their next target?

Targeting workers is nothing short of contempt on the part of this government. It is not the proper thing to do, and we will oppose every such attempt by the Conservatives. This amendment would restore the salary increases that were proposed in the employer's last offer. It does not reflect what workers want, but what management proposed, nothing more and nothing less. This amendment would

eliminate the most unfair and unacceptable provision in this bill, and I urge all hon. members to support it.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Chair, as I indicated, these wages are fair. They have been negotiated already between the federal government and its largest public sector union and, quite frankly, with respect to the constitutionality or fairness of the matter, it has already been well decided that the bill meets the requirements of the charter, as set out by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Chair, there is an awful lot wrong with the bill. In fact, everything from the title, which is An Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services, to the coming into force, the last clause, is wrong.

The title is wrong because this is not an act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services. That could be done with a phone call.

The worst clause in the bill, however, is clause 15, which imposes on the postal workers a wage rate less than the employer had put on the table in the course of collective bargaining.

I have not heard members opposite join the chorus for the remarks of my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, and nobody cares. Nobody cares about workers. Nobody cares about workers' rights.

Let me say who does care. The principle of free collective bargaining is something that divides societies that are free from those societies that are authoritarian and controlled. If we consider authoritarian societies, dictators, societies that do not have free elections, they do not have free trade unions either. Workers do not have the right to bargain collectively.

In Canada the right to bargain collectively is a constitutionally protected right. It is contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is part of the International Labour Organization, the treaty into which this country has entered. It is something that we take very seriously.

There is no greater principle within the right to bargain collectively than the duty to bargain in good faith. In good faith the employer of the postal workers, Canada Post Corporation, put on the table a wage offer that it was prepared to pay to workers from the \$281 million worth of profit that Canada Post made last year. To bargain with its employees, it put forth what it thought was a reasonable proposal to increase the wages of the workers, but what have we here? We have a clause in which the government imposes itself inside this good faith bargaining, this foundation of a free society, and says, “No, the government is going to force the workers to take less. We are going to decide what we think you should be paid. Never mind what was put on the table by a process of free collective bargaining”.

Government Orders

The minister just repeated what the Prime Minister said, so I will not blame her as she is just doing what her boss has said. She said this is a wage that was bargained freely by the largest public sector unions. Let us go back to that discussion in 2008 when this wage we are talking about was on the table, as it was called. It was not on the table. What was on the table was legislation proposed by the government to take away the right to strike for all public sector workers. Remember that? It was in the fall of 2008.

Those wage rates were offered for one day and if workers did not accept the wages within one day they would be reduced. Yes, they were accepted. There were not bargained freely and fairly over the course of negotiations. They were accepted with a gun to the head of the public sector workers in this country.

The Minister of Finance knows that members of one group said no. What did they get? That group received less. That is the kind of bargaining that the government entered into with the public sector workers in 2008 that produced the rates that are in this particular clause.

I am not surprised that the previous speaker talked about who is next because that is what everyone is asking. If this is what is going to happen to free collective bargaining in Canada under this regime, who is next? The government has contempt for the process of collective bargaining. It has contempt for the process of this constitutionally protected right that the Canadians are supposed to enjoy.

If members opposite think that nobody cares, they are wrong, and the people of Canada will be telling them that they are wrong.

• (6655)

I ask all hon. members, even those over there who think no one cares, to recognize that people do care and they do want to have these rights and do believe in free collective bargaining. I see the doubtful faces over there and I hear a few remarks that something is wrong with the idea that one can sit down and negotiate a wage, that an employer and employees can actually sit down at the bargaining table and negotiate wages and put an offer on the table and have it respected. That is something Canadians have come to enjoy and expect.

The government has no respect for that and it wants to insert its own version of a wage rate into a collective agreement regardless of what the employer in this particular case offered through free and fair collective bargaining.

This is a fundamental right that is being taken away, a fundamental change in the relationship between employers and employees. The question remains of who is next if the government is not prepared to accept the notion of free collective bargaining and takes away from employees what the employer has in fact offered. It demonstrates how much contempt it has for the collective bargaining process and for the rights of workers.

• (6700)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Chair, the minister will have several opportunities to respond to this question. I will ask the question, though I know she will not answer me right away because it is not in the definition of

the debate, but we will move our own amendment and she will have another opportunity to respond.

This debate has been very long and difficult, but I still do not think she gave a clear answer why she does not want the salaries freely negotiated. It is the main reason that some in this House, but certainly not me, question her good faith and commitment to workers. I will never go there because I do not like to impugn the motives of other colleagues, but if she were able to give a clear and convincing answer, it would help everyone to know where we are.

[*Translation*]

I heard the arguments that she put forward and I want to review each and every one of them.

First, she told us that we had to give postal employees the same treatment as other federal public servants. However, there is no reason to do this, since Canada Post has the right to negotiate. Therefore, if Canada Post has the right to negotiate, there is no guarantee that its employees will end up getting the same kind of salaries as other federal public servants. And no one said anything about depriving Canada Post of its right to negotiate. That is why it is a Crown corporation. So, this argument is a very weak one.

I do not know if the minister is still interested in listening to me, but I hope so. This debate has been a long one, but we still have not received any answer.

The second problem is what happened in 1997. The minister referred to the 1997 precedent but, at the same time, she was very critical of the government of the day. She has to make up her mind. She cannot have her cake and eat it too. She must choose. If she does not like what happened in 1997, she should not invoke that precedent. In any case, an argument based on a precedent is always a very weak argument.

[*English*]

She is saying that she wants to avoid uncertainty about wages, but such uncertainty is part of life when one negotiates wages. I do not think the Canadian society denies this kind of uncertainty. We have much worse uncertainties in life than the results of wage bargaining, where the gap between an employer and the employee may become narrower through negotiation.

Up to now, her reasoning is very weak, but before the end of this debate and the final vote, she has an opportunity to come forward with something that I hope will be much more convincing, because Canadians deserve an answer and workers deserve an answer and this House deserves an answer.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, I will just reiterate what I have been indicating with respect to the purpose of having the wages embedded in this act. Quite frankly, it is because it is a fair wage that has been negotiated. If members had been at the table and had understood the differences between these two parties in the past eight months, and had even understood the wide gap in differences in the number of disputes, and the quantum within the disputes, they would have understood why the government felt that it was very necessary to give certainty and include wage increases in the act.

Government Orders

The choice of those wage increases was based on what had been negotiated freely and fairly at the table with PSAC, the largest union we negotiate with. The increases are more than appropriate.

Finally, as well as being the caretakers of the Canadian interest with respect to crown corporations, the government has to make sure that the crown corporation itself, Canada Post, is held whole and has the ability to be economically viable in the future, in both the short and the long term. These are things that matter to Canadians, and that is why the government has acted in the best interests of all Canadians and the economy in general.

● (6705)

The Chair: Shall the amendment on clause 15 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the results of the previous vote to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: Shall clause 15 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the result of the previous vote to clause 15?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I declare clause 15 carried.
(Clause 15 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)
(On clause 16)

The Chair: I will read the Liberal amendment:

That Bill C-6, in Clause 16, be amended by replacing lines 20 and 21 on page 6 with the following:

“provided for in subsection 14(1), and to give”

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Chair, certainly in light of the last amendment being defeated, it is appropriate that we proceed with this amendment to strike the clause in its entirety.

As the Liberal Party has put on the record from the outset, probably the two most concerning aspects of the legislation are the final offer selection, and, with respect to salaries, the identification of salaries at a lower rate than had been previously bargained for and agreed to by Canada Post.

This section underlines just how the government has missed the mark. Of all the clauses in the legislation, this certainly speaks volumes about how the government has missed the mark.

To quote Einstein: “A clever person solves a problem. A wise person avoids it”. Certainly we have seen, through this legislation,

that the government has not avoided the problem, and through the defeat of these amendments tonight, is doing nothing to solve it.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the hon. minister for her answer, but I want to explain to her why I do not think it is satisfactory.

The main point proposed by the minister seems fair to her, but she did not explain in which way the last offer of the employer is unfair. The last offer of the employer was more satisfactory to the employees. Perhaps it is because the employer, in exchange, received from the employees some compromises that the employer wanted.

The employer is being put in a situation in which it will perhaps not be able to ask for these compromises, or it will ask for these compromises but with a lower wage. This is definitely interference in the negotiations, which is not in the interest of the employer, not in the interest of the employees, and not in the interest of Canadians.

[Translation]

The Chair: Shall the amendment to clause 16 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Shall we apply the results of the vote taken on the previous amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: Shall clause 16 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Shall we apply the results of the vote taken on the previous clause?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The amendment is defeated and clause 16 is carried.
(Clause 16 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27.

(Yeas: 158; nays: 112)

● (6710)

[English]

The Chair: Shall clause 17 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Will we apply the results of the previous vote to clause 17?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Clause 17 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

Government Orders

(Yeas, 158; Nays 112)

The Chair: Shall clause 18 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Shall we apply the results of the previous vote to clause 18?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 18 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

The Chair: Shall clause 19 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Will we apply the results of the previous vote to clause 19?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 19 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

The Chair: Shall clause 20 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Will we apply the results of the previous vote to clause 20?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 20 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

The Chair: Shall clause 21 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Will we apply the results of the previous vote to clause 21?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 21 agreed to)

[See list under Division No. 27]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

(On Clause 22)

The Chair: Shall clause 22 carry?

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Chair, clause 22 deals with the coming into force of the bill and provides an opportunity to mention one last time what has taken place here, over the past few days. The public has learned a number of things, and that is good.

[English]

First, the public has been able to find out what the agenda of the government is as it looks at a statute that would impose lower wages than those that the employer was willing to give. This constitutes an attack on pensions and imposes two-tier wages. The public has been able to take advantage of this debate as we tried to create the time necessary to allow for a negotiated settlement.

That leads to the second revelation of this debate, and the two are connected. The second revelation is with regard to the notion of good faith. During the meeting that my colleagues and I had with the media just before we entered here this evening, we said that it was a question of good faith and that we were presuming good faith.

[Translation]

In French we say that good faith is presumed.

[English]

One of the things members on the government side have been telling us non-stop for the past three days is that they wanted to see the amendments. At the same time, we were meeting with the minister, with her representatives and with the parties trying to use the opportunity being afforded by the detailed analysis of the bill that we were carrying out to give them the time necessary to come to a negotiated settlement.

What did we get instead? We have just had the results tonight. They went very close to what was discussed Thursday night, and again last night, but not one of the amendments to improve the arbitration process, to be more fair and respectful of the Charter of Rights on wages and to be respectful of section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights with regard to freedom of association were accepted.

We have to come to the conclusion, as we study clause 22 on the coming into force of the bill, that there is one thing that links these two elements. The government, for example, tells us that it is at arm's-length from a société de la Couronne like Canada Post and that it is a crown agency and it will not get involved. People will now be able to read the exact words of the minister just a few minutes ago in the House. The minister said that all of this was about the government imposing on crown agency wage settlements. A total contradiction in terms.

The result of the two is that the government cannot be trusted.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Chair, the act will come into force 24 hours after it receives royal assent.

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Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to follow up on some of the comments made by my colleague, the House leader for the official opposition. His summary was only partly accurate. Canadians who have been watching for the last 40 or 45-odd hours have a right to be a little bit in despair. They have been watching carefully to see how this transpires, how this process evolves.

Canadians now know that the government had an opportunity to bring time allocation to bear in the bill when it was drafted. They know that the government could have solved this problem as of last Thursday. Canadians know this. Canadians are telling us this. Canadians also know that the government had no intention whatsoever of accepting any amendments presented by any party, and presumably from their own members who quietly, in their own despair, were trying to improve the bill.

We have heard from the NDP labour critic that this was an opportunity for his caucus to have a learning experience. Some learning experience. How to filibuster a bill 101. How to posture for the media 101. How to rack up expenditures for the Canadian taxpayers 101. If NDP members want to team build, they can leave by the back door of this building and climb the Gatineau Hills.

Many times throughout this debate, Canadians could have been forgiven for thinking they were hearing speeches in a union hall and not in the House of Commons. The government's behaviour has been no better. The government made a deliberate attempt to reform labour law by bringing the hammer down, by using a statutory instrument in an unprecedented fashion to bring in through the back door what the Prime Minister knows he could never get through the front door of Canadian citizenry.

Both leaders have fed the conflict machine called the media. In this, Canadians believe the leaders have been successful. However, the biggest loser here is the Canadian citizenry and here is why. Unionized or not, unemployed or employed, healthy or sick, retired or working, the Canadian citizenry has been stuck with the bill. Small businesses, seniors, waiters, drivers, teachers, bricklayers, are all being asked to pick up the costs for an unfortunate, unnecessary and irresponsible process.

I ask the leaders of the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party to go out to the cameras and tell the Canadian people exactly how much this experiment has cost them.

• (6715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Chair, unfortunately, a new day is dawning today. We are sad to see how the government is going to be doing things for the next four years. Workers' rights will be thrown out. The message is clear: this government has no respect for the legitimate right of a legally certified association to bargain in good faith for a collective agreement. This interference sets the tone for the next four years and the message is clear: workers will have no right to be heard from now on.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for your handling of the debate, but unfortunately this is a dark day for Quebec and for Canada.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Chair, I am going to make a brief comment. Businesses and Canadians continue to be affected by this stoppage, this labour dispute. That is why our government has introduced a bill to restore the postal service.

As has been said before, the opposition has an opportunity to join with us and pass the bill today, as quickly as possible, in the interests of all Canadians, so we can do what is important for taxpayers.

I call on all of the opposition to support us and pass this bill immediately.

• (6720)

The Deputy Speaker: Shall clause 22 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can we proceed by applying the vote on the previous clause?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

(Clause 22 agreed to.)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

The Chair: Shall clause 1 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the results of the previous division?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 1 agreed to.)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

[*English*]

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Can we apply the results of the previous vote to this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Title agreed to)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can we proceed in the same way as with the previous vote?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

(Bill agreed to)

[*See list under Division No. 27*]

(Yeas, 158; Nays, 112)

The Chair: Shall I rise and report the bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Bill reported)

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (6730)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 28*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke

Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Williamson
Weston (Saint John)	Woodworth
Wilks	Young (Oakville)
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Young (Vancouver South)	

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bellavance
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Casey
Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner

Government Orders

Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Gravelle	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
Layton	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McGuinty
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Pécelet
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel — 112

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Lisa Raitt moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. After all it has been approximately 57 and a half hours since we commenced the introduction of this legislation.

The position of the government has always been very clear that the best agreement is the one that the parties reach by themselves. However, in the case of this union, CUPW, and this organization, Canada Post, that was not a possibility.

Over the past 57 hours, our government has explained the history of the dispute and the efforts we have taken to both conciliate and mediate it. We have also provided services continuously to the parties throughout this debate. As a final resort, we have had to introduce legislation that does two things.

First, it provides for a resumption of postal services so that those Canadians who have been affected, as well as small businesses and charities, can get on with their work, which will also protect the economy.

Second, we introduced this legislation to provide a fair and balanced process for the parties to reach the conclusion of this collective agreement.

The government was given a very strong mandate by Canadians to continue our efforts in this economic recovery. That is exactly why we have introduced this legislation at this time, to ensure the mail service continues now and into the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister says the best possible collective agreement is one that results from negotiation and agreement between the two parties. Even if we do not agree with the government's bill, it proposes a final offer. On the question of wages, why has the government included a lower wage offer in the bill than the employer was prepared to pay?

I know what the minister's answer will be. She will say that this is consistent with the terms for the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Why did she say in her testimony that the best collective agreements are the result of agreement between the two parties? Does she realize that the message she is sending to the employer is that if it is unable to negotiate, it can come and ask for the government's support to get something better?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, what we are saying is that taking eight months to reach an agreement is a long period of time, especially when a work stoppage is involved either through rolling strikes or indeed through a lockout.

It is unacceptable to the Canadian public and we will introduce legislation that returns workers to work and preserves the economy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin, once again, by thanking the employees of the House of Commons. I thank them for the work that they do for Parliament, the seat of democracy, and the place in which democratic debates take place. I would also like to thank our security guards, who worked very hard. I thank our employees, from every political party, who have spent many hours and days here, in Parliament. I thank our pages, who have worked here day and night in the service of members of Parliament. Thank you all so much.

I just thanked our employees. The bill that was debated and adopted a moment ago has to do with the postal workers who deliver our mail day in and day out.

It is not pleasant for anyone when things grind to a halt at Canada Post. The Canada Post Corporation is a crown corporation that is required to provide services to all Canadians. It is unfortunate that a debate had to be held on the future of workers, their pension funds, their salaries, and their working conditions. The government tried to suggest that we were somehow against small and medium-sized businesses, but that is not true.

Government Orders

There are, of course, small and medium-sized businesses in my riding. If these small and medium-sized businesses were not there—I am referring to the shops, restaurants and small factories that provide a multitude of services—in what kind of world would we be living? It would be crazy to think that anyone could be against our small and medium-sized businesses. I can assure the hon. members that whatever the Conservatives would have Canadians believe is simply not true. Small and medium-sized businesses apparently account for 75% of jobs in Canada. This includes our own family members. Some of us have brothers and sisters who own small businesses. How could anyone object to that?

I myself worked for several years for a big company called Noranda Inc. The Conservatives would have hon. members believe that I had no respect for Noranda Inc. My only comment was that if the company made a profit, it should share it with the workers that made it possible. That is all we asked.

The mail carriers participated in the bargaining process, however the minister remarked in her speech that negotiations had dragged on for eight months without an agreement being reached. If negotiations went on for eight months with no agreement, then clearly the employer, Canada Post, was partly to blame. Under Canadian law, workers have the right to unionize.

● (6735)

I will mention the case of certain women in my riding, Red Cross auxiliaries who worked for that organization under a contract from the government of New Brunswick. The government's money had been disbursed to the Red Cross to permit it to do what the government did not want to do. The employees, the Red Cross auxiliaries who went to people's homes every morning to help seniors, were paid \$4.25 an hour. After 2,080 hours of work, they received an increase that brought their wage to \$5.35 an hour.

You can check the records. If these women working for the Red Cross were sick for more than 10 days, the Red Cross lowered their wage to \$4.85 an hour. It's shameful.

These women who went to work were not even entitled to statutory holidays. Did they not have the right to form a union to bargain and increase their wage to \$7 an hour in an initial collective agreement which would grant them their rightful statutory holidays?

This is what the Conservatives are saying. They are giving the unions a bad image. It's unfair. As for the women working in the fish processing plants at minimum wage, they are now up to \$12 an hour. That was not thanks to the employer.

No one can stop me from standing up for the workers, the men and women, our fathers and mothers who have worked. No one can stop me from speaking up in House of Commons on their behalf. No one.

What the government is doing is no mistake. It has done this because it wanted to, rather than having faith in bargaining and the collective agreement. Why table a bill that offers less than the employer was prepared to give the employees after they tried to exert pressure by organizing rotating strikes?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (6740)

[*English*]

An hon. member: Keep talking.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is not very polite. I do not think it is very polite to tell me to keep talking. I think I was doing well until I was interrupted.

[*Translation*]

The employees have the right to go on rotating strikes: the Minister herself said that she received only a few calls and emails. That is what she said in the House of Commons and to the media. One might almost think she was not satisfied and that things were not sufficiently stirred up, as if they had to be stirred up in order to pass a bill. The public was not complaining. I received no calls from people unhappy about the rotating strikes. But as soon as the lockout was in place, down came the hammer and the bill was tabled. We have worked hard all weekend, and I raise my hat to the members who remained in the House of Commons and fought all weekend to give the union and the employer the chance for further meetings. That is democracy.

I hope all Canadians are proud of us. The day we cease to have a Parliament, our country will become like those to which we send our soldiers to bring democracy. The House of Commons belongs to Canadians, and this is where the debate must occur. It has occurred, and we are proud of that fact. We gave the union and the employer the opportunity to meet. However, it is impossible to reach an agreement when the government gives the employer a better offer in a bill, which is completely undemocratic, in my opinion.

Perhaps the Conservatives consider today a funny day in history. They can continue to attack the workers. This government has just sent employers the message to not bother negotiating, because the government will solve their problems. It is inviting employers to turn to the government for help; it will pass bills that will never be in the workers' favour.

That is why I am asking what the workers ever did to this government. Why does it not like them? Why does it not like the people who have provided services to us for the past three or four days, the security guards, and everyone? The next time, it will be CBC/Radio-Canada, and then it will be CN. All of them will be paying at the checkout in the next four years under this Conservative government. Is that the kind of society we want? Do we really want to attack workers?

Even if it bothers the Conservatives, I want to thank the unions who work day after day and who have the mandate, under Canadian legislation, to represent workers. Political parties need leaders, but so do the unions. So let us respect our laws and our leaders, the people with the mandate to do things for the society. If the government did not want this lockout, all it needed to do was call Canada Post to get the locks taken off the doors. It would have been easy.

Government Orders

The public will see that the Conservatives are wearing big smiles on their faces today. On the one hand, 33 million people were affected by the lockout, but so were the 45,000 postal workers because of this government. Who will it be next time? Perhaps it will be citizens, seniors, the disabled or the workers. And it will be because of the Conservative government.

● (6745)

We even asked the Prime Minister to suspend the House of Commons for one day, for the Quebec holiday, Saint-Jean-Baptiste day. Once again, he said no. Just for that, he should be ashamed. He has no respect for Quebecers. Does he not like Quebecers, as one of my colleagues just said? He does not like the workers, but he likes big business.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member still has six minutes left to conclude his remarks, so I would ask all members to come to order. The more disorder there is, the more time the member will have.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, they have no respect for Quebecers, and from what I can see, they have no respect for you either.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, order. Let us let the hon. member finish his remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, they were beginning to fail to show respect for you. It is time to make them stop.

Once again, we hope the hemorrhaging will stop and the government will think about what it is doing. Is this what the next four years are going to be like? Is the government planning to target working men and women? It is on the wrong track. Perhaps it is deliberately taking that direction, but it should think twice. People will not stand for it.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to comment on the bill at third reading. I am quite confident, as we enter hour 58 of the debate, that there is not a whole lot of juice left in this orange. At the risk of saying something that may have been said earlier in the House, a risk which did not concern a whole lot of people over the course of the last 58 hours, I, too, on behalf of the Liberal Party want to thank the officials, our professional table officers and all the Hill staff for being around.

I really want to single out the pages who do a great service in the House. That just was not a politician being shameless and playing to the hometown crowd, I do it for a reason. They were supposed to finish on Thursday. As we know, the pages are salaried employees, so they have been here as volunteers for the last 58 hours. Therefore, I really want to thank them for that.

My comments will be brief. Again, as we had said, we put our points on the record. Early on we were very concerned, as a party, with the way the legislation was put forward. We felt it tipped the

scales far too much in Canada Post's favour. For all those paying attention to the debate, we tried to reinforce the fact that this was a lockout. Knowing that this legislation was coming, gave Canada Post the upper hand. That was why we ended up in the situation in which we were. We felt the final offer selection did nothing to help the union in this situation.

We felt that amendments could have been put forward far sooner. We thought it would have been a much more efficient process to table those amendments and bring them forward sooner. Maybe if we would have put that time on the amendments, then maybe we might have had some of the changes for which we tried to advocate.

Therefore, we have a great deal of concern with the legislation and we will vote against it in the final round.

Again, I thank my caucus for the effort put forward. Our whip's office and leadership—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (6750)

The Speaker: Order, please. I am not cutting the hon. member off. I am trying to get a little order for him to conclude his remarks.

The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we laid out and put forward our amendments in good faith and hoped that we could make an impact on this legislation. Obviously the government entertained none of them and so we are this situation. It is unfortunate, but at the end of the day I am happy not only to see that mail service will resume eventually, but that the workers are back on the job.

These workers have suffered over the last number of weeks and we have brought those stories to the House. I know a number of stories were shared about the inconvenience to Canadians, but think about the hardship the workers have gone through, those who have had medical benefits cancelled, have missed paycheques and have had to provide for their families and have been unable to work the last number of weeks. Therefore, understand that part of the lockout.

● (6755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Government Orders

Mr. André Bellavance: I can hear cries of joy and enthusiasm because the Bloc Québécois is rising. One of our first battles, when the session started, was to be recognized, not as a recognized party—we are fewer than 12 MPs—but at least enough to take our place. I find the reaction of disappointment from the other side of House at my rising to speak to be quite deplorable. We have been legitimately and democratically elected, like everyone else in this House, including you, Mr. Speaker. On May 2, 24% of Quebecers voted for the Bloc Québécois. I find this reaction quite sad, all the more so because I was going to start my speech by saying that this is one time when people will listen more intently to what I have to say.

The end of the session is nigh, and I want to wish a wonderful summer to all my colleagues on all sides of the House, as well as to all those who have worked over the past few days and have put in a lot of overtime. I will not repeat everything my colleagues have said about all those who support us here and who work extremely hard to help us do our jobs.

That is basically what I wanted to say, but I might to add, as my Bloc Québécois colleague did in his speech, that we have been witness to a dark day. Unfortunately, it likely will not be the last, with this majority Conservative government. One might say that, with this special legislation, the government played into the hands of the Canada Post Corporation, but I think Canada Post played into the hands of the government. It is as if the government had planned the whole thing. We saw what happened with Air Canada and then, right afterwards, with Canada Post. There was some job action, and then the government immediately took out the sledgehammer, went on the attack, broke a butterfly upon the wheel to ensure that the employees would be put in their place and not be able to negotiate fairly and equitably.

The dice were loaded from the start of these phoney negotiations. That is what is so terrible. As soon as the government came out with its threat of special legislation, it was clear that the employer had it made. It declared a lockout, then government members told us, throughout the debate, that it was really unfortunate but there was a strike going on. That is what they said, even though it was actually a lockout. We know that the public is not stupid and clearly understands the difference—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. André Bellavance: They want me to stop talking, but the more that side harasses me, the longer I will continue. I am not at school, here. I have been a member for seven years. I know that I have the right to speak, and I will continue to do so.

The Canada Post Corporation imposed a lockout, which allowed the government to target the employees, claiming that there was an economic disaster because of a work stoppage and the public was not getting its mail or cheques anymore. Yet, we know full well that the postal workers were prepared to deliver cheques to the most vulnerable members of our society for free, most of the time. They were entitled to collect \$50 per day, but they had decided to give that money to charity.

The lockout triggered the introduction of special legislation. The bill essentially gagged the arbitrator and the employees. The arbitrator has to—and it will—give the big end of the stick to the

employer, and that is how the conditions will be managed over the next few years, until 2015.

I do not want a difficult social climate to develop in our society, but it will not be easy for Canada Post employees or the employer. Eventually, it will not be easy for this government either. That is my warning. For the next four years, the people just need to hang on tight. The agenda is now controlled by the Prime Minister and his gang, and they will feel like masters of their domain. We will do everything in our power to continue to express our opposition. We will need the public's support.

In closing, I want to wish everyone a good summer, if we ever get out of here.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Cape Breton—Canso. Everything has been said. I simply want to thank all the teams from the bottom of my heart: the translation team, the security team, the team of cooks, and everyone who works for us here, in the House of Commons.

● (6800)

[*English*]

I would also like to close with something, Mr. Speaker, to every member of this House of Commons.

This has been a physically gruelling number of days, and I would like to thank all members of Parliament for the many acts of personal kindness, small and large. I think we need to hang onto those after what has been a fractious couple of days. It was particularly difficult for my caucus because I could not find anyone to trade off.

I would like to say have a good summer, and I personally thank each and every member.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (6805)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

Government Orders

(Division No. 29)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Maestro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Williamson
Wilks	Woodworth
Wong	

Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 158

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brousseau
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
Layton	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McGuinty
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffler	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel — 112

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday of this week, I paid tribute, on behalf of our government, to the pages who had served us so well. Earlier today I paid tribute to all the staff on Parliament Hill who serve us so well. That was in answer to the Thursday question earlier today. As the calendar shows it is still Thursday, I am about to change that. I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Government Orders

Some members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

adjourned until Monday, September 19 at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

The Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands

(The House adjourned at 8:10 p.m.)

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Mr. Goodyear	1057	Ms. Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	1083
		Mr. Lizon	1084

Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte).....	1084	Ms. Raitt	1101
Mr. Saganash	1084	(Amendment negated).....	1101
Mr. Clarke	1085	Amendment NDP-5	1101
Mr. Bevington	1086	Mr. Comartin	1102
Mrs. Hassainia	1086	Amendment NDP-6	1102
Mr. Adler	1087	Amendment NDP-7	1102
Mrs. Hughes	1088	Amendment NDP-8	1102
Motion agreed to	1089	(Amendments negated).....	1102
(Bill read the second time and, by unanimous consent, the House went into committee of the whole thereon, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)	1090	Amendment BQ-1	1102
The Chair	1090	Mr. Coderre	1102
(On clause 2)	1091	(Amendment negated)	1103
Ms. Raitt	1091	Amendment BQ-2	1103
Mr. Mulcair	1091	Amendment BQ-2	1103
Mr. Mulcair	1092	(Amendment negated).....	1103
Mr. Cuzner	1094	(Clause 11 agreed to)	1103
Mr. Coderre	1094	(On clause 12).....	1103
Mr. Bellavance	1094	(Clause 12 agreed to)	1103
Mr. Godin	1095	(On clause 13).....	1103
(Clause 2 agreed to)	1096	Amendment L-2	1103
(On clause 3).....	1096	(Amendment negated).....	1103
(Clause 3 agreed to)	1096	(Clause 13 agreed to)	1103
(On clause 4).....	1096	(On clause 14).....	1103
(Clause 4 agreed to)	1096	Amendment L-3	1103
(On clause 5)	1096	Mr. Cuzner	1103
(Clause 5 agreed to)	1097	(Amendment negated).....	1104
(On clause 6).....	1097	(Clause 14 agreed to)	1104
(Clause 6 agreed to)	1097	(On clause 15).....	1104
(On clause 7).....	1097	Amendment NDP-9	1104
(Clause 7 agreed to)	1097	Mrs. Turmel	1104
(On clause 8).....	1097	Ms. Raitt	1104
Amendment NDP-1	1097	Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	1104
Ms. Raitt	1098	Mr. Dion	1105
Mr. Comartin	1098	(Amendment negated).....	1106
Mr. Cuzner	1099	(Clause 15 agreed to)	1106
(Amendment negated).....	1099	(On clause 16).....	1106
(Clause 8 agreed to).....	1099	Amendment L-4	1106
(On clause 9).....	1099	Mr. Cuzner	1106
Amendment NDP-2	1099	Mr. Dion	1106
Mr. Comartin	1099	(Amendment negated).....	1106
Ms. Raitt	1100	(Clause 16 agreed to)	1106
Ms. May	1100	(Clause 17 agreed to)	1106
(Amendment negated).....	1100	(Clause 18 agreed to)	1107
(Clause 9 agreed to)	1100	(Clause 19 agreed to)	1107
(On Clause 10).....	1100	(On Clause 22).....	1107
Amendment NDP-3	1100	Mr. Mulcair.....	1107
Mr. Comartin	1100	Ms. Raitt	1107
Ms. Charlton	1100	Mr. McGuinty	1108
(Amendment negated).....	1100	Mr. Fortin	1108
Amendment NDP-4	1100	Mrs. Glover	1108
Mr. Comartin	1100	(Clause 22 agreed to.)	1108
Ms. Raitt	1101	(Clause 1 agreed to.)	1108
(Amendment negated).....	1101	(Title agreed to)	1108
(Clause 10 agreed to)	1101	(Bill agreed to)	1109
(On Clause 11).....	1101	(Bill reported)	1109
Amendment L-1	1101	Ms. Raitt	1109
Mr. Cuzner	1101	Bill C-6. Motion for concurrence	1109
		Motion agreed to	1110

Ms. Raitt	1110
Third reading	1110
Mr. Godin	1110
Mr. Godin	1110
Mr. Cuzner	1112
Mr. Bellavance	1112

Ms. May	1113
Motion agreed to	1114
(Bill read the third time and passed).....	1114
Mr. Van Loan.....	1114
(Motion agreed to)	1115

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