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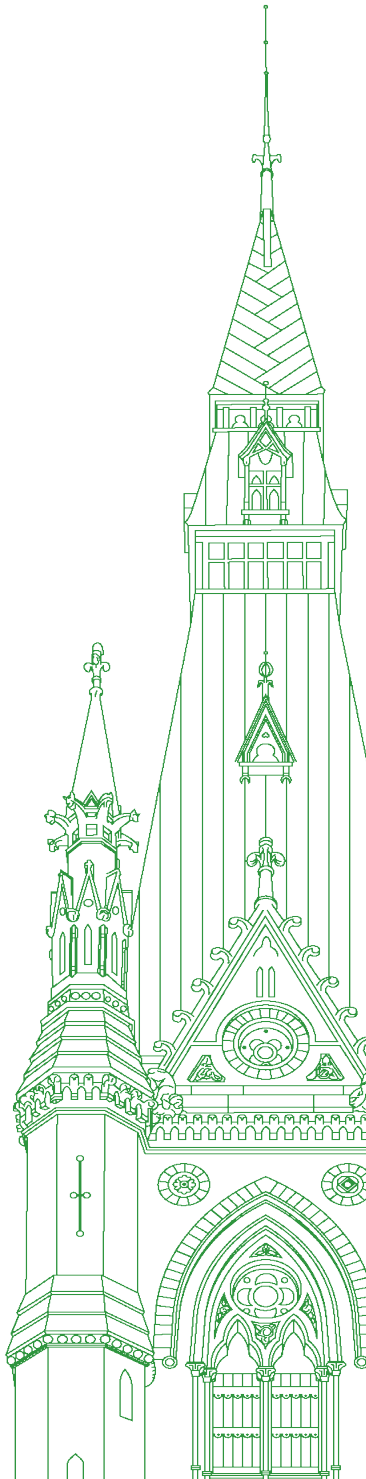

Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Monday, April 15, 2024

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Good afternoon, committee members. I will call the meeting to order.

The clerk has advised that we have a quorum and that those appearing virtually have been sound-tested and are good.

Welcome to meeting number 108 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and virtually using Zoom.

I would like to make a few comments, primarily for the benefit of the witnesses who are new to us.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

You can choose to speak in the official language of your choice.

In the room, interpretation services are available by using the headset and selecting the language of your choice. For those here virtually, please select the globe icon at the bottom of your screen to choose the language of your choice.

If there is a breakdown in interpretation services, please get my attention. We'll suspend while it is being corrected.

For those in the room, please make sure your earpiece is not close to the microphone, because it will create popping, which can be harmful to the interpreters.

Please direct any questions you may have through the chair. To get my attention, please raise your hand. For those appearing virtually, use the “raise hand” icon at the bottom of your screen.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, February 27, 2024, the committee is continuing its study on Bill C-58, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Canada Industrial Relations Board Regulations, 2012.

Appearing in the first hour today, we have, from Canada's Building Trades Unions, Sean Strickland, executive director; from Teamsters Canada, by video conference, Mariam Abou-Dib, executive director, government affairs; and from the United Steelworkers union, Nicolas Lapierre, assistant to the Quebec director, who is here in the room.

Welcome. Each of you will have five minutes or less for your opening statement.

We will begin with Mr. Strickland for five minutes.

Mr. Sean Strickland (Executive Director, Canada's Building Trades Unions): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Sean Strickland, and I serve as the executive director of Canada's Building Trades Unions. We are the national voice for over 600,000 skilled tradespeople in Canada who belong to 14 international unions and work in 60 occupations and trades.

I'm pleased to be here today along with my colleagues to advocate for speedy passage of Bill C-58, and remind this committee how critical this legislation is.

Banning replacement workers will protect workers' rights, prioritize the collective bargaining process and get workers back to the job. It will stabilize the bargaining process for federally regulated industries and positively impact almost a million workers.

When workers decide to withdraw their labour and strike, these decisions are not taken lightly. Generally, it's the last option after all other bargaining approaches have failed. Allowing the use of replacement workers—scabs—undermines the bargaining powers of workers in the negotiation process and removes the incentive for employers to avoid a strike or lockout. Strikes during which employers choose to hire replacement workers take longer to resolve, and that hurts families and communities.

We don't have to look back very far to understand the negative effects replacement workers can have on our workforce. In British Columbia, 238 workers attempted to bargain with LTS Global Solutions, a subsidiary of Ledcor, as a local established under the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 213. Since 2017, they had sought a collective agreement to improve working conditions, establish job security and secure fair wages. The majority of those workers were technicians, installing and repairing telecommunications equipment as contractors for Telus.

After union certification, the employer, LTS, refused to meet with the union for bargaining, and after two years without a collective agreement, the workers voted to go on strike. Rather than engaging in good-faith collective bargaining, LTS responded by bringing in replacement workers. As a result, the strike ended up lasting nearly six years, with the deal only occurring in June 2023.

It took a unanimous ruling from the Canada Industrial Relations Board to end it. Why? As telecommunications workers, they fell under federal labour laws. Unlike other workers in B.C., who were protected, there was no incentive for LTS to get back to the bargaining table because LTS could continue with business as usual, ignore its obligations to the unionized employees and use its considerable resources to drag the whole process through the courts for almost six long years. This has to change, as it has in some provinces.

Provincially, we've seen similar legislation successfully implemented in both B.C. and Quebec. British Columbia's labour relations code prohibits employers from using replacement workers, regardless of whether they're being paid to do the work. In Quebec, the labour code represents the most comprehensive ban on replacement workers. It covers almost all workers, except health care and public safety workers, and those sectors regulated by the Canada Labour Code.

Obviously, there's a gap between the Canada Labour Code and provincial labour codes. In B.C. and Quebec, that needs to be addressed for the benefit of all federally regulated workers. The success in both provinces amplifies how banning replacement workers protects workers' rights, improves collective bargaining and reduces the duration of strikes when they do occur.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I urge you to ensure speedy passage of this bill. Let's get this done for Canadian workers and their families.

I look forward to the discussion and your questions.

Thank you.

● (1535)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strickland.

We'll now go to Ms. Abou-Dib for five minutes.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib (Executive Director, Government Affairs, Teamsters Canada): Honourable members of this parliamentary committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today on behalf of Teamsters Canada. As the executive director and on behalf of President François Laporte and 135,000 members across various sectors of the Canadian economy, I am here to present our views on the legislation aiming to prohibit replacement workers in federally regulated industries.

Teamsters Canada is Canada's transportation and supply chain union, representing workers in all modes of transport, including air, rail, road and many other sectors. Our organization is deeply committed to protecting the rights and interests of workers in Canada, which is fundamental to a healthy Canadian economy.

The practice of using replacement workers violates the rights of striking or locked-out workers, violates the rights of workers, compromises their dignity and autonomy in the workplace and undermines the collective bargaining process. It breeds resentment and frustration among workers and increases the likelihood of violence on picket lines. Moreover, allowing replacement workers exacerbates the power imbalance between workers and employers, leading to poorer working conditions for all workers in the long term.

The use of replacement workers in federally regulated sectors is a significant problem. According to Canada's labour program, replacement workers have been used in approximately 42% of strikes over the past 10 years.

Now is the time to reform our laws and truly protect the constitutional rights of workers in Canada to negotiate their working conditions collectively with employers and to withhold their labour as a last form of leverage in that process. I will remind the committee that Canada's Supreme Court has recognized strikes as an “indispensable component” of collective bargaining. Teamsters Canada also agrees with the International Labour Organization that replacement workers constitute “a serious violation of freedom of association”.

As with any type of legislation, the details matter tremendously. Although the current iteration of the bill is good, there are still areas where the language must be refined in order to avoid effectively creating loopholes for some employers. Our written submission acknowledges areas of the bill that we are particularly pleased with, such as not limiting the banning of replacement workers to an “establishment”, hence recognizing that today's material workplace is not what counts. Things have changed and the actual work is what counts in the context of replacement workers.

While we also believe there should be limited exceptions within the law in order to protect public health and public safety and to prevent significant damage to property, these exceptions should be well defined and subject to robust enforcement provisions to prevent abuse.

Enforcing a ban on replacement workers requires a comprehensive approach. We also recommend providing union representatives access to establishments when on strike or lockout for the purposes of monitoring and reporting any violations. Additionally, the government should establish a mechanism for expedited intervention to address non-compliance and ensure the effective enforcement of the ban.

Persistent and repeated procedural delays in the bargaining process are ultimately a threat to the rights of workers to bargain and strike. Any maintenance of activities process should not present any substantial delays to the bargaining process. In this regard, when there is no agreement, Bill C-58 requires one of the parties to submit an application of referral to the CIRB for a ruling on the maintenance of essential services. We believe the submission should be automatic to reduce additional delays in granting the right to strike to workers.

On the coming into force of the law, Bill C-58 states that this will take place 18 months after it receives royal assent. Our contention is that this timeline is excessive and unnecessary and that meaningful investments in the CIRB should be made as soon as possible in order to facilitate reducing this timeline to six months at the most.

We believe that a ban on replacement workers, if done effectively, will benefit working people and their families and will lead to improved labour relations and a more just distribution of the fruits of progress. We also believe this will contribute to shaping an economy in which we create not just more jobs but more good jobs, with fairness and dignity for those performing them.

The passing of this law comes at the right time. We are living in times when all political parties are seeking ways to protect and appeal to the middle class. Moreover, there has been a dangerous trend from certain provincial governments, which have been found by the courts to have flouted the rights of workers. We must set the bar higher and not risk turning back the clock on hard-won advancements for workers in this country.

● (1540)

In conclusion, adopting legislation to prohibit replacement workers in federally regulated sectors is a necessary step for protecting the rights of workers and promoting fair labour practices. It is crucial for governments to uphold the charter rights of workers by ensuring that the right to effectively strike is respected and not undermined by the use of replacement workers. By doing so, we can create a more equitable and just society for all Canadians.

Thank you for your attention. I'm open to any questions, and I look forward to further discussion on this.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Abou-Dib.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lapierre, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre (Assistant to the Quebec Director, United Steelworkers Union): Good afternoon.

The Steelworkers Union represents 60,000 members who work in Quebec's private sector in various industries such as mining, logging, metallurgy, aluminum, various primary, secondary and tertiary processing plants, security, hotels, the restaurant industry, seniors residences, telecommunications, air, marine, rail and ground transportation, and many more.

My name is Nicolas Lapierre, and I am the assistant to the Quebec director of the Steelworkers Union.

Greetings to the Minister of Labour, Mr. O'Regan, the Liberal Party and all the opposition parties. Thanks especially to Ms. Chabot of the Bloc Québécois for this invitation. Lastly, hello to the members of the committee and to you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity you have afforded us today. This is a very important moment for us.

I'm quite moved to be here today because our members believe in the political process and democracy and because this is where we change the laws and, to some degree, the world. I welcome your commitment to public service and your collaborative efforts to protect the middle class. In this era of cynicism toward politics, it is by passing foundational bills such as this one that you acquire the power to restore voters' trust. Although some amendments to this bill may be necessary, we welcome its introduction with considerable enthusiasm.

Our Canadian union, the Steelworkers Union, and the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec have both submitted a brief. The Steelworkers Union obviously supports the recommendations made in those two submissions. I will be commenting solely on one recommendation in my remarks.

It is incomprehensible how any employer can be permitted to hire subcontractors, before a notice to bargain has been given, to do the work of members of an accreditation unit; in other words, to work as scabs during a strike or lockout. It's incomprehensible. We find it very hard to understand this idea, and it should be removed from the bill, not because it's more important, but because, on its face, it distorts the entire bill.

The Canada Labour Code provides for a strike and lockout mechanism only during a very specific period. Strikes and lockouts are permitted solely after a collective agreement has expired, whatever its term may be. Strikes and lockouts are prohibited during the term of a collective agreement, as is the case in many other countries. That's very important. Consequently, this is a key moment for both employer and union, and it's what should guarantee a balance between the parties.

How is a balance achieved between the parties? It's achieved by workers who forgo their pay in order to strike and employers who forgo revenue during a lockout. I can guarantee you that this encourages parties to agree; first of all, in order to avoid a dispute, and, second, possibly to negotiate as soon as possible to shorten the length of the dispute. This is done at the bargaining table, which makes it all the more important for the parties to talk to each other at the bargaining table. Bargaining is about give and take. Workers don't go on strike for fun; they forgo money for the sake of an ideal, whatever it may be.

Employers currently suffer no consequences under the Canada Labour Code when a labour dispute arises because they can hire scabs and continue operating their businesses as though there were no dispute. That completely disrupts the balance of power between the parties. The fact that the parties may suffer financial consequences encourages them to reach compromises and come to an agreement sooner. Since there's an imbalance under the present act, the union alone is forced to make concessions since it's the only affected party. This prolongs labour disputes.

Our brothers and sisters at the Port of Québec, stevedores represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, have been on strike for nearly 20 months. In 2022, our Steelworkers Union brothers working for Océan remorquage in Sorel were involved in a labour dispute for 9 months. Do you think those two employers suffered financially? Of course not. Their operations are running as usual, as scabs simply walk through the crowds in the picket lines.

My response to people who fear economic impacts is that we've had an anti-scab law in Quebec since 1977, and it hasn't hurt the economy in any way. On the contrary, as I said, it forces the parties to listen to each other. What's more, the disputes are shorter. The only reason why employers advance that argument is that they want to retain their undeniable advantage at the bargaining table.

● (1545)

I humbly repeat that Canadians expect this bill to be passed as soon as possible. We expect members of Parliament to work for all workers in a non-partisan manner.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lapierre.

[*English*]

Now we'll begin the first round of questioning with Mrs. Gray for six minutes.

Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

One element this bill is seeking to do is amend the maintenance of activities process to "encourage employers and trade unions to reach an earlier agreement respecting activities to be maintained in the event of a legal strike or lockout".

I'd like to ask all of the witnesses the same question. Based on your experience, what sorts of impediments typically arise on your end when identifying what those essential activities might be?

Maybe we'll go first to Canada's Building Trades Unions.

● (1550)

Mr. Sean Strickland: I think part of the challenge is when you allow exceptions for replacement workers. Where do you find that line with respect to what work is in the national interest, for example? What work is necessarily involved for the maintenance of critical infrastructure?

I think the best way to resolve that situation is between the affected parties. There could be some broad definitions that we have to be careful about, but you would have to look at some ways the affected parties—that is, the union—would be in agreement to have any kind of replacement workers to maintain critical infrastructure.

In our history at Canada's Building Trades Unions, we have made some exceptions when we've been on strike, but those exceptions are rare.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

I'll move over to Teamsters Canada.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: Of course, I agree with Brother Strickland on the question of, first of all, coming to an agreement to identify who or what work is in fact deemed essential. Maintaining the exceptions within the realm of public safety, as we indicated them to be, and knowing what compromises health and safety are key to the determination.

The other thing is time. We should be in a position to determine—again, the union and the employer—what is essential within a very short and limited timeline. That determination should begin as soon as bargaining does, so we're not in a situation where delays exacerbate a strike or a situation at the negotiating table.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

I'll go to the United Steelworkers union.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: I think that the key to success in knowing what essential services and exceptions should be maintained lies in having both parties, employer and union, involved at the bargaining table.

We regularly do this when we negotiate collective agreements. No one has any interest in leaving a business with defective heating, failing to conduct health and safety rounds or doing anything else that might endanger the survival of the business. Don't forget that there will be a follow-up after the negotiation, after the dispute. Generally speaking, the parties talk to each other so they can reach a settlement, and they agree on who they do and don't want to keep on the job.

If the parties can't reach an agreement, they may appeal to the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to resolve the dispute. Consequently, the board must be adequately staffed. Having been involved in many negotiations in recent years, I know that parties often have to wait months to be heard before the Canadian Industrial Relations Board.

Resources must definitely be allocated in the event of a dispute, but you also have to trust in the parties in place. Everyone has an interest in having a business stay healthy and enjoy smooth sailing after a dispute is resolved.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's great. Thank you very much.

To tie into that regarding the Canada Industrial Relations Board, the bill intends to encourage faster decision-making. I want to ask, based on your experience, what typically causes delays in their decision-making process.

I have only a minute, so maybe we can have some quick answers. We'll go first to Canada's Building Trades Unions.

Mr. Sean Strickland: I think it's just a delay of process and the willingness of a company who's using replacement workers to continue along that process as long as they possibly can.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I'll go over to Teamsters Canada.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: I think in addition to that, there's an insufficiently resourced CIRB, so ensuring that you have adequate resources to deal with the questions in a timely fashion is very important.

● (1555)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Last I'll go to the United Steelworkers union.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: I agree with my sister: An insufficiently resourced Canadian Industrial Relations Board is what slows down the whole process. For both sides, it can often happen before negotiations begin. We encourage this, but we still have to wait months before we're heard, which slows down the proper conduct of negotiations. You ultimately have to be aware of that fact and allocate necessary resources in the event the parties don't agree.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Mr. Long, you have six minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon to my colleagues and thank you to our witnesses.

It's extremely transformational and very important legislation that we're dealing with today. I am pleased to see the Conservatives asking some questions on the legislation. They have been avoiding talking about it. I am encouraged that they supported it to come to committee. Let's hope they continue to show support for unions.

Last week—

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): It's funny that you have a question about it.

Mr. Wayne Long: Last week, we heard some representatives, CFIB and others, including Conservative MPs, state that this type of legislation increases the length of strikes and is a disruption to supply chains. However, we have also heard testimony that contradicts this view, with examples of how the use of replacement workers has caused longer strikes.

Mr. Strickland, Arlene Dunn, a good friend of both of ours, who was a previous executive director of Canada's Building Trades Unions, says hello. She's in my riding in Saint John.

Can you speak on the record about how replacement workers undermine the constructive settlement of disputes?

Mr. Sean Strickland: I think my opening comments gave a very good example of how replacement workers prolonged a job action in British Columbia for up to six years. It's concerning when an employer can drag out a process for that length of time through legal proceedings and through delays at the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

I think the whole idea of using replacement workers undermines the collective bargaining process, which is duly constituted under the laws of each province. The fact that an employer is able to use replacement workers is in contravention of the whole purpose of the collective bargaining regime in the first place. I think it's critically important that we put this into place.

There is strong evidence from various professors at schools across Canada indicating that the length of a strike is shortened when you're not allowed to use replacement workers. Common sense would dictate that this would be the case. If your work as an employer is not disrupted because you're able to bring in replacement workers, even though you're trying to negotiate with someone, where's the motivation to get back to the negotiating table? It makes sense that the length of strikes is shortened, and there's evidence to prove that.

Mr. Wayne Long: There has also been a lot of talk at times, through this study, that unions want to go on strike and it's their first choice. Can you speak to that?

Mr. Sean Strickland: Absolutely not. The strike is the absolute last resort for a union when they have failed to reach an amicable agreement at the bargaining table. A strike imposes and has our membership endure hardships that many of us cannot imagine. Union leadership takes great time and consideration in recommending to their membership that they go on strike.

Anyone who suggests for a minute that unions have a proclivity to strike is not in touch with today's economic and labour realities.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you for that. I'll get back to you, Sean.

Mr. Lapierre, do you want to comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: Thank you very much for the opportunity to answer that question.

We think that obviously shortens labour disputes for the simple reason that money is king. That's the way it is for workers and employers. Positions may be diametrically opposed at the start of a negotiation when a dispute's in the offing. We basically want to resolve issues at the bargaining table. That's what workers and employers want, and most issues are in fact resolved at the bargaining table.

The positions of both workers and employers often soften as the weeks go by, and people reach compromises. It eventually just becomes time to resolve the dispute. Disputes put pressure on families as well. I have to say that divorces and suicides occur when labour disputes drag on. Labour disputes are hard to live through. People don't do it for fun; they do it because they believe in something, in an ideal.

That's true of both workers and employers. If an employer imposes a lockout, it does so for its own reasons, and they have to be respected. Then a balance has to be maintained during negotiations. I can assure you that people are often more understanding a few weeks later and both sides look for a solution.

So it doesn't lengthen disputes; it shortens them.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Ms. Abou-Dib, would you care to comment on that, please?

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: Sure.

I think the statement that unions want to go on strike is utterly absurd. I don't have the national stat—I was about to look it up—but I can definitely tell you from the Teamsters' perspective that over 98% of our collective agreements are negotiated peacefully and without conflict. The other 2% either have different forms of conflict, which include strikes or lockouts—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you've muted yourself.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: Pardon me.

No one wants to go on strike and there's a loss for everyone in that situation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much to all the witnesses.

Thank you for all the work you do every day to defend and promote the conditions of the members you represent.

That's also our role as parliamentarians. The Canada Labour Code should protect workers' rights, but I would add that it needs a lot of love these days. How can anyone explain how the use of replacement workers can still be permitted in 2024? It's insane.

To illustrate what I'm saying, I want to welcome the Videotron workers who are with us during our study of this bill. They've been locked out since last October. This is a good example for those people who wonder how long a dispute can last when replacement workers are brought in.

Mr. Lapierre, thank you very much for being here.

You've seen an example of this situation. We even saw what happened on the picket line at Océan remorquage, at the Sorel-Tracy marine terminal, and how that affected the length of a dispute.

Would you please tell us more about the consequences for negotiations on the working conditions of the striking workers that resulted in the use of replacement workers?

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: The first consequence is the length of the dispute, which clearly wouldn't have lasted nine months if replacement workers hadn't been brought in. No employer wants to lose money for nine months, and workers never show any real desire to go through a nine-month labour dispute.

When a negotiation begins, you start with what you want to get, and sometimes it turns into a labour dispute. However, positions inevitably soften over weeks and months, and when people start losing money, that forces the parties to speak to each other.

In our members' dispute in Sorel-Tracy, the employer brought in scabs, and they walked through the picketers and their signs every morning. Some scabs were paid much higher wages than those of the employees. That decision was up to the employer, but it was very frustrating for the employees to see people come in and do their work. They were fighting for better work schedules and a better quality of life. It wasn't just a money issue; they were defending an ideal. They eventually won their case, but only after a nine-month dispute. The use of scabs lengthened the dispute.

As I said, labour disputes are hard on families. We underestimate the consequences of these kinds of disputes; when the family nest runs short of money, that often has an impact on the parents, children, sports and other recreational activities and people's ability to enjoy life. Workers do it out of principle, but the repercussions can't be downplayed. Collateral damage inevitably occurs, and that's what workers experience during labour disputes.

● (1605)

Ms. Louise Chabot: As a parliamentarian and member of the Bloc Québécois, which has introduced 11 bills on this issue since 1990, I, like you, can only welcome this bill. I have always said there's a difference between tabling a bill and actually passing it.

What's your interpretation? We assume that the intention is to prevent replacement workers from being used. However, many people have discussed exceptions that are provided for under this bill and that don't even appear in Quebec's Labour Code, as well as the bill's coming into force 18 months after royal assent.

Would you like to comment on that subject?

Do you think the bill, in its present form, will achieve its objective?

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: That's definitely not the case. I didn't tell you about all the comments cited in the two briefs that were submitted.

The fact that the employer has the option of hiring subcontractors before the notice to bargain collectively is given makes no sense and completely distorts the bill. We find it hard to understand the intention behind that.

When I'm at a bargaining table and the other party asks me for something, I always wonder what that party wants. Sometimes I'm intrigued. In this instance, I'm trying to understand the upside of this kind of provision, apart from the fact that employers are being given a green light to hire outside resources before the notice to bargain collectively is even given. That's the only thing I can think of.

We also wonder about the proposed implementation timeline, which is 18 months. It's hard, even very hard, to understand why we need 18 months to implement this bill. We also wonder about various situations provided for in the bill. This isn't clear, but it seems that the parties would be compelled to agree on what essential services to maintain and to provide the necessary resources to the Canadian Industrial Relations Board.

I trust both parties when they negotiate. You have to support what goes on at the bargaining table. That's where it all has to happen. There are corrections to be made. Some are minor, but others are major, particularly regarding the option for the employer to bring in replacement workers before the notice to bargain collectively has even been given. That's the perfect opportunity for the employer to plan a labour dispute or lockout and to hire workers in advance. It really makes no sense to us.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Absolutely. We've been labelled conspiracists for making that argument, but we nevertheless think that it's a sound remark and that corrections should absolutely be made.

Federal public service employees have told us they're very surprised the bill doesn't cover federal employees.

Would you agree that this type of bill should also apply to the federal public service?

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: Absolutely. I don't represent public service employees, but it's a matter of solidarity.

I also find it hard to understand why that choice was made in this bill. As the saying goes, you have to eat what's put in front of you. If the party that forms the present government, the Liberal Party, sees matters that way for all employers in Canada, it will have to make sure this bill also applies to its own employees. That's also happening here in Quebec.

However, the essential services issue will obviously have to apply. You can't use a single approach for everyone, but the fact that public service employees aren't covered by this bill is incomprehensible.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

Mr. Boulerice, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our guests, the invaluable witnesses who are before us today.

I come from a political party that has always been concerned with workers' rights. In our discussions and negotiations with this minority government and in the supply and confidence agreement that we've signed and that is public, we've said that this is a major win for us. However, that troubles some people.

Representatives of management associations came to see us last week and told us that there weren't enough exceptions in the bill and that they would completely discard it if they could. That clearly shows the path some groups have taken.

Mr. Lapierre, I'd just like to say that the Océan remorquage case is quite clear. I had a chance to meet your members.

I admit it was difficult and frustrating to see their livelihood being stolen from them by people who were being paid more than what they were seeking at the bargaining table. I mention that example, but there'll be others.

How do you think an anti-scab law could restore the balance between the parties at the bargaining table?

● (1610)

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: As I said at the outset, it's entirely a matter of balance, a balance of power.

When I sit down at the bargaining table with an employer, I'm not sitting down with someone who's above or below me, but rather with an equal. So we negotiate as equals.

However, power has to be balanced. Let's imagine that I demand something or that an employer asks me to make a concession, that we don't agree or that the employer tells me that, one way or another, we'll have to accept his conditions or else he'll impose a lockout and continue operating. As you can understand, that kind of situation completely alters the bargaining table dynamic. That's what has to be rebalanced.

In a society of laws such as ours, where everyone has an equal chance, everyone must be provided with the same tools, the same “weapons”, as it were. It's important to reestablish the balance of power.That's how you stabilize labour relations and deal on an equal footing.

There's an imbalance right now, and that's what's changing the situation.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Lapierre.

I want to say that I also agree with you that, if a business brings in subcontractors before sending a notice to negotiate, the subcontractors shouldn't be entitled to do the work of the members of the accreditation unit once the labour dispute is over. I think you're raising a major point there, which is very important.

Mr. Strickland, continuing in the same vein, I was quite appalled to hear you say that a labour dispute in British Columbia had lasted six years because scabs had been brought in. That's terrible.

You said something interesting in one sentence, that Bill C-58 would help stabilize the right to bargain collectively and help workers go back to work.

Would you please provide some more details on the subject, citing the LTS Solutions case that you discussed earlier?

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Strickland: Sure.

Similar to my brother Nicolas beside me here, I think it will stabilize the collective bargaining process, because as we know and as my brother from United Steelworkers mentioned, it's a power situation. When we're at the bargaining table, we have an equal amount of power, but that power is only trumped, from our side, by our ability to strike and withhold our services. That is the ultimate thing for a union to do, which we do not take lightly.

We have discussed previously how rare it is that we withdraw services. It's only when we're at an impasse. That is severely undermined when the employer has the ability to replace labour with replacement workers. If that ability is taken away from the employer, the power balance is restored and we're on more equal footing, which stabilizes the collective bargaining process for the benefit of the employer and the worker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

Ms. Abou-Dib, you made an interesting point when you said we have to be able to make the necessary checks to determine whether the use of scabs is illegal or whether the agreement reached between the parties before the dispute is being complied with.

I was lucky, in a way, to visit a picket line consisting of workers subject to Quebec's anti-scab law. However, as it took too long to get inspectors on the ground, even the Quebec law, which is well known and has been enforced for decades, wasn't always complied with.

How important is it to avoid that trap in Bill C-58?

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Yes, we have to learn the lessons about how the other provinces, including Quebec, enforce their laws.

What has happened in Quebec and what's happening in British Columbia now is that it takes too much time to verify whether employers are complying with the act.

We want to support the government's ability to enforce the act. We really need to be serious about the resources needed to do the checks. We have to ensure that, if we want to enforce an act, the departments and agencies responsible must have the necessary resources to verify that enforcement.

● (1615)

The Chair: There were two seconds left.

Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

[*English*]

Welcome to HUMA, Mr. Seeback. You're up next for five minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I certainly understand the importance of unions. I was going through some of the transcripts from the hearings, and I think Lana Payne said, “No country has achieved shared progress and prosperity for working people without strong unions and strong collective bargaining laws.” I assume you all agree with that. I wanted to let you know I agree with that.

I'm going to share a personal anecdote. My son works in construction and is a proud member of his local union. He worked in private sector construction for a while and was well treated, but there was no comparison to how he has been treated since he has been in a union. The pay is better and the safety is better. He is going to go to trade school and that will be paid for. The benefits are enormous. I understand the incredible value that workers get when they join a union. It has made a distinct improvement in his life.

I want to quickly talk about some aspects of the bill.

The first thing I want to ask about is clause 11, which adds new subsection 99.01(1). It talks about a complaint made to the CIRB for an employer's non-compliance, but it says the board must issue an order, if applicable, “within the time limit prescribed by the regulations or...as soon as feasible” if there's no time limit prescribed. That seems a little vague to me.

What do you think that time limit should be, or is there a current time limit? If so, do you think that time limit is acceptable?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: Unless I'm mistaken, the bill provides for a timeline of 90 days within which to be heard. We think that number should be reduced to 45 days for the process to be closer to reality. That obviously influences what will happen at the bargaining table and whether the parties will even go back to the table. Going back to what I said earlier, the idea is to maintain a balance of forces. If the employer is found to be in violation of the anti-scab legislation, someone must render that decision, the employer has to be informed that it must stop what it's doing, and it must be determined whether the parties will return to the bargaining table or proceed differently.

So that has to be done as soon as possible. The sooner the decision is made, the more realistic it will be, which is better for everyone, both employer and union.

[*English*]

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: I'd like to add to that, Mr. Seeback, if it's all right.

The brother is correct about the 90-day limit in the bill right now. It is actually a bit of an improvement on where we are today. However, I think if there's a need to go beyond the 90 days, the right to strike should be automatically granted to the workers if the CIRB has not rendered a decision.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: That takes me back to asking how the CIRB is functioning.

A lot of this has the potential to end up back there when you're determining whether someone is violating the anti-scab rules. It can all go back to the Canada Industrial Relations Board. Is it resourced properly? Is it staffed properly? Are you happy with the composition of the board? How has it worked for you in the past?

Mr. Sean Strickland: I will defer to my colleagues on that question.

From our perspective, the Canada Industrial Relations Board needs more resources. Given this pending legislation and its ultimate passage, the implications for more enforcement through the bill have the further implication that more resources are needed at the CIRB.

I will let my brother and sister respond more directly.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: We've been saying that more resources are needed. Our evaluation of the CIRB is that it plays an extremely important role in labour relations at the federal level. There isn't a problem with the CIRB, other than the fact that it has insufficient resources to deal with the demands.

On the question of demands and the maintenance of service, the most important folks for determining that really should be the two parties—the union and the employer. The CIRB truly should be the absolute last resort in that particular aspect.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Now we will go to Mr. Collins for five minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the witnesses today.

Ms. Abou-Dib, sometimes governments are elected and they don't have the best interests of workers at heart. We saw that with Bill C-377 in the Harper government, and we've seen that recently in the province of Ontario, where the premier capped wages at 1%, which went to court and was deemed unconstitutional.

You referenced the provinces. I'm not asking you to talk about the politics of this, but one thing I've asked witnesses about is the fact that when this legislation is passed, it will be added to a list that has laws from Quebec and British Columbia, and will probably go a long way to helping the union movement by implementing the same kind of legislation in other provinces where there currently is no protection for workers.

Can you comment on the importance of what this legislation will do to assist the movement in provinces where at present there might be push-back the other way in violation of workers' rights, as we've seen with Ontario's wage cap?

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: You're correct in your analysis and in trying to bring out the important role the federal government has in leading the way when it comes to legislation and creating a fairer society for all Canadians. When the Supreme Court rules that the right to strike, the right to collective bargaining and the right to freedom of association are charter rights, that should trickle down not only at the federal level but into the provincial jurisdictions as well. Just as with minimum wage and other progressive labour legislation adopted at the federal level, provinces often fall in line.

It's absolutely key to creating the conditions for provinces to take up a ban against replacement workers.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks for that answer.

I'll follow up with another reference you made in your opening statement. You talked about how the use of replacement workers not only undermines the collective bargaining process but also creates a sense of resentment and can lead to violence.

I referenced in the previous two meetings the United Steelworkers' efforts in the 1940s when they fought for a 40-hour work week in Hamilton with Stelco, as well as their fight for paid vacation days. When 2,000 scab workers were brought in at that time, bricks, bats and other things were used with police and the company representatives. For decades, those stories were told in the city of Hamilton in relation to the company's actions and the people who went in as replacement workers. It can create labour relations issues for decades.

Can you talk about the importance, with this legislation, of avoiding those scenarios, which there are clear examples of? The longshoremen, who were here the other day, provided a similar story. I'm interested in your thoughts regarding the same.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: I don't think we can underscore enough the fact that the use of replacement workers undermines the collective bargaining process. Very bluntly, it pits worker against worker. I don't necessarily agree that at the bargaining table we're equal. The fact of the matter is that the employer pulls the purse strings. They have the money.

What we have is our labour as workers. That is our power. We don't have the money. If we cannot exercise the withdrawal of our labour, do so safely and have an impact on the employer, then it is a meaningless right.

In that situation, you create resentment and anger. You create a scenario where, once again, you are pitting human beings against each other. Everybody wants to make a living, and the striking workers are not making their living. Watching someone else come in and take their job is not an acceptable solution.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collins.

[*Translation*]

You have two and a half minutes, Ms. Chabot.

Ms. Louise Chabot: There has been an act in Quebec since 1977. Quebec's Labour Code expressly provides that the Minister of Labour may investigate a place of work during a strike or lockout to ensure that anti-scab provisions are being complied with. During a strike or lockout, workers may not be at the place of work or ascertain what is going on there. They may observe what the replacement workers are doing outdoors, but not indoors.

Mr. Lapierre, do you think a similar provision should be added to Bill C-58? It currently provides no such thing.

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: Every measure must be put in place to ensure that the investigation and verification process is conducted. Earlier we talked about taking diligent action regarding the necessary time and the court's reaction time, but we also need to include resources. Rigorous action must definitely be taken by either the minister or the investigator.

We now have 90 days. Last year, I conducted a negotiation and we waited months, to the point where we didn't need it anymore. The parties went back to the table, for all kinds of reasons, and reached an agreement. It took months for us to be heard. So some rigour and diligent action need to be added.

Earlier I talked about real time. The closer you follow events, the more you avoid unfortunate incidents, and you ensure that the parties talk to each other.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'm going to yield the rest of my time to you.

What's essential is that the right to strike is a fundamental right recognized in our charters. However, the use of scab labour runs counter to the right of association and negotiation.

I'd like you to tell us how important it is for balanced and harmonious labour relations to pass this kind of legislation.

Mr. Nicolas Lapierre: It's important.

I mentioned in my remarks that I've had extensive discussions with our members, the family.

People are disenchanted, but I really believe in the legislative process that's going on here. This is necessary, and it's through these kinds of processes that we increase people's trust and explain to them why we're going to vote: Ultimately, it produces foundational results for everyone.

I previously testified before the Canada Pension Plan committee. Now I'm here regarding the anti-scab law. It's important to send a signal to the members.

I'm going to conclude by asking you to act in a diligent, non-partisan manner so the process can be conducted as quickly as possible.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot, and Mr. Lapierre.

Mr. Boulerice, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lapierre, allow me to take 30 seconds and continue on with what you were saying. I think it's important that everyone around the table work well together to improve and enhance the bill, and to defend workers. That's not just a constitutional right; good, free and collective bargaining also helps maintain and improve working and living conditions. In fact, an anti-scab law is a wealth distribution tool. I think this has to be viewed in that perspective as well.

Mr. Lapierre, you just talked about timelines, and that troubles me a bit. You mentioned months.

Ms. Abou-Dib, you also talked about timelines. However, one of those that you want to see shortened is the 18-month delay in the coming into force of the act, which the majority considers too long. There's also the 90-day timeline, which we would like to see shortened.

I would like you to explain to us why it's important for Teamsters Canada that the process be much faster and more efficient.

● (1630)

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: If we want the implementation of the act to be really meaningful and to help protect workers, the timelines must be the same.

The act currently prescribes no solution after the 90 days following the request of essential services. What's the solution in that case? I believe that, regardless of the decision made after 90 days, and if there is no list or agreement, the right of those workers must automatically be respected. That's all.

That urges us on a little more to do the necessary work to determine what those essential services are.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

I find that interesting, since this would become prescriptive and we wouldn't be at a loss if the Canadian Industrial Relations Board, the CIRB, were unable to render its decision within the timelines already provided under the act.

Ms. Mariam Abou-Dib: I agree with you. That's an accurate comment.

You can't have written law confirmed by the Supreme Court without the support of statutes and regulations to implement it. That shouldn't be able to undermine the collective bargaining process. However, the use of scab labour actually does undermine the collective bargaining process.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Abou-Dib.

[*English*]

That concludes our first hour of questioning.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing.

We'll suspend for a few minutes while we bring in the next witnesses.

● (1630)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, committee members.

We will begin the second hour of our deliberations on Bill C-58 with our new witnesses.

We have Charles Smith as an individual, appearing virtually. From the Canadian Union of Public Employees, we have Mark Hancock and Annick Desjardins. From the United Steelworkers, Local 1944, we have Donna Hokiro and Corey Mandryk.

Welcome.

We'll begin with Professor Smith for five minutes or less.

Mr. Charles Smith (Associate Professor, Political Science, Saint Thomas More College, As an Individual): Thank you for allowing me to be here. I apologize that I'm not able to attend in person. Somewhat ironically, the teachers in Saskatchewan are in a rotating strike position, and I've been having to pick up my kids for lunch hours, so we were unable to leave until last week.

I really am honoured to be before this committee. I think this is a very important bill. I have been following the debates in the House and in this committee quite closely.

In looking at the bill as a whole, I want to argue before this committee—and I have submitted my speaking notes—that as presented, it is a logical extension of Canada's industrial relations system, which is based, and has historically been based since its inception in the 1940s, on the notion of industrial peace.

In short, I want to argue that anti-scab legislation as presented in this bill is an important tool to further promote the Government of Canada's long-held policy goal. In the words of industrial relations scholars Jon Peirce and Karen Bentham, this is “to regulate strikes with an eye to protecting the public interest and maintaining public peace and order”.

In making this argument, I don't want to repeat the points that have been made by unions and businesses in critiquing or supporting the bill. Rather, I want to take up the challenge that was raised before this committee on April 11 by some of the presenters, who said, “much of what has been said to date is simply not rooted in documented reality.” They claim that the literature proves two things clearly. One is that “Replacement worker bans result in more strikes”; the other is that they result in “longer strikes”.

I fundamentally disagree with this interpretation of the data. It is, in my opinion, a narrow reading of the literature on strikes and lockouts in Canada. I'll further seek to explain my argument—which is laid out in more detail in my submission—by looking at the two jurisdictions that have introduced anti-scab legislation: Quebec and British Columbia.

There are a few things before I get to that particular point.

When we look at Canada's industrial relations system, it's built on this idea of industrial peace. Since the 1940s, the Canadian government's provincial counterparts have designed an industrial relations system that is very much designed to restrict the ability of organizations like unions to withdraw their labour at will. They can only do it in very specific times and in very specific circumstances. They have to go through a significant set of legal hurdles to withdraw their labour, and that's declared a legal strike. I could get into that in more detail if people want, but I'm sure you are aware of it.

They can only strike after declaring an impasse in bargaining. Usually, in most jurisdictions, they can only do so after a mandatory cooling-off period before mandatory conciliation. All strikes must be authorized by a vote of the membership. The list goes on and on.

My argument would be that the governments in Canada have already put up significant hurdles for unions to withdraw their labour and to declare a legal strike, all with the policy goal of declaring industrial peace.

Once a legal strike has been declared, though, the one remaining hurdle that contributes to more intensity on the picket line—and we have documented this with qualitative research interviewing strikers over the past 40 years—is that when scabs are used, there's a high likelihood of more intense violence on the picket line. That is a well-documented result of the use of replacement workers in Canada and in Canadian strike history.

Taken together, what I would summarize, using the examples so far, is that legal rules in the Canadian system already place numerous restrictions on workers' ability to strike. In so doing, when workers take that legal action, they're not doing it in any willy-nilly kind of way. They're following a very specific set of rules that were developed over the last 80 years or so.

However, we're still left with this conundrum of how we can maintain peace and stability on the picket line. I would argue that this bill goes a long way to doing that. We know this because two jurisdictions in Canada have implemented anti-scab legislation, and they're both long-standing. They've lasted the test of time, and they haven't been withdrawn by governments of any political stripe.

In Quebec, in 1977, the Parti Québécois government of René Lévesque passed an anti-scab bill to address some serious concerns with the construction industry. In 1993, the government of Mike Harcourt did something similar in British Columbia.

With regard to two claims that were made by witnesses on April 11, they argue there's a possibility that anti-scab legislation will contribute to more strikes and to longer strikes. However, when we look at the data historically, I find very little evidence to support this claim.

● (1645)

In 1977, when the Quebec government passed this legislation, strikes did indeed go up slightly, but from the 1980s until last year, they fell precipitously. This struck me when I was looking at strike data over the weekend.

The 2023 numbers were recently released. In 2023, Quebec went through a historic number of strikes, but it would be hard to make the argument that—

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Smith.

I'm going to keep everybody to their timelines so we can get everybody in.

Now we have Mr. Hancock for the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

You have five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mark Hancock (National President, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to all the members of the committee.

My name is Mark Hancock, and I'm the national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

[*English*]

CUPE represents more than 740,000 frontline public service workers across the country. Over 30,000 CUPE members work in federally regulated industries, such as airlines, communications, public transportation, ports, cash transit and security, as well as in indigenous councils and services.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-58 and the urgent need for anti-scab legislation in Canada.

I want to sincerely thank the NDP and the Liberals for including this commitment in the supply and confidence agreement, and for supporting anti-scab legislation clearly and publicly.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank the Bloc Québécois for its support.

[*English*]

I also want to thank all MPs of all political parties for the unanimous vote in favour of Bill C-58 at second reading.

Why is collective bargaining so important that it is a charter-protected right in this country and in many countries around the world? It's because it is the only tool that workers have to correct a fundamental power imbalance between them and their employers. It is this inequity that Bill C-58 aims to address because collective bargaining without a real right to strike is deeply flawed.

This bill will also correct a disproportionate advantage that employers currently have: the ability to lock out their unionized employees and replace them with non-union workers without restriction. This is a practice that allows for a collective dismissal during bargaining.

Right now, as we speak, two groups of CUPE members working under the federal jurisdiction are victims of this vicious tactic. The committee has already heard about them. They are the Quebec port workers, SCFP 2614, and the Videotron employees in Gatineau, SCFP 2815. Some of them are here today.

Longshore workers in Quebec have been locked out for 18 months. Our members are asking for a basic work-life balance because workers cannot ignore their family responsibilities to work extraordinary hours of overtime due to systemic understaffing. Meanwhile, untrained workers are coming in every day to work as scabs, putting the safety of operations and staff at risk.

Employees of Videotron working in Gatineau were locked out in October 2023. They are simply asking to keep their jobs in Canada. Videotron is circumventing their collective agreement protections by locking them out and contracting out their work overseas, where workers are mistreated with impunity and paid a fraction of what Videotron pays its employees in Canada.

While it is business as usual for these two employers, our members and their families are experiencing the devastating and real impacts of this fundamental power imbalance.

Bill C-58 is a step in the right direction to bring fairness to labour relations at the federal level by getting rid of scabs, but the bill has loopholes. We urge you all to consider our recommendations to make this legislation work more effectively.

First, proposed subsection 94(4) should be a prohibition on performing any struck work or locked-out work. Exceptions should be limited to preventing imminent danger to the health and safety of the public or to the environment, or the threat of destruction to the workplace.

Second, the enforcement mechanism should include workplace investigations, as in Quebec. Investigations already exist in the Canada Labour Code for health and safety and labour standards, so it would be easy to replicate.

Third, the prohibition on using scabs should come into force immediately when the bill is adopted. There is no reason to delay the implementation of proposed subsection 94(4). The CIRB already has the authority to issue orders for unfair labour practices, and there is no need for further regulations there.

Finally, I have a few words on essential services. We heard business representatives talk about expanding the definition of essential services to include different types of economic disruptions, but that's what strikes are about: disruption.

As I said before, because it seeks to address a fundamental inequality, the right to strike is a charter-protected right. That means any limit to striking activity must comply with charter guarantees. If essential services are guaranteed to include economic disruption, this restriction on the right to strike will be unconstitutional.

● (1650)

You know that our members will not remain silent when our fundamental rights are attacked. Just ask Premier Ford.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hokiro, you have five minutes or less.

Ms. Donna Hokiro (President, United Steelworkers Local 1944): Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to talk about this vital piece of legislation.

I'm Donna Hokiro, president of Local 1944 of the United Steelworkers. Our local union represents over 5,000 members across Canada, mostly federally regulated in the telecom sector.

Allow me to start with this: No one goes on strike for the fun of it—nobody. It's never a decision that union members take lightly. Arguably, it's the hardest.

Importantly, when the employer decides to lock out workers, they don't consult the union and they threaten the very livelihood of their workers—our members. Strikes and lockouts have always had significant impacts on workers. The use of scabs escalates an already difficult situation and has the potential to impact an entire community. It turns workers against each other, neighbours against neighbours and sometimes even members of the same family against each other.

Our local union has experienced such situations in the past. Familial brothers who both worked at Telus came to blows when one crossed the picket line while the other honoured it. This one act of scabbing by one of the real-life brothers affected their family, so much so that Christmas, birthdays, other holidays and special occasions could not be celebrated together. Countless relationships and friendships have never been restored.

This affects our members and your constituents. That's why we have been fighting for anti-scab legislation for decades.

Anti-scab legislation already exists in British Columbia and Quebec. It has been proven that bans on scabs reduce the number and length of labour disputes and restore the balance in collective bargaining. More importantly, it upholds workers' constitutional rights and leads to better working and living conditions. However, the bill before us falls short because it includes loopholes that could allow employers to bypass the ban and includes unnecessary delays that postpone workers' protection.

First, anyone performing the job of a worker on strike or lockout must be included in the ban, whenever they were hired. Of course, we accept exceptions for work necessary to prevent an imminent threat to life, health and safety, destruction of property or environmental damage, but we also submit that an agreement on who will perform conservation work must be reached between both the employer and the union and must not be decided by the employer alone.

Also, the waiting period for the CIRB to issue an interim or bottom line decision on the maintenance of activities needs to be cut from 90 to 45 days to ensure employers don't use delaying practices before workers can exercise their right to strike.

Importantly, we need to get rid of the current wording that gives scabs preferential reinstatement over existing employees after a labour dispute. That makes no sense.

Next, the labour code already defines “employee” to include dependent contractors. This exception needs to be removed to make it clear that they are not allowed to cross the picket line.

Finally, the delay before the implementation of this bill needs to be removed. The government needs to show they are serious about this law, and it must come into force before the next election to make it harder for the next government, whoever it may be, to repeal it before workers have had a chance to benefit from it.

I spoke of Telus earlier, but it's not just them. Rogers, having made big promises to the current government to ensure that the acquisition of Shaw closed smoothly, instead locked out 288 of my members in Vancouver and Surrey, British Columbia, before the ink was even dry on the approval. They brought workers in from other parts of Canada, telling them that they would be helping with extra work because of the merger.

Worse still, near the end of the lockout, the B.C. labour board ruled in favour of a provincially regulated contractor, allowing it to force its technicians—against their wishes—to cross our federal picket lines. This unfortunate loophole is being rectified by the provincial government in B.C.

● (1655)

Please ensure this new legislation respects any picket line, regardless of what jurisdiction it falls under. A picket line is a picket line is a picket line. For the sake of all federally regulated workers, we respectfully ask you to adopt these amendments and get Bill C-58 passed and implemented swiftly.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hokiro.

Mr. Seeback, you have six minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm new to the committee and I'm new to this study. I was going through and reading some of the testimony from before, and one thing that jumped out at me was what Lana Payne said when she was here. She said, “No country has achieved shared progress and prosperity for working people without strong unions and strong collective bargaining laws.” I'm assuming everyone here agrees with that. I want to say that I agree with that one hundred per cent as well.

I told the previous panel a personal story. My son works in the construction industry. He worked for two private companies. Of course, he was treated well. Now he works for a large company in a union and his life is incredibly better. His pay is better. Safety is better. The benefits and opportunities are better. His life has dramatically improved because he is in a union.

I fundamentally believe that unions create better-paying jobs for Canadians. That's what I want to come to with my questions on this bill. I want everyone to know that.

When I look at the bill, one thing I look at is the section on fines when there is an offence. Clause 12 of Bill C-58 would add a new section, 101.1, to the CLC to establish that if an employer contravenes the rules on the prohibited use of replacement workers, there could be a $100,000 fine "for each day during which the offence is committed or continued."

Taking out how long these things might take to be deliberated upon, do you think that fine is sufficient? Where do you folks stand on that?

Everyone can take a turn answering.

Mr. Mark Hancock: There's definitely a union advantage. I'm glad your son is enjoying that. My kids have both also had union jobs and definitely experienced much better conditions when they worked in those environments.

With respect to fines, I have no problem with them being higher at all. When we use unions and do something that an employer does not think is right, it doesn't take long for the employer to take us to whichever labour board it may be—provincial or federal—and the threats of fines are significant. You may recall we had a significant job action in Ontario with education workers and with Premier Ford. I think it was about a billion dollars that we were going to be fined in the first week.

I think stronger fines against employers would be very helpful in levelling the playing field.

● (1700)

Ms. Donna Hokiro: Thank you for your question. I appreciate it.

Back in 2005 when we were locked out by Telus, instead of meeting all of our demands, they opted to pay, we estimate, over three times the cost for scab labour. They certainly can afford and have the ability to pay. I would just throw out there that when we're locked out and there is no consequence, there is indeed anti-union animus and it goes against the charter, quite frankly.

I agree with my brother here that the higher, the better. I would also say it's quite illegal when you go against the charter. We should all be offended.

Indeed, I think the higher the better. I approve.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thanks very much.

One thing that left me sort of scratching my head when I looked at the legislation is that there doesn't seem to be a good definition of what a contractor is versus a dependent contractor. I think that falls into one of the loopholes that everyone is talking about today.

Do you think "dependent contractor" has been redefined effectively in Bill C-58 for the CLC? If not, what would you do to make that definition better?

Does anyone want to take a stab at that?

Ms. Donna Hokiro: Having not heard from independent Smith, maybe he'd like to start.

Mr. Charles Smith: I'm sorry. Did you want me to respond to the first question or the second one?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Respond to the second one, please.

Mr. Charles Smith: My union and our work don't deal with independent contractors and dependent contractors, so I would defer to some of the union leaders who have dealt with this directly.

Ms. Annick Desjardins (Executive Assistant, National President's Office, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Our recommendation is to broaden the scope of the protection against scabs—against replacement workers. Dependent contractors are considered employees under the code, so that is not an issue here. The problem we have with the definition in the prohibition is that it allows for employers to continue working with their contractors during a strike. That's the problem we have.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: My final question is going to be for the United Steelworkers. I'm going to veer off slightly, but I hope you'll bear with me.

I also work on the international trade committee. We heard from steel producers that imports of steel have gone from 19% of the Canadian market in 2013 to 39% in 2022, mostly because of dumping from other countries.

Do you think it's really important, as this bill is important, that the government take some steps to revise how we deal with anti-dumping, which is taking away good union jobs from steelworkers across this country?

Ms. Donna Hokiro: Yes, certainly. Just to be clear, I am in the telecom sector, so I wouldn't be an expert on that, but I am an expert on being a worker. I come from the shop floor, for over 30 years.

Dumping absolutely takes jobs away from our steel sector, and, by the way, it makes a very poor product. It's unpatriotic, quite frankly. We should be very stern against any dumping, regardless of the logo on your pin, because it's anti-Canadian. There should always be jobs for Canadians first and steelworkers all the time. It's our work.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I couldn't agree with you more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Next we have Mr. Sheehan for six minutes.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Last week, there were some questions for FETCO at the end of the meeting about claims that 911 or other emergency services may go down due to this legislation. I just want to be clear on that. Its March 12 communication entitled “The Urgent Need to Amend Bill C-58” says, “The absence of these workers during strikes could lead to severe disruptions, endangering everything from home heating and emergency communications to the delivery of life-saving medical supplies and the refueling of commercial aircraft.”

An emergency communication isn't explicitly 911. I'll point out that twice, on February 20 and February 21, FETCO shared an oped by Robin Guy that asserted, “during a strike replacement workers would not be able to fix problems. Customers in an affected area could be without even emergency services—including access to 911, be their need ambulance, fire department or police.”

As discussed, and it seems like our witnesses had agreed with me, not only would 911 services be protected by the maintenance of activities process, but Bill C-58 would actually improve this process to protect the health and safety of Canadians and prevent serious environmental or property damage.

I just wanted to clear that up, because we ran out of time as we were finishing.

My first question is for Professor Smith. We heard from FETCO and other corporate groups that raised concerns around Bill C-58 about how it might increase the frequency of strikes. In November 2023, you published an article in the Monitor entitled “Anti-scab legislation does not increase strikes, despite corporate propaganda”.

Professor, could you speak more about your findings after Quebec and B.C. tabled legislation banning the use of replacement workers? I noticed that you ran out of time.

● (1705)

Mr. Charles Smith: My final thought in my presentation was that we saw the same trends in B.C., and I was going to end there.

Let's break it down. To understand the context about why strikes occur and why we see an increase or decrease in strikes, I'll note they cannot be correlated to one single legislative act or one single act.

In 1977, when the Government of Quebec introduced it's anti-scab bill, it did so for very specific reasons. The Quebec construction industry was notoriously complicated. There had been some serious strikes with some serious acts of violence. The government acted in a way to try to prevent that. While we saw an increase in strikes in the next two years, they started to decline—and declined precipitously. One reason for that was the structural change in the economy. We moved from the Keynesian welfare era to a different type of era where markets were more free and so on. We saw a decline in strikes, which ended up seeing fewer and fewer people in private sector unions.

We saw similar trends after 1993, when the government of Mike Harcourt introduced an anti-scab bill similar in context to that of the Quebec government. Actually, 1993, if we start there, is the high point for strikes. After that, they decline precipitously in British Columbia, and they have never been matched since then.

I don't see the evidence that one legislative act leads to more strikes or longer strikes. It's actually much more complicated than that, and I'm not convinced by the evidence in those briefs, Mr. Sheehan.

My final thought is on the issue of longer strikes. That's a bit more complicated, because we do see a few longer strikes after anti-scab legislation, but we see periods of shorter strikes as well. This would lead me to conclude that, again, it's context-specific. How do we understand that? We look at each specific strike and try to see what the issues are and what's happening on the ground.

To conclude, we know for sure that when anti-scab legislation is introduced, we see fewer incidents of violence on the picket line. I think that's an important policy objective of the Canadian government's industrial relations framework.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Then you would say, based on the data, that there's no correlation between strike activities by labour unions and legislation prohibiting the use of replacement workers. There's no direct correlation to what has been stated. Is that correct?

Mr. Charles Smith: Absolutely.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Thank you.

There's fearmongering out there, whether on Twitter or in statements. Along with 70 other labour experts and professors, you urged the government to adopt Bill C-58. You went on about what was happening with legislation in Quebec and British Columbia. I'm sure members from the NDP and the Bloc would agree that, again, there doesn't seem to be any kind of economic collapse happening as a result of it.

Could you expand on that fearmongering about economic collapse? As soon as a strike happens or appears it will happen, there are right-wing interventions that say it has to stop, sometimes even before it starts. Could you please comment on that?

Perhaps I'll let my union friends make a comment on that as well.

Mr. Charles Smith: I would echo what Mr. Hancock said—

Mr. Terry Sheehan: I'm sorry, Professor. Maybe I'll let Mark go.

Mr. Charles Smith: It's no problem.

The Chair: Mr. Hancock.

Mr. Mark Hancock: I'll be very quick.

There are no union members out there who want to strike. When they have a strike, they want to find a solution that works for them and their employers. That's the bottom line.

With 740,000 members, we have strikes. We have 2,100 local unions and 4,000 collective agreements, and a very small percentage end up on strike. That's because workers don't want to strike. They want to get a collective agreement that works for them.

On the numbers in 2023, I blame them on COVID. Workers were coming out of COVID. They were frustrated. We were seeing the cost of living skyrocket. That's what 2023 was about.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sheehan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really want to thank all our witnesses, and you too, Professor Smith. I thought I heard that you were responsible for essential services at home.

I want to commend you for the important work you are all doing.

I'm going to go to Mr. Hancock. I was, in a way, privileged to go on the picket line at the Port of Québec and to speak with their local representatives. I was deeply moved by what I was told about the situation, after the 18-month dispute, regarding the workers' current mental health and the health and safety issues, particularly as a result of replacement workers. I apologize for saying this, but replacement workers don't care at all about industrial health and safety rules or standards, and that results in damage to equipment. But nobody talks about that. This shows both that employees don't choose to be locked out and that they choose even less to be replaced, considering the ensuing consequences.

Would you please tell us more about why the act needs to be amended to prevent these kinds of situations?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Hancock: Yes, absolutely. I touched on that in my earlier answer.

We're Canada's largest union, with 740,000 members. We have locals with as many as 30,000 members working for the City of Toronto, and we have very small locals as well. It's not exclusively a big-local or small-local issue when workers go on strike or are locked out.

I can tell you that in every single case I'm aware of—and I've been national president for eight years now—workers have always had the goal of getting a collective agreement that works. Nobody wants to go home and tell their families that their lives are about to be disrupted because a strike is coming or, even worse, an employer is locking them out. Strike pay is not nearly what wages are. There are huge impacts. You talked about the port of Quebec. I've been there visiting members on a number of occasions. It has a real toll.

I haven't heard today—maybe somebody touched on it a bit earlier—about that relationship. Every strike and lockout will come to an end. We heard about the long strike a bit earlier today, but they all end at some point. What happens when a strike ends and workers need to go back to work for the employer who has locked them out or used scabs? It's pretty hard for those workers to go back to that type of company or workplace and pretend that life goes on as usual. Those are some of the real damages that scabs have in workplaces.

I hope I answered your question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: You pointed out a number of deficiencies in the bill. I think you're speaking for many labour organizations when you say that, if the aim is to uphold the right to strike and prevent the use of replacement workers, we should prevent the bill from permitting that indirectly. As I understand it, one of the flaws that you're pointing out concerns all the personnel that could be used on an exceptional basis in the event of a strike or lockout.

Ms. Hokiro, you represent some workers at Telus. I know this is off-topic, but we know that alarm bells are going off in the Canadian government over the decline in the number of good jobs for workers in Quebec and Canada as the company delocalizes those jobs outside the country.

I imagine the same situation occurs during a strike or lockout in the telecommunications sector, as is the case at Vidéotron, when a company delocalizes out all jobs and brings in replacement workers.

Do you think that should be prohibited?

● (1715)

[*English*]

Ms. Donna Hokiro: I'm going to be very blunt here. In 2005, when we were locked out, Telus turned on their first overseas call centre. We have video footage of it. Telus said they were only doing it to give the folks onshore a break, because they'd locked out their employees. However, the truth of the matter is that there are more and more offshore centres.

We are actually in a very precarious position. Since then, there has been no ability to have a proper strike, even if our members want one. This is because, as the sister in the panel before us said, there is no balance. There just isn't. We can only withhold our labour, but if withholding our labour means someone else is going to do it, there is no balance. We have nothing. Worse yet, it's not even done by Canadians.

It is so precarious. It's not feasible. We'll lose our whole industry.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here and taking part in this important study on a bill that is historical but that can also be improved.

The 18-month lockout at the Port of Québec is really a disgrace. I also had a chance to walk the picket line there, and it was difficult to watch the replacement workers drive in to do the work of the members who were locked out.

Some members of the Videotron employees' union are here today as well. I'm somewhat amazed at the fact that they aren't here just to improve their working conditions but also to keep their jobs because jobs across the entire telecommunication sector are threatened by delocalization. We have to talk about that.

I obviously agree that no one should ever cross a picket line. However, the Quebec and British Columbia acts provide for exceptions.

Under this bill, subcontractors hired before the notice to bargain is sent may continue doing their jobs in the same manner, to the same extent and in the same circumstances as they previously did. Consequently, if a person watered plants for 10 hours a week, that person must continue watering plants for 10 hours a week. That person may not be asked to make telephone calls or maintain computers. However, as you noted, Mr. Hancock, the Canadian Industrial Relations Board must have the resources and means it needs to conduct investigations on the ground to verify whether the act is being complied with.

I would like to hear what both of you have to say about that, but also about what happens in cases where subcontractors are brought in from outside the country, which is increasingly common in the telecommunications field. Doesn't that trouble you, in addition to the use of subcontractors itself?

[*English*]

Ms. Donna Hokiro: On the worry, I don't even think I quite have words, frankly. I'm a worker who was locked out in 2005, and I have bargained against Telus since then once I became president. There's not much of a hammer, quite frankly. Unions typically want to “rah-rah” their members and say no to concessions, but honestly, that's all we ever take, and we have no choice because not only will we be replaced by scabs, but they will probably not ever have us back.

As Brother Hancock said, there's going to be a resolution at the end, but when you have the ability to offshore everything, I don't know that there will ever be a resolution. That hurts all of our constituents across the country and that hurts our economies and our communities. It hurts all Canadians—it just does. There's no coming back from it.

We need this legislation and it needs to be fixed as soon as possible.

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Desjardins: I will add that people from Videotron could tell you about the work that's being done outdoors during the dispute.

Delocalization is definitely a much bigger problem than the anti-scab bill because we can't put the burden of protecting employment in Canada on workers' shoulders. Once they've summoned all their courage and decided to stand up to their employer, this bill must not permit the use of subcontractors. If they're working outside, we can't know if the amount of work being done is increasing or not.

We have recommended that existing subcontractors not be permitted to continue working during a strike or lockout precisely because employers may plan to increase their subcontracting volume before the notice to bargain is given.

As for inspections, we think it's important to have access to information so that we can have the evidence we need to pursue remedies. Quebec has an inspection system that we think works well and that should have been incorporated in the Canada Labour Code. It appears in parts II and III, but it could also be included in part 1.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Since you represent members of the telecommunications sector, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees also represents many people in that same sector, I want to ask you this: When the federal government grants tax credits or makes investments in telecommunications infrastructure, through grants, for example, shouldn't guarantees of continued employment be provided to prevent job delocalization?

[*English*]

Ms. Donna Hokiro: Yes, one hundred per cent. During COVID, most of the telcos received all kinds of what I'll call bonuses, but in the meantime, they were doing things that were not very conducive to helping workers. We should really be tying government contracts to jobs in Canada, jobs in everybody's community. That's not the point of this bill exactly, but it is hugely problematic when our government lifts up companies that just pay companies to get rid of our jobs. It's not helpful at all.

Mr. Mark Hancock: Part of the problem here is free trade, but I don't have time to get into that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Hancock: Fundamentally, what our government and representatives are here to do is make sure that all Canadians have a standard of living that supports their families. I'll leave it at that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

[*English*]

We'll only get at most to one and a half questioners. We started at 3:30, so we'll now go to Mrs. Gray for five minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the first meeting on this bill, this committee heard from Chris Aylward from PSAC. I want to hear your thoughts, Mr. Hancock, on a comment he made in reference to outside consultants and contractors. He said, "any time you go outside and do any kind of contracting out and you're not consulting with the people performing the duties, then it's going to be a disaster." These are his words. He also said, "Studies have shown time after time that contracting out public sector work costs more money, doesn't come in on time and is done more poorly. That's what we advocate for. Keep it in-house."

Do you have any comments on that? Would you agree, and do you have similar thoughts?

Mr. Mark Hancock: We have collective agreements with employers across this country, over 4,000 of them. In some of those cases, consultants or contractors are utilized. Generally, they're in places where there may be a unique skill set that's needed for a short period of time, like piledriving—things that members of CUPE wouldn't necessarily have.

Study after study has shown that contracting out definitely costs more. It's not as beneficial for taxpayers. I don't see them in the same vein as scabs, though. Scabs are definitely at a level of their own, and only superseded by employers who will use scabs.

Generally, I would agree with my friend Chris's statements.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: One of the other things you mentioned on that was these workers feeling undervalued when their skills aren't being used. Anxiety levels can rise when you're wondering if you're the next one whose skills won't be used.

Do you have similar thoughts on that?

● (1725)

Mr. Mark Hancock: Do you mean people are questioning their skills when contractors are brought in? Is that where you're going with this?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: It's when outside consultants and contractors are brought in and the workers aren't asked their opinion about how the worker is going to be utilized.

Mr. Mark Hancock: Maybe it's a different issue with the federal government. I'm not sure.

What I can say is that we have workplaces and employers who try to contract out large amounts of work. We have many collective agreements across this country at all levels, in provincial and federal sectors, with provisions that give workers support and that say certain work can't be contracted out. Sometimes it's tied to employment levels: As long as everybody is working, some work can be contracted out.

If I'm a tradesperson and you bring in an outside tradesperson, I'm going to start to wonder why the employer is doing that. Is it simply a need, that they need more tradespeople? If so, why aren't they hiring more tradespeople in the workplace? Those types of questions would definitely come up.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's great.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today. I know many of you have sent in written testimony as well.

During the last few minutes of this committee meeting, I want to bring up an issue that's likely important to many families following today.

I'd like to move a motion, Mr. Chair. I will read it:

> Given that:
>
> a) the Liberal Government committed to creating the Canada Disability Benefit in 2020;
>
> b) now, four years later, the Liberal Government has still not implemented the Canada Disability Benefit;
>
> c) the Liberal Member of Parliament for Whitby, Ryan Turnbull, has resorted to writing an open letter to the leader of his own party, pleading for the benefit's implementation, remarking that "Canadians with disabilities have waited long enough"; and
>
> d) this letter has been signed by Liberal members of this committee, including the Member of Parliament for Don Valley East, Michael Coteau; the Member of Parliament for Saint John—Rothesay, Wayne Long; and the Member of Parliament for Newmarket—Aurora, Tony Van Bynen;
>
> the committee recognize the Liberal Government's broken promises to Canadians with a disability who would qualify for this benefit.

To speak to this briefly—

The Chair: The motion is in order to be moved, and I want to advise the witnesses that this is acceptable at the committee. We have to deal with Mrs. Gray's motion before we can return to the witnesses, and we are running out of time.

Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We know the Canada disability benefit was first announced in the 2020 throne speech, and the legislation wasn't tabled until June 2021. This legislation was Bill C-35, which died when the Prime Minister called the 2021 election. A second bill, Bill C-22, wasn't tabled until June 2022. In October 2022, the minister told this committee that she expected it to take 12 months to develop the regulations, with an early 2024 target for publication. We know that commitment timeline has come and gone.

Canadians living with disabilities don't know if they're eligible. They don't know how they're going to apply. They don't know what they'll receive. They don't know how they'll receive it, when they'll receive it, how it will interact with provincial programs or if claw-backs will be triggered. The Liberals have broken their promises.

I bring this up because we are on the precipice of budget 2024, and people living with disabilities and their families deserve these answers.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

I have Mr. Fragiskatos, then Mr. Coteau online and Madam Chabot.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting how the Conservatives, when they put forward their motions, reveal a whole lot about what they actually stand for. This is the second time they have interrupted very important meetings on this bill with motions of their own.

Further to that—again all about Conservative motions showing us who they really are—in December, the Conservative Party voted against funding for the Canada disability benefit. The members my colleague just mentioned are members on this side of the aisle. Mr. Turnbull is not on this committee, but he is a valued colleague because he's advocated for this. In fact, all of us on this side have done exactly that.

Tomorrow is budget 2024. I'm optimistic. I'm hopeful. I don't know what's in the budget, but because of the advocacy of Liberal members and members of the Bloc and the NDP, I'm hopeful about what could be in the budget for the Canada disability benefit.

With that in mind, Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn debate on the motion, namely because this renders it moot and we can revisit it at a later time.

● (1730)

The Chair: There's been a motion to adjourn debate on the motion. I'm going to call a vote on the motion to adjourn debate only.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: Debate is adjourned on this particular motion.

We are running out of time. Will committee members indulge me for a moment or two for some committee business?

Currently for Thursday, April 18, the committee plans to hear from witnesses on Bill C-58 for the first hour. For the second hour, we will go into committee business to conclude the consideration of the draft report on artificial intelligence. I hope for the indulgence of the committee to get to the second version as well, so committee members should be prepared to do that. Again, that's so we can create some time in June to get to housing.

Also be prepared, if we get through version 2 of the artificial intelligence report, to look at version 1 of the volunteerism study report. You will have it tomorrow. I would like to begin version 1 of the report on volunteerism in that last hour.

I'm know I'm being very ambitious, but I'm getting some nods from Mr. Aitchison.

I just wanted to give you a note on that. That's what my plans are for the second hour. Also, I'll have to get approval for five budget items to cover the scrumptious lunches we've been having at committee as well as to invite committee members.

With that, thank you for your time. We did conclude the majority of the discussion on Bill C-58 today, so thank you.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The committee is adjourned.