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Wednesday, April 28, 2021



Threaten \$100K A Day Fines

Labour Minister Filomena Tassi yesterday introduced a rushed bill ordering striking Montréal longshoreman back to work under threat of \$100,000-a day fines. Tassi called it “a matter of life and death.”

“I have heard messages from stakeholders loud and clear,” Tassi told the Commons. “This is literally a matter of life and death has been the message communicated to me. If medical products and lifesaving medical devices do not get to hospitals and patients in a timely manner, the health of Canadians is at stake.”

“We know there are ships currently with Covid-19 related products, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment that now cannot get through,” said Tassi. “The impacts are vast and deep.”

Bill C-29 *An Act To Provide For Resumption And Continuation Of Operations At The Port Of Montréal* would force 1,125 longshoremen to end a strike underway since Monday morning, and subject their union Local 375 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees to final-offer arbitration. Tassi described the bill as an unhappy necessity. “Canadians are counting on us,” she said.

“The impact on our economy from these disruptions to supply chains will be devastating,” said Tassi. “Ensuring the uninterrupted flow of commodities and goods to and from international and domestic markets through the Port of Montréal is essential to the economic well-being of Canadians across the country.”

Terms of the dispute between CUPE and the Maritime Employers Association were not detailed. “The Minister says she is doing this with a heavy heart, but the fact is she’s doing it,” said Conservative MP Mark Strahl (Chilliwack-Hope, B.C.).

“The government likes to pat itself on the back for its intentions,” said Strahl. “It always has good intentions and thinks that should be enough to get them kudos.”

Green MP Elizabeth May said she will oppose Bill C-29 after opposing every previous back to work bill. “It is not fair to the workers to have management know they can count on the government,” said May.

New Democrat MP Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway), former lead counsel to Teamsters Canada Local 31 of Delta, B.C., yesterday called the bill “a victory for employers” at longshoremen’s expense. “No employer sits at a table and bargains seriously if it knows a government will intervene,” he said.

“Strikes cause economic pressure,” said Davies. “That is the very point of them.”

“I do not know how many members of this House ever had the opportunity to sit at a bargaining table on the union side but I did,” said Davies. “The only power labour ultimately has is the right to withdraw its services.”

Cabinet will seek passage of Bill C-29 today in the Commons. Senators currently on adjournment will be recalled Thursday to pass the bill into law by week’s end.

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