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**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):**

Madam Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to rise in the House during debate, I will take the opportunity to thank the voters of Halifax who voted me back with a very strong mandate to represent all the constituents in the riding.

For those political trivia buffs, such as the member for Winnipeg Centre, it is an interesting fun fact to know that I was elected with more votes of any member since Robert Stanfield. That is not bad for a New Democrat.

I am here representing the constituents of Halifax, regardless of whether they voted for me, I have had a lot of contact from constituents since we started this debate in the House, and actually since hours after the rolling strikes began and the government announced in the House that it would introduce back to work legislation.

It is the constituents' voices that we are missing. We are doing a good job, standing up for the workers and for Canadians, but their voices are missing. Therefore, I will take this opportunity to bring their voices to this chamber, to this magnificent place, and actually share with hon. members what they are saying in my riding. Some of them are postal workers, some are not, but they all care deeply about this issue.

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The next letter is actually from someone in my riding who I know is not a postal worker. In fact, he is a scientist but he wrote to me because he cares about this issue as well.

(4235)

His name is Chris Majka, and he writes:

A just and democratic society is one that knows how to hear and balance the voices, ideals, and legitimate concerns of all its citizens. The right to collective bargaining by unions representing working people, are an essential component of how modern, progressive, democratic societies work. These rights were hard fought for, and represent a significant triumph for citizens, not only of Canada, but also of nations throughout the world where the principles of civil society are respected. They ensure that working people

have a right to be heard with respect to legitimate concerns relating to the conditions of their employment and the remuneration they receive. But they also represent something even more important--dignity. The dignity that is every person's birthright. Dignity to be respected as an individual, as a human being with fundamental rights--and not simply as a mechanical cog within an administrative or corporate machine.

And these rights must also not be toothless. Where collective bargaining fails to achieve a mutually acceptable consensus, unions, and the members they represent, must have the right to withdraw their services, and strike for what they believe in. Without this capacity collective bargaining pales into insignificance. Unions must be able to take a principled position on the picket lines, literally standing for what they believe. Except in demonstrably dire circumstances, this right to collectively bargain should not be abrogated by government.

Forcing workers back to work needlessly muddies the waters of collective bargaining. It disenfranchises workers from the fundamental rights of every person to have to have a role in determining the conditions, circumstances, and remuneration under which they offer their services to an employer.

I submit that in the case of the current [lockout] by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, there is no dire threat to Canada of the sort that would warrant the federal government passing back-to-work legislation.

I urge the Canadian government to respect the rights of workers, to respect the principles of collective bargaining, to respect the right of unions to undertake legal strike action, and to drop its plans to pass such legislation. Canadians from all walks of life are looking to see if this government intends to impose governance on its citizens, or work in concert with them. This is the time to demonstrate good faith and show a commitment to respectful civil society.

Actually, I feel like I could not have said this better myself. People have written really passionate letters and it is a real privilege to be able to bring their voices to the fore.

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