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Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to participate in today's debate on the anti-scab legislation brought forward by the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

As members here will know, I introduced a similar bill, Bill C-337, even earlier in this Parliament than the one we are debating today, but the lottery system that assigns our days for debate means we are debating Bill C-386 first, and I am good with that. In spite of the huge egos that some members bring to the House, it is not all about us. In fact, it should not be about us at all. We are sent here to represent the views and aspirations of our constituents and to protect their interests, not ours. Therefore, I do not care who brings forward solid pieces of public policy, I will stand in my place and proudly support them.

This, as has been said before, is not the first time we have debated anti-scab legislation in the House. Each time, as would be expected, the Conservatives opposed the ban on replacement workers and the NDP and the Bloc supported it. Each time, the Liberals said all the right things, but when push came to shove and they had to stand and be counted,

they voted against the legislation in sufficient numbers to ensure its defeat.

Although I make no claims to be clairvoyant, I am absolutely certain that under the current Liberal leadership, the Liberals will once again allow Bay Street to determine their vote and this bill too will be defeated. However, that does not mean it is not worth fighting for. In fact, it is now more crucial than ever.

Just this past Monday, we debated a motion related to back to work legislation. I spent a considerable amount of time talking about the importance of a level playing field to the success of collective bargaining. I will not repeat the arguments here because I only have 10 minutes in today's debate. Suffice it to say that allowing employers to bring in replacement workers during a legal labour dispute negates entirely the only power that workers have at the bargaining table, and that is the right to withhold their labour. When workers are so unilaterally stripped of their power, they become desperate. The largest single cause of injuries on a picket line is the use of scab labour.

In Ontario we had a brief period of time when the NDP outlawed scab labour. The benefit of

that legislation is beyond dispute. During the time that the ban on replacement workers was in effect, the strikes and lockouts were shorter. That benefited both workers and employers, but sadly, Mike Harris, who never let good public policy stand in the way of ideological politics, repealed the legislation as soon as he came to power. I guess that should be expected because it is also successive Conservative and Liberal governments that sold out our country to foreign businesses and allowed their culture of labour relations to flourish here.

Let me tell members how the American business model has impacted my hometown of Hamilton. In the last 20 years, we had watched business after business, representing thousands of well-paying manufacturing jobs, be sold off to American corporations, only to shut their doors within months. They send in new plant managers and CEOs who have no personal stake in my community, do not bring their families to live among us and approach their new roles in the manner of colonial overlords. They do not want to be here and cannot wait to go home.

They reap huge individual bounty for short-term assignments and leave hundreds of devastated lives in their wake. They ignore the workplace culture and challenge the laws of the land. They defy the unions to take them on and even when they lose their challenges before the OLRB or the WSIB or the MOL, these employers continue to ignore the decisions to the brink of enforcement.

They even find ways around legislative protection for the disabled. They enter into agreements with the government of the day in bad faith, knowing that the deals are weak and likely unenforceable. They have closed plants and transferred standing product orders to

U.S. facilities. They have locked workers out for no other reason than to take advantage of the current economic distress, thumbing their very noses at Canadian labour laws.

At the former Stelco plant, previously known as Hilton Works, U.S. Steel idled the blast furnace and curtailed production barely a year after acquisition. It forced hundreds to retire who were not, under normal circumstances, prepared to do so. It has recalled the remainder only so as to avoid severance payments while simultaneously locking out the workers at Lake Erie Works.

That is the new culture in the workplace, not just in Hamilton but at Vale Inco at Sudbury, at ECP at Brantford, and at countless other companies right across the country. Companies come into our country and tell Canadian workers that they want and need to change the culture of the workplace.

Let me remind members what that culture looked like in Canada. It was a culture in which workers had dignity, where workers were treated with respect, where workers were able to earn wages that provided a decent standard of living for them and their families. It was a culture where workers were able to bargain at the negotiating table with their employers for things like pensions and health benefits for their families. That is the culture we had in our country, a culture where workers could go to work in the morning and come home safely in the evening because we had health and safety standards in this country.

Was it a perfect world? No. There was plenty of room for improvement. New Democrats have been fighting for that at every possible opportunity. However, it was a far cry from what we see now, where companies come in and tell workers, "You are no longer able

to expect to receive the very things that you have negotiated after decades and decades of bargaining. Not only can you not expect that any more, but we will put you on a picket line and we will have other workers come in and do your jobs until we break the backs of you and your union brothers and sisters”.

By failing to protect workers from these predatory employers, we are complicit in their corporate agendas. I, for one, refuse to play any part in that. Along with my NDP colleagues, I will fight that agenda every step of the way so workers have the protection of Canadian laws and we as legislators live up to the commitments we have made as signatories to UN and ILO conventions.

It is not just unionized workers who have a stake in this fight. Every Canadian does. In fact, it makes no sense that anyone would want to be a scab. In the end, those people are only hurting themselves.

In the type of economy that we have developed, where there are more and more unemployed and where people are earning lower and lower wages, sometimes family heads, women or men, feel compelled to take any job at any price. Although at first blush that is understandable, it is ultimately shortsighted.

The effect of scabbing, especially now when the theme in labour relations by the corporate world is to end defined benefit pension plans, when the agenda of the corporate world is to reduce wages and when the agenda is to reduce workforces, scabs simply join with that agenda. They endorse it, they support it, they advocate for it and they make that agenda possible.

In the end, they lose along with every other Canadian worker. It is no wonder that the very notion of a scab evokes such strong responses.

Let me read just one quote:

After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful substance left with which he made a scab.

A scab is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a water brain, a combination backbone of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumour of rotten principles.

When a scab comes down the street, men turn their backs and angels weep in heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of hell to keep him out.

No man or woman has a right to scab so long as there is a pool of water to drown his carcass in or a rope long enough to hang his body with.

Judas was a gentleman compared with a scab. For betraying his master, he had character enough to hang himself. A scab has not.

Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Judas sold his savior for thirty pieces of silver. Benedict Arnold sold his country for a promise of a commission in the British army. The scab sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children and his fellow men for an unfulfilled promise from his employer.

Esau was a traitor to himself; Judas was a traitor to his God; Benedict Arnold was a traitor to this country; a scab is a traitor to his God, his country, his family and his class.

That is what Jack London had to say back in 1905. More than a century has gone by, but many of the thoughts behind that quote are still as relevant today as they were then.

By voting for the anti-scab legislation before us today, I am voting for my country, my family and my class. I urge all members to join me in taking that stand.