

*Government Orders*

Despite the responsibility placed on the parties, no further negotiations took place and the union commenced legal strike action on October 3, 1991. This followed a period during which grain handlers in Thunder Bay were laid off effective September 10, 1991 as a result of the strike by the Public Service Alliance of Canada. It involved federal grain inspectors and weighers in the port.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, grain handling operations at Thunder Bay have been virtually at a standstill for the better part of the last month. For a port which handles approximately 40 per cent of total Canadian grain exports, this is unacceptable for this country's farmers and for Canada's reputation as a reliable exporting nation.

As an indication of this government's concern, I spoke with the representatives of both parties last Friday urging them to return to the bargaining table and extended the offer of mediation assistance.

This past Tuesday, given the serious consequences of the work stoppage action, I instructed Warren Edmondson, Director General, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service to travel to Thunder Bay and meet with the parties to assess the situation, and determine the possibilities for a settlement.

Mr. Edmondson met with the two sides in Thunder Bay yesterday and conveyed to them my strongest possible concerns over their failure to resolve their contract dispute. The parties were also made aware that the government was not prepared to stand by while serious damage was inflicted on our farmers and the country's economy.

While Mr. Edmondson has advised me that there is some room for a negotiated settlement of the dispute by the two parties, prospects of an immediate resumption of grain handling activities in the port remain remote.

If we were faced with an industrial activity that offered reasonable alternatives or in which the parties inflicted harm only on each other, the work stoppage might be allowed to continue until the parties took the action necessary to settle the dispute. This is not the nature of the grain handling industry at Thunder Bay.

The Thunder Bay terminals are the largest elevator facilities in Canada. Approximately 40 per cent of Canada's grain exports flowed through Thunder Bay in the

last crop year which ended July 31, 1991. The significance of the elevators to the economy of Thunder Bay is obvious. Their importance to the ability of western Canada's grain producers to get their crops to domestic and world markets is equally self-evident.

Madam Speaker, the economic impact of the strike at the Thunder Bay terminals is clearly of great concern to the government. The intensity of the competition among grain exporting countries is well known. The threat to the viability and income of our grain farmers is well appreciated by members of the House. What is unfortunate, Madam Speaker, is that this strike occurs at a time when the Thunder Bay terminals are experiencing a rebound in the volume of grain exports after two years of low exports.

[*Translation*]

The volume of grain exports increased considerably in the last crop year and we do not want to see this improvement jeopardized further by this strike and by the preceding stoppage involving the PSAC grain inspectors and weighers.

[*English*]

I know that the Prime Minister and my colleagues, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds will have more to say on an assistance plan for grain farmers. But at a time when this government is working on a significant measure of assistance for grain producers, it is unthinkable that a work stoppage in the grain handling industry could jeopardize these efforts and the welfare of the grain producing industry of western Canada.

The proposed Thunder Bay Grain Handling Operations Act provides for the immediate resumption of grain handling operations in the port of Thunder Bay. It also makes provision for the appointment of a mediator-arbitrator to deal with all matters remaining in dispute between the parties. The bill extends the term of the collective agreement to include the period beginning February 1, 1991 and ending on a date to be fixed by the mediator-arbitrator not earlier than January 31, 1993 or later than January 31, 1994.

Under the terms of the legislation, the mediator-arbitrator is given 90 days or such longer period as the minister may allow to endeavour to mediate all of the matters in dispute.