

Government Orders

and other representatives and they feel a sense of anger and betrayal at where this process has led.

They tried hard to get a collective agreement. They bargained for many months in good faith trying to get a collective agreement. On the other hand I firmly believe the employer was well aware of the fact that if they just sat back and took a hard line, the government would move in and settle.

Representatives that I spoke to asked the question my colleague asked earlier. I recognize the importance of moving grain and I know that my colleagues recognize the importance of moving grain because over half our caucus is from Saskatchewan. We do not need any lessons on the importance of grain movement to prairie farmers.

• (1655)

I see the Minister of Agriculture here in the committee. I see the minister responsible for labour. If it was so important to move grain, why did they not say to the B.C. Maritime Employers Association that it should move that grain? The longshoremen were quite prepared to move the grain. Of course the reality was that the employer was prepared to hold them hostage and to hold the grain farmers of the prairies hostage in order to put pressure on the government to do exactly what it has done, which is to bring in this settlement.

The question I want to ask the minister is this. It comes back to the point that was raised by the hon. member for Mercier. This employer even before mediation started made it very clear that it wanted final offer selection. It made that very clear during the process as well.

We think final offer selection would be a good idea. The union was quite prepared to accept even non-binding arbitration. It moved an awfully long way. However what is happening in this legislation is that the employer is getting exactly what the employer wanted.

If the final offer selection process is in place as is proposed in this legislation, what happens? The employer and the union both have to agree on the appointment of an arbitrator. If they do not, who appoints the arbitrator? The arbitrator is appointed by the minister.

This is the same minister who appointed the mediator. Therefore from the perspective of the union, quite clearly if the mediator has already said that 65 cents is enough the perspective and the perception of the union is that that is exactly what the acceptable final offer is. From the perspective of the union, it is a done deal.

The employer's position will be maintained because after all the minister's appointee has already said that he thinks 65 cents is enough. It is not fair. Not only is it not fair but it is certainly not perceived to be fair by the men and women in the longshoremen's union.

I want to ask the minister whether he would be prepared to reconsider. I believe this has been poorly handled. When one

intrudes into the collective bargaining process in this very heavy-handed way one has a particular obligation to be fair. The fines in the bill are harsh and excessive. I know my colleague from Transcona is going to be dealing with that point later.

The union made an effort to arrive at a settlement. It was prepared to move an awfully long way. The employer hung in there and said: "To hell with you. We know the government is going to order us back. We know the government is prepared to impose a settlement which effectively will be in the interests of the employer".

How can the minister responsible for labour stand in his place and suggest that it is a fair process when he knows full well that the outcome of this process is almost certainly going to be in favour of the B.C. Maritime Employers Association?

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Chairman, I am quite intrigued by the point of view raised by the hon. member who is making a great plea for fairness but clearly expresses a bias on one side. He is hardly expressing what I would call a fair objective analysis of the situation.

It is his right to do that but now he is putting me in an untenable position. If I was to take his position, I would be showing bias to the other side would I not? By his own verbal gymnastics he has been able to totally defeat his purpose. Now he has said that if I adopt his position that is bias on one side versus the other.

Clearly and obviously in the interests of fairness I cannot adopt the hon. member's suggestion.

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette): Mr. Chairman, I think we are getting away from the real point here.

I appreciate the hon. minister acting in this matter. I would have liked to have seen him act a little faster as he knows. This legislation is here to do something for the victim and not for the offenders in this strike.

• (1700)

It is time that we as the House of Commons realize that we as a country are a victim of these senseless strikes. We cannot continue with them, regardless of whether we are for labour or for management. The whole country is suffering through this. I appreciate the hon. minister taking these steps. We have to realize that when we will not have food on our tables to eat, we will find out how important these strikes have been and I thank him for that.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Chairman, I take the hon. member's representation. I should point out that Premier Roy Romanow of the province of Saskatchewan endorses that position exactly as he stated in the Saskatchewan legislature yesterday and it unanimously passed the Saskatchewan legislature.

I would be very happy to provide a copy of that to the member from Burnaby.