

Grain Handlers' Strike

Second, once it was made clear to the companies that the government, if forced so to do, would legislate on the basis of Dr. Perry's principles—again, these are important words—it was illogical for them to persist in refusing to discuss the report and work out a settlement on the basis of the report. The final result, as we are witnessing today, was clearly inevitable. The companies said they were standing on principle in demanding parliamentary action. But it should be borne in mind that that standing on principle resulted in substantial losses being borne by prairie producers. They are losses which could have been avoided if the companies had accepted voluntarily, several weeks ago, the result which they then knew would be inevitable. If they had wanted to avoid responsibility, if they had wanted a scapegoat, they could have pointed the finger at the government. In the meantime they could have saved western farmers several million dollars.

It is interesting to consider the figures to which the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) referred.

Mr. Benjamin: The grain companies do not pay demurrage; the Wheat Board does.

Mr. Goodale: Demurrage charges totalling nearly \$10 million have been incurred over the past several weeks, because grain has not been moving. As I said, it is interesting to note the figures mentioned by the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre. For instance, the total cost of the increases suggested by the Perry report might be \$3.5 million, perhaps \$4 million, over two years. The demurrage charges alone which the Wheat Board has had to pay would have paid 2½ times for the increases in the new contract.

Given this recent chronology of events, the long history of sour labour relations in this industry on the west coast and the difficult attitudes adopted at times by both sides, and given the work done by Dr. Perry in his 2½ months of effort, the government's action in the circumstances has been fair and reasonable. Let me point out—this is particularly important to grain producers—that if the government had pursued a course of action other than the one it did, we probably would have seen a full work stoppage, perhaps a violent one, not in late August but perhaps in May, in April or even earlier. The grain kept moving, albeit at a slower rate, until the last week of August. That, in itself, was a considerable contribution in view of what might have happened.

Let me say one final word about the figures. Percentages have been mentioned in this House, in the press and elsewhere. Anyone who wants to put forward a view can sharpen his pencil and come forward with calculations in its support. When you break it down, Dr. Perry in his recommendations makes three separate points. They must be separated, because if you try to add them together you are adding apples and oranges. He talks about wages, about a cost of living adjustment and about a pension plan. If you break down the wage figures, you will see clearly that the increases range from 31 per cent to 32 per cent over two years, which is 15 per cent of 16 per cent per year. In terms of the situation in Vancouver, perhaps even the national situation, that would not be out of line when you are talking about a wage package exclusive of a cost of living adjustment.

[Mr. Goodale.]

● (1730)

When considering the pension plan provisions, bear in mind there had not been, by and large, any effective plan in place for the past several years for these particular employees at Vancouver. Clearly, the pension plan figures cannot be simply lumped in with the wage figures. There is a qualitative difference between an increase and having a pension plan at all. They cannot simply be added together to come up with some grotesque figure which does not fairly reflect the situation.

I do not want to take up any further time of the House dealing with the arguments pro and con the particular politics of the situation. As we go about our difficult task today, the problems are serious enough. I hope there will be a speedy resolution. None of us like the job we are called upon to do today, but I urge the House to pass expeditiously the legislation before us so that the crucial product, the grain, can begin to move. As this serious dispute ends, as the employees go back to work and the grain moves into export position, I hope all members of this House and all Canadians will heighten our resolve to find in the long run a better way.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, the issue we are discussing today is like a gramophone record I have been hearing for 20 years; the more things seem to change on the west coast, the more they remain the same.

I wish to congratulate the new member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale) for presenting the government case so logically. I congratulate him on his delivery. However, I must warn him that he will never succeed in being a lasting success in this House by becoming an apologist for those "two babes in blunderland" who wandered around on this issue this past spring.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): There is a mess on the west coast and everyone knows it. These stoppages we have had since 1965 are going to continue this fall, next spring, and forever after. If it is not the grain handlers, it will be the longshoremen or some other group. All I can say is that the job to which we should be addressing ourselves is how we are going to eliminate these perennial stoppages. All parties agree that is our job. I wish to direct my attention to what are the issues.

First, there is a gulf or gap between labour men and management that is too wide to bridge by the absolute and sterile methods now being used in labour-management negotiations. The rigidity and barrenness of this approach are not only hitting Canadian producers of grain, but hitting the world in a way the continuation of which we cannot tolerate. I am referring to the fact that there is a hungry world out there.

These working men and farmers know as well as I that we have a job to do. We know what stands in our way is this barren, sterile labour-management type of procedure that is laid down. It is not for me to lay down a new labour-management procedure. I just want the House to know that the misinformation given to us by the hon. member for Assiniboia is very simple. He talked about two months and four months of exhaustive negotiations. I can