

Maintenance of Ports Operations Act, 1986

Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of longshoring and related operations at ports on the West Coast of Canada, assented to in 1982; and an Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services assented to in 1978, for the first time in the history of this Parliament the Government is talking not only about proceeding with regulations which govern both union and management with respect to the application of this Bill, but it is also talking about kicking someone out of a union office for five years if there is a contravention. When we had a postal strike in 1979 the imposition was a \$100 a day fine. There was never any consideration that someone should be kicked out of the union office for five years.

When we had the imposition of a back-to-work order on the West Coast longshoremen's strike of 1982, the prohibition was a contempt-of-court charge, if you did not live within the regulations as imposed on the back-to-work order. Likewise, in the Great Lakes shipping agreement of 1978, the only penalty imposed was a contempt-of-court order.

Why is this Government proceeding with legislation which would deny a union office holder the right to serve in that union as an officer for five years at the same time that there is no concurrent penalty being applied against the employer? Are we now suggesting that the employer should be kicked out of his or her office for five years?

I suspect that Clause 13(2) was a deliberate attempt by the Government to essentially buy the company line when it comes to this back-to-work legislation. The provisions for the industrial inquiry commission buttress my argument that the Government has bought the company line hook, line, and sinker. In the industrial inquiry commission the one area that is turned over to the commission is the container issue. Membership in this commission is again chosen in a rather ambiguous way by the Government.

● (1120)

The long-standing problems surrounding the Port of Vancouver were cited in the press release of the Minister of Labour (Mr. Cadieux) when he announced the changes yesterday. He talked about the difficulties which have existed over the last 16 years. In fact some positive suggestions have been put forward by people working on the docks and in the port. They say that the container clause is only a smoke-screen. It is the tip of the iceberg.

In fact there is a lack of competitiveness on the part of that west coast port. The Government is not prepared to provide the kind of massive investment into upgrading the port which we see in the United States.

Let us look at the report on the St. Lawrence project in 1985. It cites the Port of Vancouver as handling only between seven million and eight million tonnes of general cargo. Only 12 per cent to 15 per cent of this total is containerized. Therefore, containers are not the only problem facing the Port of Vancouver. That same report of June, 1985 cites the real

problem—the lack of competitiveness of the port. For example, between 1976 and 1983 there was reference to cross-border container traffic between Canada and the United States, according to Ports Canada data. In 1983 there were 47,362 unloaded containers destined for Canada in American ports. That amounts to a business loss to Canada because our ports were not competitive. However, 16,103 unloaded containers destined for the United States were waiting on the West Coast of Canada in the same period of time. The lack of competition is not strictly related to containers, because containers only amount to 12 per cent or 15 per cent of business ventures at the port.

I am sure most Hon. Members have had an opportunity to review the brief delivered to our offices by the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. It pointed to the real problem. Let us look at the Port of Seattle which is in direct competition with the Port of Vancouver. That port has invested over \$90 million in the last two years to build new facilities or upgrade existing ones. A comparison of container capability—who can deliver how much and how quickly—shows that Vancouver has five cranes and that Seattle and Tacoma combined have thirty-one cranes. Is it any wonder that there are competition problems in Canada? Is it any wonder that many of our containers are now being unloaded in the United States for shipment into Canada?

It is not the container clause problem. That is a smoke-screen for a far more serious problem which relates to the Government's inability or unwillingness to upgrade the capacity for container movement or shipments over the last number of years. Let us look at the decision-making process in the United States. The union pointed out that most ports were under local control, so decisions could be made quickly and directly by those persons involved. In Canada we have theoretically passed legislation which decentralized authority. However, in practical terms most decisions are still made 3,000 miles away in land-locked Ottawa. We must not only look at the question of containers, we must look as well at the over-all issue of productivity at Vancouver ports.

We will in fact propose a number of amendments. It is our belief that the industrial inquiry commission to be set up by the Government should not be restricted to looking only at the container question. If that is the case, it has clearly bought the argument of the employers that the only problem is in fact containers. We would prefer to look at the over-all question of productivity and competitiveness.

One key issue which the Government has not addressed in this particular piece of legislation is the question of job security. We will be proposing amendments in that regard as well.

I should like to refer to the industrial inquiry commission. The Government is rather vague about who will be appointed to the commission and what will be their qualifications. I wonder whether the qualifications of the appointees to the commission are anything akin to those of recent Senate appointees. To wit, a Senate appointee was quoted this