

West Coast Ports Operations Bill

Mr. Skoberg: Mr. Chairman, this matter must be clarified in the House if we are to act responsibly. We hear this government talk about industrial peace. As far as I can see, we do not know whether the old agreement will be in effect until the new agreement is signed. By not proclaiming this section of the bill what we are saying to those people is that they should go on strike, because they will have to go on strike before this government sees any necessity to proclaim Part II of the bill. Through you, Mr. Chairman, I sincerely urge the minister to give some protection to the working people of Canada, as well as to the employers if they need it, so far as lockouts may be concerned.

• (1230)

If we do not give some protection to those people out there we will deliberately frustrate the intent of the labour bill we discussed earlier this year. We talked about the preamble in that bill and what we were going to do for the people, but we know now that they will be working without a contract until the declaration of a strike. Surely, this parliament could include a clause which would ensure that the old agreement will be in effect. Surely, we could do that much if we expect any consideration whatsoever. If we do not do that I feel confident that these people on the west coast will say to hell with this government and any legislation it may pass. This is the type of thing that brings about industrial conflict and confrontation, and that is not what we want in Canada.

What is wrong with a simple amendment introduced by the government that will leave the old agreement in effect? Who are we trying to protect? I cannot understand a situation in which we cannot do anything that will protect all the parties at the same time. I am bothered when it is suggested that this clause will not be proclaimed until something happens. There is the suggestion that this may occur, but I suggest that the Alberta Wheat Pool and the UGG agreed to the amount of money involved in the conciliation board report. They are now backtracking because these companies thought they could get off the hook by letting the government bring in legislation. I do not think this House should be blackmailed into a position along those lines. That is not why we were called back here.

Mr. O'Connell: Mr. Chairman, I do not disagree with the objectives for which the hon. member for Moose Jaw is reaching. I would simply ask him whether he has considered the effect of his proposal on the rights of the parties, particularly the union, to exercise influence on the elevator companies and vice versa by extending the agreement? The whole scheme of the labour code is to allow the parties to come to the point where they may exert their strength on each other. We have taken the precaution but we would not want to remove the right of the union at this time to exert its economic powers, nor would we want to remove it from the companies. We are in agreement in respect of the search for justice, but there is this question involving the immediate removal of those rights.

Mr. Skoberg: Mr. Chairman, I have just one last question. I see I am not getting through to the minister. Perhaps I am not making myself clear. I would be the last one to take away the right of these individuals to exercise

[Mr. O'Connell.]

their economic power in a democratic society. At the same time, I do not think it is right that we should pass legislation which is there to be used in a so-called crisis, particularly when a so-called crisis can only come about when they do use their economic power to go on strike. At that time the government will proclaim this part of the measure. What I am asking is whether, in fact, the grain elevator companies in Vancouver can do what they want with their employees. Is there anything binding them to a recognition of the rights of the individual workers at that port? If there is not then we are doing a disservice to the workers all across Canada.

Mr. O'Connell: Mr. Chairman, we expect that the distance between these two parties is so slight that, with the results of this conciliation board report now being available and public, and with the additional mediation we are proposing to put into effect at once, we expect the dispute will come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Chairman, the minister is missing the very important point the hon. member for Moose Jaw is making. He is not asking the minister about settling the dispute. There was a collective agreement between the parties and its termination was last November. The parties negotiated and went through conciliation procedure. By the operation of the law that collective agreement continued in force during that period. The conciliation procedure is now over and the operation of the law is no longer applicable as far as the life of that agreement is concerned. The result is, according to the employees of the union involved, that the employer is saying there is no longer any collective agreement, we are not going to consider any of your grievances and we are going to ignore other provisions of the agreement in respect of seniority and other things.

The vice-president of the local union, the chairman of the committee to whom there has been reference, informed the hon. member for Moose Jaw in a call he received very early this morning that this is what the employers are doing. What the hon. member for Moose Jaw is asking the minister to do is to take some steps to protect the employees. My colleague may want this done by way of amendment to this bill. I hope he does not mind if I say that whether it is done by amendment to the bill or by a declaration here by the minister that the employer ought to observe the collective agreement that was in force until conciliation proceedings were over does not matter. Perhaps he would undertake right now to do this and, instead of saying he will appoint a mediator as soon as possible, he will say a mediator will be appointed just as soon as he has finished his job in this Chamber and that the mediator will be at work tomorrow so as to get an agreement between the parties. It is that kind of thing for which the hon. member for Moose Jaw is asking. Not only the people involved but everybody who is concerned with decent labour-management relations ought to be grateful to the member for Moose Jaw for having raised this point as emphatically as he has. The minister does not answer the problem at all when he talks merely about settling the dispute eventually, and that is the problem he ought to consider.