

Labour Dispute at Montreal

Hon. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, just before the minister outlines the government's position I would appreciate the opportunity of saying a few words, partly by way of representation and partly by way of suggestion. I intervene at this stage and take advantage of the opportunity given by the adjournment motion primarily because of my concern, as a member from British Columbia, for the welfare of the fruit growing industry there, but also a number of other primary producers who are affected.

The position of the British Columbia fruit industry is, of course, that it has had an old and traditional market for its produce in the United Kingdom, that this produce customarily is moved through the port of Montreal, and that this time of year, approaching Christmas, is the height of that movement. Therefore any interruption or slowing down of the movement of this perishable commodity represents in itself a very serious set-back for the industry, the kind of set-back to which sensitive markets are accustomed to react rather badly.

Those who handle this kind of produce on the other side need the assurance that their trade requirements will be met, and if there are interruptions in the supply it gives the British Columbia fruit industry a bad mark. So there is an understandable sensitivity and concern on their part for an interruption such as that brought about by this slowdown. The concern is heightened now by the fact that the United Kingdom market, as a result of devaluation, is made a much more difficult market on that ground alone. That situation is difficult enough.

There are no alternative supplies of as good quality apples, but there are alternative sources of supply of apples. When you have the situation where because of devaluation our hazards in the United Kingdom market are increased, and you add to that the difficulty in transporting the goods, in other words in meeting the commitments, you realize that firm contracts are jeopardized by the situation in the port of Montreal. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree with me that the concern and urgency with which the British Columbia fruit industry regards this situation are entirely justified.

On that basis they feel, and I support them, that the minister can no longer refuse to intervene directly. After all, it was the government, on the recommendation of the Minister of Labour, that introduced into this parliament and had passed the bill setting up

the first arbitration process, so the government has an inescapable responsibility to see that the terms expressed and implied in that statute are carried out. We opposed the bill at the time. We said it would make difficulties. The hon. member for Ontario pointed out clearly the kind of difficulty it would create. But the government insisted and were successful in having the bill passed by the house.

The bill says the findings of the arbitrator shall be incorporated into the collective agreements. That is the expressed provision of the bill. I say this means by implication, and by necessary implication, that those findings must be carried out. I say the government cannot drop the matter at this stage and say "There is a dispute as to their terms and it would be really most improper for us to take any further action by way of intervention either directly or indirectly". I say the minister must bring the parties together and keep them together until they arrive at agreement as to the meaning of the terms.

The minister must impress upon the parties their national responsibility. I know he is reluctant to go further than what he thinks is the general guiding principle with regard to direct intervention in matters of this kind. I respect that principle and appreciate his reluctance, but I say that having picked up this hot potato, he cannot drop it now.

I appeal also to the Minister of Agriculture. I am quite certain he is aware of the seriousness of this situation for primary producers without the necessity of my further elaboration. I suggest he should join the Minister of Labour in meeting the parties to the dispute and impressing upon them that while they have understandable concerns, which are respected, nevertheless there is an overriding concern which they too must respect; and that is the concern for the national good and for the welfare of parties who are powerless to intervene directly. Those parties being powerless to intervene directly, they must be represented by and action must be taken on their behalf through the ministers of this government.

I know the government are concerned about this matter, and my suggestions are not made on the basis that they have not thought about it and expressed their concern. I believe the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Agriculture should form a team and meet with the parties to this dispute. They should meet with them without delay,