

*Halifax Operations Act*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The question is on the motion for second reading. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the House went into committee thereon, Mr. Laniel in the chair.

**The Chairman:** Order, please. The House is in committee of the whole on Bill C-14, an act to provide for the resumption and continuation of longshoring and related operations at the port of Halifax. Shall clause 2 carry?

On clause 2—*Definitions*—“collective agreement to which this act applies”.

**Mr. Forrestall:** Mr. Chairman, I find this bill deficient in that it does not properly describe the locale of the dispute we are considering. The locale, in fact, is the port of Halifax-Dartmouth. I regret that the full name of the port is not mentioned in the bill. Is it confidential?

I wish to ask two or three questions about the details of the bill. I join with the hon. member for Halifax and the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants in regretting the necessity to consider the matter at all. At the same time, we recognize the importance of the government's action. We hope that both sides will do everything necessary to bring about a return of trust and confidence in the port of Halifax-Dartmouth.

If users regain their trust in the port, it will work immediately at about 60 per cent of normal capacity. It may take another two or three months to recapture 100 per cent of all the port's business. Restoration of confidence is most important to the port. We all hope that confidence will be restored within a week or ten days of the coming into force of this act and that the port will regain its previous stature in the shipping world. The question concerns us. I hope everything will be done to facilitate this process.

I would now direct my first question to the minister. Essentially, what services will the department make available to both sides? I am concerned about the question of dispatch. In other words, will the services of departmental officials be available to either side if they should need such services?

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** Yes, Mr. Chairman. Obviously if the parties want the department's help in resolving the matter voluntarily before the cut-off date, December 10, the department will respond positively.

**Mr. Forrestall:** May I ask another general question? I shall ask two or three specific questions when we come to the relevant clauses. In his statement to the press yesterday, the minister, in looking generally at difficulties at other ports in Canada between the MEA and various locals of the ILA, indicated that he would have to take a fresh look at labour relations and difficulties which have plagued the past history of negotiations between the ILA and the MEA. What did the minister mean; can he elaborate?

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

In the eyes of some, he left the matter dangling; he left the impression that it would be resolved in a judicial way. Some took the minister to mean that he would not consider the history of these relationships but would consider ways of imposing guidelines, restrictions or directions with respect to how the parties should conduct themselves in future. Will the minister elaborate on what he said?

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** Mr. Chairman, yes, I will. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the hon. member's question. In the department we are pleased because we have been able to resolve this year all those areas of concern which, if left unresolved, could have had a severe national impact in terms of tying up the country. Labour and management have entered into collective agreements and this has been an encouraging sign. I am talking about the railways, the tow-boats, the St. Lawrence Seaway workers and the grain handlers. All have settled. The grain handlers even agreed to voluntary arbitration, which is a leap forward, a new point of departure and an encouraging sign.

On the other hand, when one considers the history of the ports in terms of the collective bargaining process, one is not encouraged. Eighteen months ago I came to this House with legislation ordering men back to work in the port of Montreal, and here we are again with legislation to end the work stoppage at the port of Halifax. I have read the history of the involvement of competent mediators, both locally as well as nationally-oriented, who have lent their services to find some resolution of the difficulty, without success. I have reviewed the pattern of the efforts undertaken in Halifax; I think it is impressive. Yet we are still not able to resolve the difficulty. The result has been the port being closed for two months, a closure which has affected the economy of an entire region as important as Nova Scotia. Business was lost at the port of Montreal owing to the work stoppage. All this indicates that something is seriously wrong with the collective bargaining process between employers and the unions with which they deal.

Perhaps there is a fundamental lack of trust of the most basic kind, a lack of trust which does not enable the parties to enter into a contract without government intervention. That basic lack of trust is most serious. I do not know its precise cause. I only know that this continued history of breakdowns is injurious to our economy, particularly that of the regions.

If this history establishes a pattern of poor industrial relations between employer and employee, or vice versa, there may be a reasonable basis for an examination and investigation of the state of labour relations in this industry. It is an option that should be considered. I have not made any such determination. However, perhaps if some competent people set up as commissioners, who have an intimate knowledge of the industry and who would enjoy the competence of all those on the employer and employee side, would look into this situation and make recommendations, it may lay the basis for a resumption of the basic type of trust that is needed for the parties to arrive at any successful collective agreement which, as I say, is not very encouraging in this particular industry.