

*Maintenance of Ports Operations Act, 1986*

Whatever the case, Mr. Speaker, in order for us to give assurances to both parties to the dispute that Parliament is acting in the total interest of both parties, and in fact in the total interest of the port community and of the shipping community, we need to broaden, elaborate, and redefine the focus of the parliamentary action that is being proposed, and that action will subsequently follow.

Finally, I wish to say to the Minister that I hope that we have in front of us another case example of how the Government can no longer delay coming to grips with the fundamental issue of technology change and its effects upon labour in this country.

If I may make one small digression. Members of this Party have argued in a different context for the need to deal with the question of labour adjustment, particularly in relation to the matter of trade. We see in front of us a potential for serious dislocations occurring on a number of fronts. The actions taken by the Government in substantially reducing the employment strategies and the national trading Act and other instruments have severely reduced its capacity to respond to the technology change in the labour market. We do not have the same tools that we had two years ago to respond to those issues. The Government has retreated substantially from coming to grips with the fundamental problem that, as we go through a number of changes in our economy, too often it is workers who become the victims of those changes. For the sake of argument for productivity, competition, and greater levels of efficiency, we tend to forget that there are a number of human lives at stake, a number of jobs at stake, a number of very real issues at the individual level which must be faced.

I would say to the Minister through you, Mr. Speaker, that as a relatively new Minister he has an opportunity, in fact, an obligation, to bring forward in this House a much broader plan of action, a much broader blueprint, so that not only Members of Parliament but the wider economy can see what signals are being sent by the Government as to what it intends to do about these very crucial issues.

● (1550)

We can no longer simply leave it to management and labour. If we as a Parliament in this case are being drawn in to provide a solution to the problem, it would seem that we have an equal obligation and responsibility to begin giving a broader set of guidelines and blueprints on how we want to come to grips with the issue and how we can assist along the way.

We would support the Bill primarily and fundamentally because of the situation faced by western farmers. We are prepared to work with dispatch. However, when the matter goes to committee, we hope the Minister will have had time to take under advisement some of our recommendations at second reading. We could discuss some of the particulars at that time and perhaps even improve upon the initiative which the Minister has taken.

**Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West):** Mr. Speaker, like the Minister and the spokesman for the Liberal Party, none of us in the New Democratic Party take any pleasure in dealing with legislation which inserts a third party into settling a disagreement between two parties who should be bargaining collectively and reaching an agreement.

In principle, my Party is philosophically opposed to this type of thing. However, in reality, all parties including mine at the provincial level have resorted to legislative intervention on more than one occasion in a dispute which severely affected the provincial or national larger public interest. We in the New Democratic Party pride ourselves on being in the forefront of support for the right to belong to a union, the right to organize, the right to free collective bargaining, and the right to strike when that breaks down. That is part of the history and foundation of the New Democratic Party. I might also add that it was part of the history and foundation of our forerunners, namely, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. That Federation was comprised of farm organizations, the trade union movement, the academic community, and people from other walks of life. However, these three were the main founders. I might add to it the religious community, thinking of J. S. Woodsworth. The reconciling of the interests of those communities was no small task. Our Party knows that as well if not better than any other Party in the country, as a result of some experiences both bad and good.

We recognize that the lock-out is severely harming not only grain producers of Alberta, the Peace River country, and the western half of Saskatchewan, but also potash production and sulphur and lumber exports. I take issue with the Minister and many others who seem to forget that this is not a strike. The International Longshoremen's Union has repeatedly said publicly, privately, in writing and verbally, that it would keep working. This is not a strike; this is an employer lock-out. A consortium of companies has chosen to stop the operations in the Port of Vancouver, just as it did a few months ago at Thunder Bay.

However, whether it is the media, comments in the House or in other places, they are always put in the context of a work stoppage, in the context of labour unions, and in the context of strikes. I have been here along with Your Honour since 1968. There are only 11 of us left out of 96, which tells us something about the mortality rate around here. I have been through this type of thing six or eight times, in terms of back to work legislation involving longshoremen on at least one previous occasion, air traffic controllers, the Post Office, St. Lawrence Seaway pilots, railroaders, and grain handlers twice. Yet this is the first and only experience since 1968 where it is government and parliamentary intervention to make employers unlock the doors of their premises.

Possibly this would cause my colleagues on the government side and in the Official Opposition to say that this legislation should make members of the NDP jubilant and that we would rush to support it because it is against the employers, the bosses.