

Government Orders

[English]

Not in itself but on that particular occasion there was the intervention of a mediator. I read this in the newspaper. The mediator is said to have agreed with 65 cents. The longshoremen had made an offer of 75 cents.

It is very important that the minister listen to me. If I speak in English it is because I want to be sure to be well understood. I hope I express myself correctly.

I want to defend the longshoremen of Vancouver. A mediator agrees with a settlement of 65 cents, which is only 5 cents more than the 60 cents offered. The union has asked for 95 cents and in front of the mediator because it wants a settlement goes as far down as 75 cents. I am sure if they went down to the docks they would have a real discussion with the guys there. I suppose that most of them are guys.

Mr. Chairman, I do not think the minister is listening to me.

We have a situation where the only point that is not settled, as I understand it, is the money gap. The mediator of the minister agreed to 65 cents. The employer wants a final offer and the minister presents a bill. When we speak to the longshoremen's union we think the minister is with the employer.

I pray the minister will preserve the impartiality of the labour minister for the months and years to come. I hope this will be the case. I hope we do not have a conflict in Montreal but if we have one I hope that the labour minister will have all the impartiality that he should have.

[Translation]

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Chairman, first of all, I would like to say that the remarks made by the hon. member for Mercier were impressive, in either official language. I did listen to her. Whether she is speaking French or English, the message is the same, if I understood her correctly.

[English]

I think the hon. member is beginning to stretch the point. There is no evidence of bias in this case. The role of the mediator is to make recommendations on what he or she thinks would be the best judgment. To suggest that it demonstrates a bias is simply saying whether it is a judgment call or not. I do not think they side with one party or the other. It would be unfortunate to cast aspersions on a mediation service which over the years has done very well by this country and has served in a very neutral and objective fashion.

• (1650)

I also believe that if the hon. member would look carefully at the legislation she will see there is equal opportunity for both sides at the start. Both sides have the right to recommend the selection of the arbitrator who would decide on final offer

selection. We invite both parties to come together to find a person of their mutual choosing so there would be no suggestion there was any one side. On the other hand we also have to declare that we do not, as I carefully pointed out before, fall into using the arbitration methodology which has proven in the past to become another form of avoidance by the parties to the dispute.

I would argue it is very important to use final offer selection for the cases to follow. If we simply agreed with the hon. member and went back to the traditional forms of arbitration then it would give the message to all others who are facing similar disputes that once again they can rely on that crutch, that artificial lifeline and we would not have more relevant and realistic labour relations discussion in some of these crucial areas.

I want to assure the member there is no bias and if the parties in dispute use the final offer selection as it is set out in this legislation they will find out it is to their advantage.

It was put to both sides, employer and employees, the necessity of making a judgment based on the best interests of their overall industry. If there is a dispute how do we divide the spoils? To what extent do we ensure there is fair compensation for employees at the same time we retain the economic viability of the industry itself?

We should not be debating these questions in the House of Commons. We are not the experts. We are not party to it. We should not be arguing whether it should be 65 cents or 72 cents. It is not our business. We are not the stakeholders nor should we presume to take over their responsibilities. What we should be doing is putting together a procedure that we think will arrive at a fair solution and in this case because of the inadequacies of the past by using arbitration I would not want to return to that methodology at this time.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in the discussion of this legislation.

I believe as the only member of Parliament from the greater Vancouver area who has spoken in the debate I want to raise a couple of concerns with the minister, particularly with respect to this final offer process.

I want to put it in context because the minister has said that it is important there be no bias. It is also important there be no perception of bias, there be no perception on the part of either party that one party is being given undue advantage in the process that we as elected representatives are putting in place to settle this dispute. If the test is not only actual bias but a perception of bias, not only justice being done but being seen to be done, this legislation fails that test.

I want to make it very clear that I have spoken with representatives of the longshoremen, with Gord Westrand, the president,