

• (1545)

In closing, I feel sad that we need to have this debate now but I think that, under the circumstances, Parliament can only recognize failure and hope that such failures will be as few as possible, by ensuring that this legislation will guarantee the best chances of equity under the circumstances.

[English]

**Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap):** Mr. Speaker, all I want to praise the government for its sensitivity on the spreading economic impact on the labour dispute involving 3,500 west coast grain handlers.

The basic orientation of the Reform Party caucus to this proposed government legislation is that we support the imposition of the government settlement one last time due to the seriousness and widespread impact of this dispute.

At the same time we would like to make a suggestion that the government form as soon as practical a special joint committee among House standing committees on agriculture, labour and transportation in order to formulate legislation leading to the long-term resolution of this reoccurring national problem. The need for a long-term solution becomes apparent when one looks at the number of times labour disputes at the Canadian ports have been ended by government legislation.

For example, in 1972 there was the resumption of operations of ports on the St. Lawrence as well as the West Coast Ports Operations Act. There was the West Coast Grain Handling Operations Act of 1974, the West Coast Ports Operations Act again the following year, the St. Lawrence ports in 1975, the port of Halifax in 1976, the west coast again in 1982, Prince Rupert in 1988 and the British Columbia Grain Handling Operations Act of 1991. It is a long, sad history.

It is obvious that the seriousness of the underlying factors affecting labour and employment in the Canadian economy must be dealt with in a better fashion. One of those underlying factors is the steady improvement of productivity per person employed in handling grain or, to phrase it another way, the steady decrease in the number of people being hired to do the job.

According to figures supplied by Gordie Westrand, president of the Canadian area of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, in 1988 a total of 5.446 million man hours were required to move 54.591 million tonnes through the west coast ports of Vancouver, New Westminster, Victoria, Chemainus, Port Alberni, Port Simpson and Stewart.

In 1992, 4.648 million man hours moved 53.128 million tonnes in those same ports. Primary figures show 4.2 million man hours for 1993. Therefore, tonnes per man hour have

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increased from 10.2 in 1988 to 11.43 in 1992 and there will be an increase again in this crop year.

Basically this means that fewer people are being employed to move more grain than ever. Mr. Westrand estimates his Canadian union membership dropping by 120 to 130 every year. Once again we are talking about Canadian jobs and their disappearance altogether. As I pointed out previously to this House, employers with their backs to the wall are often faced with cutting labour, one of the few options left, faced with increasing overhead such as the recent increase in premiums for unemployment insurance paid by both employees and employers.

At the same time the number of longshoremen is decreasing, productivity of wheat and demand for that wheat among Pacific Rim customers is growing. In part "Grain Matters", a letter from the Canadian Wheat Board, reads:

The Far East and Oceania, home to 3.2 billion consumers, could account for 40 per cent of world wheat trade by the end of the century.

Population and income growth, increased urbanization and the resulting dietary shift away from rice are expected to lead to greater use of the wheat based products. Canada could secure as much as 30 per cent of this market.

• (1550)

We are all familiar with some of the major losses from the current dispute, losses which Canada's economy can ill afford, loss of wages for the 3,500 longshoremen and transportation employees primarily in the railroads, loss of income from grain sales for the farmers, and loss of income for all maritime employers. Perhaps the most serious loss of all may be the long-term loss of our Canadian international reputation as a reliable supplier of goods.

We must ask ourselves what happens in boardrooms around the Pacific Rim when executives see that a shipment expected from Canada was delayed for two weeks due to a labour dispute. According to figures supplied today by experts from both the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Human Resources the Japanese have already cancelled some of their barley orders for April.

The 26 ships currently in port, plus the 38 ships due to arrive this week and next if not filled with grain, cannot merely be shifted like some big steel cart. On the contrary, unfilled or seriously delayed orders profoundly damage the willingness of our customers to buy from us if they can possibly obtain adequate grain from Australia or the United States. Losing such orders would have obvious long-term ill effects on the entire economy of Canada, especially on western Canada.

It is apparent that major long term improvements are needed in labour relations in the Canadian ports, especially west coast ports which handle the majority of Canadian grain shipments for the hungry world.