

Grain Shipments

own business. They are concerned enough to send a delegation out to the coast to observe the situation at first hand.

The time is long overdue for a new Canadian Wheat Board farmers' advisory committee to become operative. I am sure members are aware of the vote that is to take place in respect of this long overdue advisory group. I feel certain that the subject of the debate tonight will be the first major policy item to come before that important group. I suggest that group cannot meet too soon after the election this coming spring in order to sort out this situation.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, some members might ask what I know about raising or merchandising grain, and therefore why I should want to speak on the motion moved by the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser). In the first place I am just as concerned as any other member of this House, and any citizen of our country, that a small handful of irresponsible people should be allowed periodically to shut off the flow of wheat and grain. This group of people is presently posing a threat to every single sector of the Canadian economy.

The power held by these grain handlers and other groups of workers in essential services has to be checked. I have said in the past, as the government is saying now, that the right to strike is one of the legitimate tools of labour-management negotiations, especially in cases where the workers simply cannot get management to negotiate in good faith. However, unlike the government, I feel we have learned that the right to strike has been badly abused in recent years, and is certainly being abused today.

It is obvious to all of us that too many groups of essential workers are using the right to strike to blackmail the government and also the Canadian people at large. We have seen cases in recent months where workers have walked off their jobs over some petty grievance without even taking the trouble to see whether the grievance could be settled by arbitration or negotiation. We are not living in the old days of the sweat shop with 12 or 14-hour days on fixed wages, although that might apply to members of parliament tonight. We are not living in a time when workers are victimized on every hand by management. When you consider our very advanced and comprehensive labour relations then you have to say that the unions have had an advantage over those who are not organized.

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In fact, every time a union goes on strike, especially a prolonged strike, the non-union strikers take the brunt of the strike, not to mention the innocent citizens who have nothing to do with the issue in question. In this regard I think of those on fixed incomes and the working poor who are not unionized. The fact of the matter is that far too many unions today have found they can use the strike weapon to bludgeon management and blackmail the government into awarding unreasonable and excessive settlements just to get the country moving again. We have been blackmailed long enough.

A few years ago we had the example of elevator repairmen remaining on strike for several months. The government did not take any steps to end the strike, nor did it take any steps to ensure that innocent people were provided essential elevator service during the strike. There were cases of elderly people being trapped in high-rise buildings without access to food, drugs or medical care. In many cases volunteers walked up and down stairs in those buildings to render assistance to people trapped in the buildings. In some cases people actually died from heart seizures after walking upstairs, and others because they could not obtain medical assistance. I say that such an attitude on the part of a union or government is inexcusable. Anyone who would refuse to render assistance by refusing to cross a picket line is simply looking for a convenient excuse to exercise a terrible kind of behaviour.

At the present time, thousands of railway cars are tied up on railway sidings. These cars cannot be used for any purpose until they have been emptied. Dozens of ships are lying in anchor at Vancouver harbour waiting to be loaded. This is the second time in a few months this has happened. Thousands of workers across this country are idle because of this strike by a handful of workers in an essential category. During a crucial period in this strike we did not have a Minister of Labour to answer to this House or to take positive steps to get these people back to work.

I would say that in this case every Canadian is affected in some way and will continue to be affected for some time to come. There is no doubt in my mind that we will lose even more markets for grain because countries around the world to whom we have been selling have already decided Canada is not a dependable supplier. We accept orders from countries such as Japan and then keep them waiting for weeks or months while we watch grain handlers, railways workers or some other group of workers walk off the job over a grievance. I do not say that their grievances always are petty or frivolous, but this often is the case.

Even in cases where the grievance is legitimate there are legitimate and responsible means available for the settling of the dispute. We have reached the point where such disputes must be arbitrated whether or not the unions wish it. Settlements will have to be made while the workers are on the job. There are too many cases today in which unions announce in advance their intention to strike when their contracts come up for renegotiation. They do this sometimes months before the expiration of a legal contract. This certainly does not represent responsibility. The right to strike includes the responsibility to negotiate in good faith. There are laws under which it is illegal for certain essential workers to strike. Even in this case we see strike after strike, very often in places where the disputes were over issues in respect of which the workers were bound by contract.

I am still waiting to see whether the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) will in fact lay criminal charges against some workers and labour leaders who recently have gone on strike and who have refused to go back to work when told to do so. If charges should not be laid and followed up, we can expect other unions and their leaders to flaunt the laws and resort to further blackmail.