• (1810)

The arbitrator will pick one or the other with the intention that he would pick the one that is most reasonable. It is an incentive to both sides to be very reasonable in their final offer. The arbitrator will pick the one that is most reasonable. Therefore the desire to be as close as possible to reasonableness only makes simple common sense.

That is why when I hear the speeches from the other side, from the government side, the side that runs this country, saying this bill is going to deny free and open collective bargaining I am wondering if those members have even read the bill or even thought about the bill, to see that this is some direction to the arbitration process once everything has broken down and that these decisions do not fall within the parameters of the arbitrator but that he has a choice of one or the other, whichever is most reasonable. That is the incentive that this bill is going to provide.

I will split my time with the member for Wetaskiwin. I am going to stop at this time and allow him to share his views as well.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up where my colleague left off.

Witness the labour dispute at the port of Vancouver in January and February, 1994. For 11 days the grain shipping process was paralysed. Some estimates place the loss to Canada's grain industry at hundreds of millions of dollars.

It is absolutely ludicrous that such losses were allowed to occur. These losses came about as a result of a failed collective bargaining process.

We cannot allow one sector of the grain shipping process to harm everyone else in the chain. When there are disruptions in the grain marketing system individual farmers are not the only ones to suffer. Workers everywhere else along the shipping chain are affected. It has a domino effect on the whole industry.

When a strike occurs grain starts to back up in the system. The system becomes, if you will, constipated. The grain stops its otherwise perpetual flow from farm to market. This is detrimental to numerous people. Whether at the grain elevator or somewhere along the railway many people are forced to endure pain because of the actions of a few. This is not acceptable.

With many unions that are involved in the grain transportation process we are left with the never ending threat of strike action. All too often strikes do occur. When they occur they disrupt the economy.

More than just accepting the measures suggested in Bill C–262, we might also look at further legislation that would require all union contracts affecting grain handling transportation to come due at the same time. This would simplify things and perhaps put an end to the rotating type of strikes.

No one benefits from a strike. Unionized workers suffer losses of income while on strike. While they may win an increase in their pay, all too often the net result is a loss of income. Employers lose in a strike. They lose money, they lose contracts and they pay demurrage on waiting ships. Besides that, no work gets done.

In the case of grain transportation strikes there are an incredible number of people who are directly harmed: railway and all its workers, dock workers, shipping companies and their employees, and of course farmers are harmed.

This represents only the direct impact of a strike action. Countless others are harmed indirectly as well. The ultimate casualty is the whole Canadian economy. Exports represent a huge sector of our economy. Canada's balance of trade continues to tilt in our favour. We must ensure that we retain this favourable balance.

As borders become more and more meaningless Canada must be prepared to take on the entire world. That means we must achieve competitiveness to attain a dominant position in the global economy. When Canadians are unable to access the world market we all suffer. The thrust of the bill is final offer selection arbitration. I believe these measures will be fair to all sides.

Legislation such as Bill C–262 provides a reasonable answer to endless strikes in the grain transportation sector of the economy. Further it represents a reputable solution when considering legislation that could apply to other areas in the labour market.

• (1815)

Historically strikes affecting grain movement take place when markets are good and when prices are up. The use of binding arbitration to settle labour disputes is a good way to avoid unnecessary and crippling strikes. This would go a long way to foster good relations and co–operation between labour and management. With management and labour working hand in hand, our reputation as a reliable supplier of grains and oilseeds would improve with the possible result of increased demand, increased price and perhaps an increase in employment.

Since 1966, as my colleague has already alluded to, we have gone through this process 13 times when the federal government has had to intervene and introduce back to work legislation to keep the grain flowing to market. We need to ensure that never again are such measures necessary.

The bill provides for a dispute settlement process that I believe will be fair to all parties. This bill could not be of more immediate importance or more timely. The looming threat of a