

Labour Conditions

there are problems, but there must be another way of settling them. I for one will vote against this measure.

Mr. Howard Johnston (Okanagan-Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, I find myself able to support the amendment to the bill for reasons different from what might be expected. I do not believe we should concern ourselves particularly about the truth of various versions of what went on in the negotiations, because no matter how many witnesses are called, or how many times we go through the various versions of what happened, we shall really be no closer to the truth than is the audience of Rashomon when it hears the final version of what happened in the bamboo grove.

I feel that we ought to concern ourselves with the terms of the agreement as presented in the appendix to *Hansard*, and with the bill itself. The hon. member for York South spoke of the government's responsibility to labour. Some of us, I think, are concerned with the government's responsibility to the entire country. The agriculture industry is periodically threatened by stoppages at various docks, which become increasingly crucial year by year. Small businessmen found themselves seriously hampered this year when the tourist season opened, and the wares they expected to have were tied up at the Montreal dock. As a result financial loss was suffered thousands of miles away from Montreal. There is a concern that goes far beyond the immediate in this type of dispute, and we have to concern ourselves with it.

● (8:40 p.m.)

The situation at the docks, like many other situations in this country, will have to be dragged into the twentieth century, and it will be dragged screaming very loudly. We can see that from listening to part of the discussion this afternoon.

I know how important it is to the government to be able to put the best possible face on this agreement because we have heard a great deal, even today, about holding the line. We know at least one group of Canadian citizens who are being asked to hold the line somewhat longer. In the light of inflationary tendencies we know that the settlement of the dispute at the Montreal dock was a real break with the policy to hold the line, and so it becomes very important to the government to be able to say: Yes, but look at what we got in return for that; we got at least our foot in the doorway leading to compulsory arbitration.

I do not profess to be a labour person, but I have been involved in salary agreement negotiations and I know how intricate, how prolonged and how tense this kind of negotiations can be. I have had the experience of having to go back to a large number of people and saying: "This is exactly what we agreed to do." I find it hard to agree that the long list of people who signed this agreement could have been so naive, so fresh, so new and so innocent that they would have allowed this clause with its "or otherwise" to stand throughout the agreement. Possibly unwittingly it is there.

I am sure that the people who negotiated know that the whole question of automating the docks will have to be faced some day, sooner or later. What the "or otherwise" does, and what this legislation does, is to take the job out of the hands of the people negotiating the agreement and put it into the hands of parliament. If passed, this legislation will let the government off the hook, but it will let the negotiators of the agreement off the hook as well.

On the other hand, if we look at the terms of the legislation we find that they are concerned with the size and make up of work gangs, but there is also a clause concerning the safeguarding of job security, and in both these cases we run into the problem of looking into the future and not knowing what the suggestions of the commissioner may be.

I do not feel that it is any task of parliament unknowingly to enshrine a feather-bed situation, which we could do if we were to bring in a redundancy fund. We could do that and clearly know, when we are doing it, that we are bringing in a redundancy fund for people removed from employment by automation. Let us be sure we are doing that, if that is what we are doing. On the other hand, if we are setting up compulsory arbitration—and it might not be a bad idea—let us be sure we are doing that. Or, if we are moving into the area of labour courts, where this question can be examined by a body separate from parliament, where a great deal of expertise can be built up over the years, let us be very clear that that is what we are doing. But let us not do it on the basis of this bill, and on the basis of the expression "or otherwise."

Here I am not questioning the veracity of the minister in the statements he made this afternoon. I have never found that personal attack or rudeness accomplished anything,