

West Coast Ports Operations Act

there must be more casuals or more people to fill those gaps so that the ports operate efficiently. Work scheduling, shift differentials, coffee breaks and money are other issues, but there are two unwieldy groups attempting to bargain with each other and not once in 13 years have they been able to do it.

The port must operate. I have to vote for the port to operate. It is a hemorrhage to all Canada, particularly the west coast. Clause 4 of the new Bill suggests 6 and 5 per cent. As one outstanding maritime operator on the west coast told me on the telephone this morning, "If the Government brings this in, it will lead to open warfare on the west coast". And it will.

The National Harbours Board has a great deal to answer for in this regard. There are three container cranes in Vancouver and 24 in the Puget Sound area and long decision time from Ottawa, sending cargos elsewhere on the west coast. We hope the new Canada Ports Act will give Vancouver a chance to compete and a chance to have a great many more jobs for longshoremen on the west coast. Is there a solution? Yes, there is one and it is quite simple. It is to allow collective bargaining to continue after the port is open.

● (1630)

An Hon. Member: Vote that way.

Mr. Cook: Let us have an industrial inquiry commission set up on the west coast. This should have been done years ago. This is absolutely necessary in order to determine the facts, to look at the management group, its bargaining tactics, whether it can really bargain properly in the best interests of the west coast and in its own best interests. As well, this type of commission should have a look at the union. Why should the Port of Vancouver not be dealing with Local 500 rather than the whole of the Canadian section of the union? Those are factual matters which an industrial inquiry commission could determine.

I say to this Liberal Government that we must have back-to-work legislation for the good of all Canada. We must have collective bargaining. We can have arbitration if absolutely necessary but we should have very definitely and as soon as possible an industrial inquiry commission set up with terms broad enough so that the facts can be brought out and we can have an end to 13 years of labour unrest in all of British Columbia's ports.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I listened with care to my colleagues, the Hon. Member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie) and the Hon. Member for North Vancouver-Burnaby (Mr. Cook). I feel much as they do. I suspect that Members on all sides of the House feel similarly that this is a very difficult occasion and a very difficult thing for Members of Parliament to do. It is difficult for a government to legislate workers back to work. It always has been. Governments of every political stripe, both federally and provincially, have had to bring in this kind of legislation. It does not matter whether it is a Liberal, a Conservative, an NDP, a CCF, Social Credit, or whatever kind of government. A move such as this has

always been done with restraint and forbearance in the hope that collective bargaining would succeed.

I want to point out to my colleagues on all sides of the House that since July, 1972, this is the twelfth occasion when we have been faced with back-to-work legislation. On five of those occasions, the legislation passed with all-party support. There were six times when my party supported back-to-work legislation and there were six times when we opposed back-to-work legislation, trying as best we could to judge each one of these instances on the basis of the merits and the demerits of the particular case.

There was an occasion, and I felt for them, when my good friends in the Official Opposition opposed back-to-work legislation while the Liberal Government and the New Democratic Party supported it. It was a tough time for the Conservatives. They had to agonize and struggle. I am referring to the grainhandlers' dispute in 1974.

Of these 12 occasions, this is the fifth time we have had to deal with longshoremen and the ports. That has to tell you something about the situation in our ports from coast to coast. We legislated the longshoremen back to work regarding the St. Lawrence ports dispute in 1972. We legislated the longshoremen and the grain handlers on the west coast back to work in 1972, once in July and again in August. We legislated the ports dispute in Quebec in April, 1975. We legislated the port of Halifax dispute in October, 1976. We legislated the resumption and continuation of shipping services on the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1978. Now we are dealing again with the longshoremen on the west coast.

As I recall the debates on other occasions when we dealt with ports disputes involving port employers and longshoremen, Members from all sides of the House repeatedly asked the Government—as my colleague, the Hon. Member for North Vancouver-Burnaby has just done—to set in process by whatever method an inquiry or a Royal commission to bring about a resolution to the problems that face us every time these contracts are up for renewal.

The Hon. Member for Rosedale and the Hon. Member for North Vancouver-Burnaby both made, I thought, good speeches and gave some good reasons for voting against the legislation. I appreciate this matter is not easy for them. They are going to vote for it. I understand that, because excellent arguments can be made on either side. Something that all Hon. Members in this place strive for, and I believe we succeed most if not all of the time is the achievement of sincerity, consistency and integrity.

The six and five proposal was fought tooth and nail by my colleagues and I. It caused Members of this House to sit extra time in the summer. We continue to oppose and fight the six and five kind of law. I believe even though my colleagues in the other parties disagreed with us, they at least respected us for the position we took. I believe also that we would be the worse off, either in my Party or any other, if we were to cease or deviate from the whole matter of consistency or integrity whether or not our constituents, the public, or for that matter the press, agree or disagree with us.