

West Coast Ports Operations Bill

As the amendment is available for us to discuss, I want to say that I have been giving consideration to, and I have been discussing with many members of the International Longshoremen's Union in Vancouver, the whole question of grain handling. I am not in a position to make any commitment that an industrial inquiry or a study under the Inquiries Act, as was proposed, will be undertaken by the government. I can say that there are unsatisfactory conditions with respect to the handling of grain. I am going to give continuing consideration to the question of whether a study or an inquiry would be appropriate. I have held discussions with some of my colleagues on the subject.

The Chairman: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

The Chairman: The Chair has already read the amendment. Shall I read it now or dispense?

Some hon. Members: Dispense.

• (1210)

The Chairman: The question is on the amendment in the name of the hon. member for Moose Jaw. All those in favour will please rise.

Some hon. Members: Order! Out!

The Chairman: Hon. members know that when the question is put they should not enter the chamber. I trust everyone will observe that rule. We shall proceed with the vote.

Amendment (Mr. Skoberg) negatived: yeas, 16; nays, 81.

Mr. Horner: Before clause 8 carries, I should like to point out that I have put down amendments to clauses 8 and 14 which are substantially the same as my amendment to clause 5 seeking to change the date upon which this measure would expire.

I do not intend to move these amendments to clause 8 or to clause 14, since the amendment to clause 5 was defeated by the committee. However, I cannot allow this clause to pass without cautioning the government once again. The present termination date, December 31, 1972, allows too short a period for the act to become effective, particularly bearing in mind the election which is in the offing and the fact that the date the government has chosen coincides with the festive season. Negotiations which have been in progress since November last year can scarcely be expected to be concluded by January 1, 1973. If they are not, I want the government to remember well that it was cautioned, that it was advised that the date on which this legislation is to expire is premature. The government is certainly expecting too much, and may be in trouble in 1973.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to.

On clause 10—*Grain handling operations to be resumed.*

Mr. Skoberg: The minister might be able to tell us now why grain handling and related operations are covered by

[Mr. O'Connell.]

the bill before us. I realize he referred briefly to this matter yesterday. But is he aware that difficulties have arisen on the coast because management is refusing to live up to the old agreement, or to follow the agreement procedures? It might shorten discussion of the subject, indeed, there might not be need for any discussion of these items, if the minister would deal with points which are of concern to everyone in this chamber.

Mr. O'Connell: We must bear in mind that there are two disputes affecting the handling of grain. One of them affects more than just the handling of grain; it involves the loading and unloading of general cargo throughout all the ports. However, there is a dispute between the five elevator companies and their employees, some 500 men who belong to the International Union of Brewery, Flour, Cereal, Soft Drink and Distillery Workers of America. They are the grain handlers. This dispute has been the subject of conciliation proceedings. It has been the subject matter before a conciliation board. The collective agreement expired almost ten months ago and the union and the companies have gone through all the required procedures.

As of a few days ago a strike or lockout position exists. The president of the union, Mr. Henry Kanes is here and I have had a number of discussions with him. He has made representations concerning the problems which have been encountered in connection with grain handling. I think the union has taken an extremely responsible position throughout this dispute. He is anxious to get an agreement. The conciliation board has reported to me in a majority report approved by the chairman and the union nominee, the elevator companies dissenting. Since that time, of course, grain handling has been virtually at a standstill because of the longshore dispute. Sixty-five or more longshoremen are required to participate in the handling of grain. The 500 or so grain handlers are the main body of the employees in the grain handling business. Some of them are still working, but many have been laid off as a result of the longshore dispute. Those who are still employed are required to carry out general maintenance and other work in the grain elevators.

The difficulty which might confront us is this: when the legislation before us is passed, and Part I is in force and port operations resume, unless a new agreement is not reached in this other dispute, grain handling operations would once again be shut down if a strike were to be called or a lock-out put into effect. This is the practical dilemma which faces us at present when we are taking the responsibility of asking parliament to order a resumption of operations while negotiations continue with the longshoremen. We have sought to handle this practical dilemma in the following way: we would proclaim Part II with respect to the second dispute only if and when necessary. In the meantime, continuous efforts are being made on an urgent basis to bring these two parties to an agreement. Little separates the two parties. Unlike the longshore dispute where very little serious negotiation has taken place, many months have been spent in very serious discussion in this case, and a conciliation board has been able to bring in a set of recommendations which leave the parties very close together. The distance separating them is, in fact, so slight that one would expect that through addi-