

Government Orders

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House are sorry, as I am sure the government is in its own way, that it had to come to this but we are faced once again with back to work legislation, albeit in a different context than the back to work legislation we were faced with over the strike by the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The dilemma throughout the week has been that on the one hand we wanted the minister to give as much time as possible to the collective bargaining process in order for it to work. At the same time we knew that the closer we got without success to the end of the week prior to the one when Parliament was not sitting, we were creating the possibility of having to deal with this legislation in a very short time frame. This is one of the reasons we have made it possible for the debate to begin in the way we did this morning. We will continue to be in discussion with the government over the course of the day as to how things ought to proceed.

I might say in referring to how things unfolded this week that there might have been a different outcome. The possibility of an agreement being reached was sabotaged or endangered—however you want to put it—by the statements made by the Minister for Grains and Oilseeds at the rally in Winnipeg yesterday, that things were proceeding. There was no guarantee that they would proceed to an agreement but nevertheless there was progress. When people heard at the rally in Winnipeg that the minister had announced back to work legislation, this indeed soured the mood and made the possibility of an agreement even less likely.

I think that is unfortunate and is one of the contributing factors to why we find ourselves in the situation we are now in.

It is not just farmers, although obviously it is farmers, who are most greatly affected by this. These strikes affect other people and other sectors of the economy as well. I speak as one who has a great many railroaders in my riding. When the grain finally piles up and the boxcars are not being emptied and not coming back, that eventually begins to affect employment in ridings like Winnipeg Transcona.

Railroaders know what it is like to be on strike.

I keep that in mind when I deliberate upon what my response might be to the kind of situation I find myself in now and which my colleagues and I find ourselves in as supporters of the collective bargaining process and as

people who are generally critical of back to work legislation, but who realize also that there are situations, particularly when the government has made up its mind, that call for some arrangement to be made here in the House with respect to the legislation.

Again, the government could have made all this a lot easier and still could make it easier if it would agree to the very reasonable requests that are being made by the union *vis-à-vis* the legislation.

One of the sticking points over the last little while in the negotiations, as I understand them, has been the refusal of management, the company, the pools, to put pensions on the table. It seems to me reasonable for employees to want to be able to negotiate, at the time of renegotiating a contract, to want to have the matter of pensions on the table. This has not been the position of the companies.

All that the minister had to do, and I understand that he has said something in this respect, earlier on in the week was use whatever clout he has as the Minister of Labour to make sure that pensions were on the table in a way that might have helped an agreement to come about.

There has also been a request by the union for a three person arbitration board, rather than the one person as the government suggests, the idea being a person selected by management, another person selected by the union and someone else mutually acceptable is a preferable way of having settlements like this arbitrated.

As the hon. member for Churchill said, this is not uncommon. It is a process that has worked. It is not as if it is some radical new idea. It is just a radical new idea to the bureaucrats in the Department of Labour who do not like to do anything different. They have their ways. They are set in their ways. Heaven forbid that anyone should come up with a suggestion that they have not come up with already.

It seems to me that the minister should take this request seriously now. I understand that he has rejected it. If he has rejected it, he might consider another proposal by the union which is that at the very least the person who is appointed the arbitrator be someone who knows a great deal about pensions, someone who can take the pension concerns of the union seriously and deal with them fairly and adequately because that person knows what they are talking about when it comes to pensions.