

● (2055)

The minister's response to the Reform member's question was not acceptable then and it is not acceptable now.

Today we are talking about ending a strike which affects longshoremen. It is not good enough to do this today. We must bring in back to work legislation tomorrow to end the rail strike which will still cost farmers and other shippers money tomorrow, Friday, Saturday and the day after that.

The Chairman: The hon. member is speaking to the matter. He can speak to any of the amendments or any of the clauses. The members on the government side were listened to courteously. I think the members of the government side might listen to this member who comes from the grain producing region of Canada.

Mr. Benoit: Mr. Chairman, tomorrow let us get back to work legislation on the rail strikes. Next week let us get legislation before the House that will prevent this from happening again next year and in the years following.

I would like to thank my fellow members of caucus who have worked so hard in pushing for an end to this strike. I would like to thank in particular the member for Wild Rose for asking yesterday for an emergency debate to end the longshoremen strike which stopped movement of grain and other products. I would also like to thank the Liberal government and the labour minister for her action in legislating this strike to an end.

I want to talk about the costs this strike will bring to farmers, that the strike last year brought to farmers, that the rail strike will continue to bring to farmers in western Canada and to others who depend on this movement system.

Particularly for the farmers these costs include demurrage costs on ships that wait to be loaded. It cost millions of dollars last year in the 12-day strike. It took the government 11 days to act last year. I guess it is to be congratulated. It took less time this year with this strike. How long is the government going to take on the rail strike? We have yet to see.

There are 28 ships waiting in port right now with 17 more ships due by Friday. More than 60 per cent of the grain exports are not moving. Grain elevators are backed up. Lost sales which we incur with each of these strikes are the biggest single cost to farmers and for other shipping commodities through the west coast and other ports.

What is the value of lost sales in grain due to this strike, due to the rail strike which still continues, due to the strike last year? Last year the estimated cost over the 12-day strike was over \$200 million in lost sales. This year for the longshoremen strike it will be millions more. We do not know when the rail

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disruption will end. I would like to ask the minister when she plans to end the rail disruption.

Why did this longshoremen strike and the rail strike ever happen? In 1992 a contract ended. We knew, this minister knew, this Liberal government knew, Reformers certainly knew, farmers knew and union members knew there would be a work stoppage.

It has become tradition for unions to depend on back to work legislation to end strikes and lockouts. It has become tradition because they have learned over the past years they do very well by waiting for government to legislate them back to work. In some cases the agreements have actually been better than they have been asking for in negotiation. Labour has come to depend on governments legislating them back to work.

Why did we have to wait until the work stoppage actually came into effect? Why are we waiting for the rail strike to continue? When will the minister act in that regard?

● (2100)

Last year when government legislated an end to a disruption on the west coast, the Reform Party presented during the debate positive alternatives which, if implemented, would have prevented this situation from ever happening. Reform pushed for last best offer arbitration during last year's debate. Nothing was done. I would like to quote from a speech that I gave about a year ago in the House in very similar circumstances.

I want to present one of the Reform options which I presented to the House at that time and which the Liberal government should have responded to then and which I ask it to respond to now.

I talked about two options. The second option:

—is to put in place a better labour-management negotiation process. This could involve ensuring that a new agreement will be in place before the old one expires—

To accomplish that an arbitrator could be appointed approximately six months before a contract expires. If a settlement has not been reached within two weeks of the end of the contract, then an arbitrator would ask management and labour to come up with their best offer, their best position. The arbitrator would then pick one, either the labour position or the management position. One position would be completely accepted and the other position completely rejected.

Under this process a strike would not be allowed to occur. This is good for labour. It is good for management. It is good for western Canadian grain farmers and others using the system. These options should be considered in developing a long term solution to the recurring disruptions in the grain handling system.

That is what I recommended in debate last year.

Since then the hon. member for Lethbridge has put forward a private members' bill on this issue, Bill C-62, which he will talk about later. In that bill is the process for dealing with last best offer arbitration.