

Labour Dispute at Montreal

I agree with him most wholeheartedly that everything possible should be done to have this surcharge removed as soon as possible, and the hon. member can rest assured that in any negotiations on the matter we will do everything we can to make possible the removal of the surcharge as soon as possible.

Mr. B. S. Mackasey (Verdun): Mr. Speaker, it has been suggested by various hon. members that the members from the Montreal area have been somewhat silent in this debate, but the minister has pointed out that there are 10 or 12 members from the Montreal area who have been following the debate with a great deal of attention. Of course, in view of the fact that this debate was granted at the request of the opposition it was only normal and natural that we should have permitted members of the opposition to use up as much time as they required, but frankly I am rather surprised that there has not been full participation on the part of members who have pointed out the tremendous urgency of the situation that exists at the moment.

The hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr), the former minister of labour, who is not in his seat at the moment, emphasized the fact that his party voted against Bill C-215 which was introduced and passed by the house a year or two ago. I think that is a rather sad commentary on the former minister of labour because if ever there was a good piece of labour legislation introduced in the House of Commons it was Bill C-215. I do not want to spend too much time bringing back to memory the situation at that time, but hon. members will recall that the ports of Montreal, Three Rivers and Quebec had been tied up by a devastating strike which threatened not only Expo and its starting date but also the very economic life of the nation.

Respecting, as this party has always done, the rights of labour in labour disputes and realizing that the public usually conceives at first that labour is to blame, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) bent over backwards to do nothing that could be interpreted by labour or by management as an infringement on their rights under the free collective bargaining process. But when it became apparent that a state of emergency did exist and that the economic life of the country was being affected, then and only then did the minister exert the type of pressure which under normal circumstances he would be reluctant to exert. This resulted in Bill C-215 which was passed by the house on division.

[Mr. Greene.]

The only suggestion the former minister of labour had to offer was one which he makes on many occasions such as this, namely, bring all the parties together in Ottawa. I have heard this suggestion from the hon. member every time there has been labour dispute. However, I have looked at his record as minister of labour, and I may say it was an excellent one, and I found no hesitation on his part during the British Columbia ferry dispute to introduce legislation to bring that embarrassing strike to an end.

Nor did I find any reluctance on the part of the N.D.P. to bring the longshoremen's strike in Montreal to an end. As was pointed out by one of the members of the Conservative party today, a bill was introduced by the leader of the N.D.P., drafted by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard), which, if it had been adopted, would have removed from labour their democratic privilege to strike. Regardless of what followed the longshoremen would have been forced back to work. But, as has been pointed out, the N.D.P. had second thoughts about the bill and withdrew it. Since there were no concrete and valid suggestions offered by the opposition, Bill C-215 came into existence and was discussed quite adequately in the house. It was the first breakthrough in the history of Canadian labour that faced up to the fact that the future of labour and management is bound up in a common cause, particularly in light of the fact that we are an exporting nation.

Strikes are rapidly becoming obsolete as a bargaining weapon. If labour is to share in the fruits of the wealth of this nation it must understand that wage increases and productivity go hand in hand. We can no longer afford the luxury of rising costs and lower productivity. This feeling is growing among responsible labour people. They know there is a direct relationship between productivity and labour, and the Picard report attempts to deal with this subject matter.

Without going into all the technicalities of the clauses, Bill C-215 was a piece of legislation which impressed on the ship owners, the shipping federation, that the men in the port of Montreal were entitled to an increase in pay, and impressed on the labour union that if the ship owners were to be able to afford increased wages, and at the same time Montreal was to remain competitive with other ports in North America, then the port of Montreal would have to produce more. There