down. One in ten people in Vancouver, every prairie farmer, every shipper of wheat, potash or anything else is affected. There are 24 ships in the port now. If this strike were to continue for another couple of days, prairie farmers may be paying for more than 18 ships awaiting grain. That is money out of their pockets every day.

There is only way in which I believe that we will be able to change the attitude of the longshoremen. I am not talking about the union leadership, because I believe the leadership knows the container clause should be investigated and removed for a trial period. The only way to change the attitude of the longshoremen is to guarantee them the same amount of work when the clause is dropped. In that way we can learn whether there will be as much work and whether the employers will have to pay a subsidy. We will find out if the removal of that clause will bring shipments back to Vancouver.

Another reason why I sincerely hope that the industrial commission removes the clause is that the Port of Vancouver and its officials have used the container clause as a crutch to explain why the port has not done better. If we take that clause out and the Port of Vancouver does not do any better, we had better look seriously at the management of the Canadian ports, and the employers will have to consider the kind of marketing they are doing because they will no longer have the container clause to use as an excuse.

I am not baiting labour. The employers are so convinced that this is the answer, they have already agreed that if there is any loss of work as compared to previous years they will subsidize the union for as many hours of labour as was done in the past. What could be fairer than that? If there is no improvement in the port without the container clause, and if the number of hours of work for longshoremen decreases substantially, then the union is right and the management and the port are wrong. They will have to realize that.

• (1200)

On the other hand, if there are 3,600 longshoremen who have been looking at the bird in the hand as opposed to the bird in the bush during this period of time, this is the only way they can be convinced about what is in their own best interest.

The longshoremen have made a number of valid points in the material that they sent to every Member of Parliament. There is more wrong with the Port of Vancouver than merely the container clause. The railway infrastructure is not as it should be. I can recall reading about the Port of Vancouver and the silk trains in the early 1920s. Shipments of silk would arrive from Japan, be instantly loaded onto trains which would be given a clear track right to eastern Canada. Silk from the Orient would arrive in eastern Canada quickly. It was a romantic period during which the silk trains became famous in the country. During my life I have not seen anything that the railways have done in terms of co-operating with the Port of Vancouver, either by applying rates or making it easier for shippers to use the Port of Vancouver. Without the co-operation of the railways, the trucking lines and the entire infrastructure, the Port of Vancouver will continue to be defeated by Oakland, Seattle, Tacoma, and now even Bellingham. This is because the American railways are better competitors.

The double stack train has been mentioned. Many of them are being used because shipping a container from Seattle to Chicago by using double stacking saves the shipper approximately $400 per container. Canadian railways do not have this capacity, although Canadian Pacific is talking about implementing something similar next year.

In order for the Port of Vancouver to compete, obviously the federal Government through the Department of Transport must lean on CN and CP to pay more attention to the West Coast ports of Canada and ensure they have an opportunity to compete fairly, as they cannot do now because of the railways.

I agree with the Member who spoke previously that the scope of the industrial inquiry commission should be broader than just the container clause. It should cover the whole gamit. I am surprised at the attitude of the Liberal Party. For years I sat in opposition in the House of Commons asking for an industrial commission into the Port of Vancouver. That never happened and I never had any co-operation. I spent years dealing with the Canada Ports Act and fighting for more autonomy for the Port of Vancouver.

Let me give an example. When a shipper in Seattle wants to move a million widgets through the Port of Seattle, knowing the rates and the arrangements, a board meeting can be convened to make a decision in half a day. While there may be slightly more autonomy to the Port of Vancouver in Canada, that kind of special deal would involve telexes heading back and forth to the Canada Ports Corporation in Montreal so that possibly in a week or two something may be done. By that time, those million widgets would have gone through the Port of Seattle.

The Port of Vancouver will never realize its full potential until it can function independently. Unfortunately, that has not yet happened and those of us from the West Coast will continue to fight the good fight in that regard.

This Bill must pass today for the sake of all Canadians. The union is prepared to work. The Bill will force the employers to stop their lock-out, because it is an absolute necessity that the port begin to operate again. The issue may be settled by knocking heads together. If the parties are not satisfied with the Larson report, they only have to arrive at an agreement between themselves. We cannot allow the port to be closed because it is essential. I hope the legislation passes today so that the port will open. We can then proceed to address this long dispute at the Port of Vancouver.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments? Resuming debate.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-24 is an Act to provide for the maintenance of ports operations. Those who are beginning to follow this debate have come to realize that