

Halifax Operations Act

respect of this miserable business that has occupied us for some time and is occupying us in this place now.

My colleagues and I have talked to the people from the Halifax-Dartmouth port commission, we have talked to members of the Maritime Employers' Association, and we have talked to members of the International Longshoremen's Association, the chief disputants in this matter, as well as to others. There were times, I think the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) would have to agree, when it appeared that perhaps we had come close to helping him and Mr. Kelly solve a very difficult issue. Our only purpose was to try to be of help in seeing that the issue was solved outside parliament. We worked like hell trying to do that, Mr. Speaker. We came close at times, but we did not come quite close enough.

I made one promise to everyone I talked to, and that is why I am not mentioning names today. I said they could talk to me, the hon. member for Halifax, and the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East, without getting their names in the press in any way, shape or form. We told them we would honour their confidence and do our best to carry forward their points of view. We did this all through the piece and, as I say, we came remarkably close to solving it. We worked among the parties daily, and if we did not qualify for the title of statesmen in that posture, I do not know what we would qualify as. We tried, and we missed.

● (1240)

I just want to tell the House that after consultation with the parties concerned—I think I can mention two names, Mr. Masters of the Maritime Employers' Association, and Mr. Quinn of the Longshoremen, and you will appreciate that we speak to these people every day and sometimes twice a day—there is no way this lock-out can be ended unless we take action in parliament. When any labour dispute has to come into the House of Commons and the other place to be solved, that is a miserable solution, but I simply say it is the only solution that can possibly work.

I do not want to single out any of the people I have spoken to for this comment, but I am convinced that they are so exhausted by the process in which they found themselves, the lock-out, with all the pressures from every conceivable angle, that it would be impossible for them to reach agreement. There are too many feelings that can be tenderly bruised just by the sheer process and the fact that they have been fighting for too damn long. Too damn long has come to an end, and I say let us pass the legislation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): One o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Is it agreed that we call it one o'clock.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until 2 p.m.

At 12.45 p.m. the House took recess.

[Mr. McCleave.]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a good deal of interest to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) when he introduced this bill, and to the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) who represents the area which is directly concerned with the lock-out.

Our position on this question is one which we have held for a long time, and our views have not changed. We believe in free collective bargaining between an employer and an employee or his union. We believe that it is wrong for a government to intervene directly very often. We hoped the government would never have to intervene in a dispute between employees and employers. We have been, we are, and we will continue to be, opposed to the views expressed by some members of this House, and certainly by many people outside the House, that there should be legislation requiring compulsory arbitration. We think that is wrong. We think that kind of policy which is used in some countries would embitter rather than help solve or lessen the differences between employees and employers.

Having said that, we accept the fact that when a dispute between employees and employers which leads either to a strike by employees or, as in this case, a lock-out by employers, continues for any length of time, it has such grave consequences on the community directly concerned, and indeed on the whole region, if not the whole country, that there comes a time when the government must intervene. We have had examples of this. I did not take the time to search the record for the years in which I have been here, but on a number of occasions in the 14 years I have been here the government has had to bring in legislation to end a work stoppage.

● (1410)

There were occasions, when Saskatchewan and British Columbia had NDP governments, when both governments found it necessary to bring in legislation to end work stoppages. We accept the fact that this can and does happen, and it has happened. It has happened in this case. The differences involved in this case go back even longer than the minister recounted to us earlier: they go back three or four years. Arguments and discussions have gone on at least that long in connection with the port of Halifax, and that is not surprising.

With regard to loading and unloading goods which are shipped by boat, there has been a veritable revolution in the past 25 years. Many products which used to be loaded and unloaded individually are now packed in containers and moved by new and modern equipment, large cranes and other equipment, and as a result the port of Halifax and all other ports require fewer employees than once was the case. The way in which employees are to be dealt with as a result of this containerization and modernization has been, and will continue to be, a matter of dispute between employees and employers for a long time. I say that as a statement of fact and it must be accepted.