

trying to provide a more extended and active way of developing a collective bargaining process.

I would say that the Government of Canada, which is always interested in learning and adapting to useful ideas presented at the provincial level, would feel that final offer selection in this case makes a lot of sense, particularly because in the one case the issues in dispute are not complex. They are basically monetary ones of a very limited nature.

Second, as I tried to say in my opening remarks, because there are similar disputes of this nature brewing on the horizon, it would be very important for us to indicate that rather than having Parliament continually do a bailout of parties in the dispute that we once again try to, while the work stoppage may be harmful, restart or restore elements of collective bargaining, which in this case really requires both parties to make their best efforts to come out with what they think is the most reasonable, rational, effective solution. Then there is a certain risk that they play that they would not be accepted, but it is a way of putting some discipline, some pressure and some persuasion on the parties to get down to a serious calculation of what would be in the best interest of their industry in a collective way.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, the minister mentioned the discipline that he would want to bring to both parties to the dispute in this case and in other cases if he should find a way to have final offer selection built more into the labour relations of the country. I wonder if at this point he could tell us, because there is no obvious point in the bill where this question might be asked, why he chose not to try to impose some discipline on the company at the point at which the longshoremen volunteered to continue to handle the grain and the company refused.

It certainly seems to us, as I said in my earlier remarks, that this was an opportunity for the collective bargaining process to work without the pressure that it immediately creates when grain exports are held up. I wonder if the minister could explain why he did not say to the company: "Look, you simply cannot have that advantage. If people are willing to continue to handle grain then you must be willing to continue to permit them to do so". Why did he permit the lockout to transpire?

• (1635)

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Chairman, while the movement of grain is a major and vital part of the port of Vancouver activity, it is not the exclusive, sole activity. There are many other commodities that move through the port of Vancouver such as potash, sugar and other raw commodities from western Canada which are considered just as vital to those who produce them.

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Also, because of the containerization in the port itself and the clear diversion that was taking place, I think the employer was basically saying it would be wrong and the reason why we do not endorse a single shot or single item settlement is it would in fact be discriminatory against many others who have serious economic stakes in the port of Vancouver.

One of the reasons, as I said in my remarks, for bringing in the legislation at this time is the reputation that Canada must establish in its west coast ports for reliability. In this case we have already noticed the shift of many container ships into the American ports to the south. If we just allowed the grain movement to take place by itself those other items would have provided damage to their own producers, their own manufacturers and would have continually eroded the positioning of the port of Vancouver which is also in the vital interest of Canada to maintain as a viable port.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Chairman, must I still address the Chair? No. Then you will not hold it against me this time. It could be habit forming.

My question, Mr. Minister, is along the same lines as that of my colleague from the NDP. Basically, you chose to let matters ride for quite a long time. Today is February 8 and since the employer declared the lockout on January 29, some time was allowed to pass. There was an attempt at mediation and I only learned of the concrete results after meeting with departmental officials. If I had had this information in hand before my meeting with them, I would have asked them different questions.

I want to say at the outset that given the mediator's position, given the fact that the final offer was the employer's preferred means of settling the dispute, that the mediator agreed with the employer's minimum position or vice versa, in point of fact, the workers may have been quite convinced, and no one would have been able to convince them otherwise on the basis of the facts, that the final offer was in fact a veiled way of proving the employer right. That is why I announced that I intended to propose an amendment to clause 10(1).

I do not want to start an argument because it is important to me that these workers are given the best possible chance to have an equitable solution put on the table. However, in order to ensure that they do get this opportunity given everything that has happened before, given this agreement on the 65 cents which was very close to the initial offer made by management and given the major concessions made by the workers, I think that to offer as the only solution a choice between two final offers is the same as supporting the employer's position.

I have the impression that in the opinion of my colleagues opposite, and especially the Minister of Labour—whom I hope