

Government Orders

in any dispute, in any port, in any transportation system or anything under federal jurisdiction, to rely on their own best efforts to resolve their differences and come to some conclusion. We will not provide a constant crutch for them to find an easy way out of their responsibilities which under our labour relations laws they have been expected to assume.

To summarize, the BCMEA and the ILWU have shown an inability to resolve the obstacles standing in the way of settlement and the resumption of longshoring operations. The legislation will restore port operations on the west coast, get the ships and export and import cargoes moving and at the same time allow the two sides to come back and assume responsibility and arrive at a resolution.

As I indicated at the outset of my remarks, the introduction of legislation of this kind is not a pleasant task for a minister responsible for labour matters in this government. However, as the minister I have a duty to intervene when the parties fail to make the system work and in so doing inflict considerable harm on those not directly involved in the dispute.

There had been reason to hope that labour and management at the port of Vancouver had moved away from the dismal patterns of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s when Parliament was forced to provide for resolution of their disputes on a continual basis. The negotiation of settlements in the last two rounds gave some reason to believe that the pattern had changed and that the parties were entering a new era of constructive labour relations. Sadly once again it shows that old habits die hard. Therefore, we hope the legislation will provide a strong reminder, a wake up call if you like, that we want a new regime and a new set of labour relations in this country.

• (1530)

My wish, and one which I am sure is shared by members of the House, is that the current difficulties do not represent a reversion to previous form. The parties will endeavour to find better ways of resolving their differences. They owe it to themselves, the competitive future of the west coast ports, and to the wider community of the country that relies on this vital gateway for world commerce.

In sending forth this legislation I want to express my appreciation to members on both sides who have given their unanimous consent that this legislation can proceed with dispatch and with the kind of urgency that many people in the economy would respect.

I recognize that there will be questions and we will certainly be prepared to entertain them once we get into committee of the whole. I would only add to my appreciation my request that members do consider strongly that once they have had the opportunity to express themselves in second reading that we

move on to consideration in committee of the whole and hopefully toward third reading.

I understand that our colleagues in the other place are quite prepared to deal with the legislation this evening so it can go into effect and we can then take the final step. I do so with the strong invitation and willingness to sit down with members opposite to talk about how we might at a future date, not too far in the future but reasonably so, come to grips with how we could have a broader examination of labour relations and use their wisdom and judgment of the past on how we might proceed with a different kind of regime and proposals and policies that might help avoid situations that we now face with this legislation.

With that, I urge all hon. members to provide for prompt passage of this legislation to allow for the immediate resumption of activities in the ports.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, it is always a very sad moment when Parliament, any parliament for that matter, must legislate an end to a labour dispute. Having worked for many years in this field as a unionist and later as a teacher, I know that back to work legislation means failure, not only for the parties involved, and perhaps more so for one side than for the other, but also for the labour relations process.

I would just like to say that this dispute signals a singular failure. It is difficult to understand why with so little separating the parties, they were unable to settle their dispute within the time allowed. I realize the minister was feeling some pressure, but with all due respect, perhaps the announcement of pending legislation did not speed up the settlement process. I say perhaps it did not, since I am familiar with the labour relations environment.

May I remind you, Mr. Minister, that although this group of employers and these unions have had trouble getting going many times and have had some major disputes settled by special legislation, namely on four occasions, as you pointed out, in all fairness to the parties, I would also—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order, please. I would simply like to remind all members of the House to direct their comments to the Chair and not to speak directly to a minister or to other members.

Mrs. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, regarding the minister's comments to the effect that the two parties had a lengthy history of confrontation which could only be settled with legislation, in defence of the parties, one has to say that the last two agreements were reached by mutual consent. No doubt this is the reason why legislation was not introduced early on. To my understanding, all issues have been settled, except for the question of salaries. The last attempt at mediation brought the parties closer together than was reported in the newspapers