

grain and wheat supplies, and this prophesy became a reality when one considers the action of Japan in buying United States wheat. Consequently, estimates of the cost of the strike in real terms indicate that \$10 million in demurrage charges will be incurred, with up to \$250 million lost in potential sales.

The instability of the labour situation at the port of Vancouver is well known internationally. When the contract with China for 76.4 million bushels of wheat valued at \$350 million was undertaken, it was stipulated that only 60 per cent of the total volume be shipped through the port of Vancouver, I suggest for this reason.

The Minister of Labour says we have new problems, and on October 7 he speaks about the appointment of an industrial commission, about which I will have more to say a little later. For three consecutive years, a period during which the prairie farmer could sell virtually every bushel of wheat delivered to the port, Canada has had trouble keeping its foreign contract commitments, let alone making extra sales. In the first year, delays were attributed to the unusually heavy snowfall in the Rockies. This was followed by a shortage of boxcars, and now the grain handlers' strike.

Although no official figures are available, government spokesmen have intimated that Canada is falling behind its export schedule at the rate of 15 million bushels per month. It is expected that by the time the grain handlers' dispute is settled, this figure will have reached 50 million bushels. However, statistics confirm that backlogs are never caught up, especially when grain shipments are dependent upon the Canadian transportation system which has been publicly denounced by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) as being in a mess. Those are the facts which this government, for some reason, has callously disregarded. The consequences of this dispute affect us nationally and internationally, yet the minister said he did not want to recall parliament because he did not want to turn this body into a labour court. What are we doing right now? I will have more to say about that as well, Mr. Speaker.

It is now admitted that the situation is urgent. Was it not urgent four weeks ago, or five weeks ago? Did it suddenly become urgent because this government decided it was going to adopt the Perry report, notwithstanding any contrary opinions?

Mr. Sharp: What is your opinion?

Mr. Alexander: Now we hear that voice in the wilderness bleating. I have a great deal of respect for the hon. gentleman who is now government House leader, but I suggest the best thing he can do now is to talk some sense to his colleague and other members to his left in order that we might reach agreement as to the determination of this bill, not only in terms of the length of the debate but the hours of sitting. I suggest in that way he will be making a magnificent contribution.

Mr. Broadbent: Let's finish it all today.

Mr. Alexander: Now we hear that other voice in the wilderness to my left, a man who is also from the class of '68. I suggest he is allowing his position to go to his head.

Grain Handlers' Strike

I say, with all due respect, that we sit here today as the highest court in the land, in effect suspending the democratic freedoms of labour and management and thereby overriding the collective bargaining process—something that could have been avoided, in my view, and something that is distasteful to all hon. members.

What is most unusual and extremely questionable is not the fact that the government is asking hon. members to declare grain handling, in all its aspects, an essential service; rather, it is the forced imposition by the government of the role of arbiter on hon. members, with power to settle and to set the terms of an agreement. This is what is extremely unusual. In these circumstances, one readily recalls the dispute involving the railway workers during which parliament ordered the resumption of operations, asking that compulsory arbitration be imposed, and setting a minimum wage hike from which deliberations would start. But that process is not to come about this time. That which is usual and acceptable is being flagrantly disregarded and replaced by a procedure which is totally unacceptable.

● (1550)

Notwithstanding all that I have said, I would now point out some concern about the fact that much has been said about union and management in this dispute, but it seems to me that in the absence of leadership from this government in the fight against inflation, and because of its complete lack of anti-inflationary policies which has resulted in a free for all, dog eat dog society, one cannot really blame workers, unionized or not, who pursue with determination and vigour cost of living protection. Workers are retaliating against the loss of purchasing power, which has increased steadily since June of 1973.

Accordingly, the Perry suggestions, to the union's way of thinking, were most acceptable in the absence of any government initiative to wrestle inflation to the ground. What other choice did the union have, under the circumstances? To reject the suggestions would have been called insanity, particularly when the government indicated its approval beforehand. I would also say that it is not easy to point the finger of blame at management because, after all, their stubbornness is related to a genuine, sincere and probably true assessment of the situation, namely, that the government-approved settlement which they will impose is highly inflationary and damaging to the economy. That is a position which this opposition party accepts.

Who, then, should be blamed and condemned? None other than the Trudeau Liberals. I point the finger of condemnation at the government for its failure to tackle inflation, for creating a climate of economic instability and uncertainty, for creating lack of confidence in the economy, for creating confrontation collective bargaining, and for the attitude that nothing can be done about inflation.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Who is the author?

Mr. Alexander: I thought I heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner), but perhaps I am wrong. In this regard, the president of the Canadian Labour Congress said in a recent speech: