

Maintenance of Ports Operations Act, 1986

I know that my time is up and I just want to say once again how very important this issue is. It is important not only for today but also for the future, not only of the West Coast, but that of Canada. I can tell you as the Member for Vancouver East that it is tremendously important to thousands of ordinary people in Vancouver and their families. They need the jobs and they have the skills to make our port very effective.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions or comments.

Mr. Cook: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell) expressed some of my own thoughts on this occasion. It is not often that we agree, but there are a number of things she said that we do agree on. However, I would ask her one specific question. Her whole speech seemed to indicate her thinking and I would like a little confirmation.

If the commissioner comes down with the rule that there will be job security for the longshoremen to the extent that it involves destuffing, would it be her opinion then that that clause be removed from the contract in order to make the Port of Vancouver at least a little more competitive? I suppose that could be answered with a yes or no, but I do not expect it.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but note that the Hon. Member, whose riding encircles the Port of Vancouver, like mine does, has not been very vocal on many of these issues. I certainly hope he is going to be the next speaker to tell his constituents what he intends to do about this situation and the Port of Vancouver generally.

• (1740)

The destuffing clause is going to be referred to a conciliator. It has been a part of the collective bargaining process to date. I have listed some of the pros and cons. It is not my job that is at stake, at least I do not think it is. I think it is incumbent upon a conciliator who is going to be very objective and careful and will consider the views of both sides as a result of this Bill to deal with it.

Mr. Greenaway: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member says that the situation of containers and destuffing is extremely complex. She likes to tie it to job security. Is the Hon. Member aware of a move in the U.S. to build a 28 acre port facility between Blaine and Bellingham to handle only Canadian trade? If that happens, I do not see how we will save jobs in British Columbia if we do not get rid of that clause. It is my understanding that many shippers would move their freight to Vancouver if that clause were eliminated.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, is the Hon. Member aware that this clause has been in existence in the United States and was just challenged in the courts? The courts upheld the clause, which affected the longshoremen there. That should indicate something about the competitiveness.

I would like to quote as follows from the Larson Report: "There can be no doubt that the container clause constitutes a legitimate mechanism to secure and preserve bargaining unit work, not unlike provisions against contracting out or non-affiliation clauses under other collective agreements". That is an expert in the field saying that this is legitimate.

I do not speak as a union member, but my understanding is that there has been a history of the union being willing to look at this clause. If there were real guarantees of permanent jobs, perhaps there might be some changes. However, you must understand how jobs for longshoremen are dealt out in the hiring hall. A person released from this job will not be hired to man a crane. There are specific jobs for real people who are affected. I hope that answers the Member's question.

Mr. St. Germain: The Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) and the Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) said there were no plans for improvement to the Port of Vancouver. Is the Member aware that there are presently bids out for cranes, which are contingent upon resolving this container clause? I do not blame either labour or management. They are both responsible for resolving this situation. However, I think members of the NDP, the socialist Party, are making innuendoes that the Government is not taking a responsible role in providing for future planning for the port. In fact, the Government is doing that.

The Member referred to a port user committee. The Vancouver Port Corporation is in place. It is planning effectively. The establishment of a port user committee would be redundant and would add to the bureaucracy and confusion. You would not be able to find the crane among the piles of paper which would be established as a result of forming another committee.

Is the Hon. Member aware that plans are under way? I would like the Hon. Member's reaction to the long-term operating agreements which have just been put into place by the Vancouver Port Corporation which awarded these long-term contracts which will give stability to the port. Did the Member know these things were taking place?

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I know that there has not been a major improvement in the port since that Member's Government has been in charge in Ottawa. I know that there were two or three years of planning for a master plan which has remained on the shelf of the Vancouver Port Corporation office. The community people in my riding are extremely concerned about all that wasted effort. There have been three different port managers in the last two or three years, which must indicate something.

The Member should be studying the Bill on which we worked very hard in 1981 which said that there should be port users. Does he not realize that the Vancouver Port Corporation consists of political patronage appointees to the board by the Government? Through a port user committee we would bring the railroads, shipping companies, workers, municipalities and the grain industry from the Prairies together to study the inter-