

Government Orders

appointment of a commission of inquiry will not give us short term solutions to this problem.

The appointment of a commission of inquiry will certainly help us in the medium term so that this situation does not happen again. Right now, I agree that we are opting for a more traditional solution, if I may use this expression before the members of this House, to the dispute that is going on. This more traditional solution is the appointment of a mediator-arbitrator who will impose a settlement so that we have a collective agreement that will be effective until at least December 31, 1996.

In the meantime, we will appoint a commission of inquiry which will review the bargaining process and we will be able to see what changes can be made later on. So, the bill before us will help us solve the problem in the very short term, but we will still take a long term look at the whole bargaining process.

Mr. Crête: Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the last amendment on our list because it is a little different. That amendment provides that in clause 11, on page 5, line 17, all the words after the word "agreement" be deleted. That clause reads as follows: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed so as to limit or restrict the rights of the parties to the collective agreement to agree to amend any provision of the collective agreement—and the clause goes on—amended by or pursuant to this Act, other than a provision relating to the term of the collective agreement, and to give effect thereto."

The purpose of our amendment is to delete all the words after the word "agreement" so that the parties will have much more freedom to agree on provisions other than those provided for in the bill, more particularly relating to the term of the agreement.

• (2050)

We would like the parties to have the opportunity, if they so wish, to negotiate provisions other than those in the bill, and especially a back to work agreement. It would be important for the parties to have some breathing space to do that.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I have been informed this is already possible under the present provisions of the Canada Labour Code. The amendment proposed by the hon. member for the Bloc Quebecois is unnecessary.

Mr. Crête: Mr. Chairman, if it is already indicated in the Canada Labour Code, then it is a matter of clarification. If it is already in the Canada Labour Code, it would be unnecessary to say what it says in the bill, because this would mean adding

something that already exists in the Canada Labour Code. Here, certain clauses restrict the rights of the parties, but we do not want any restrictions on the rights of the parties. This is in line with getting rid of the mediator-arbitrator, but it is an additional element that could apply even if the amendment on the mediator-arbitrator is rejected.

[*English*]

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Chairman, it is sad that I must stand here today to talk about putting an end to a strike that should not have happened.

This type of work stoppage has happened again and again. There have been over 25 stoppages in the grain handling system in the last 25 years. There is no need for that.

The irony is that as we debate putting an end to this longshoreman strike, at this very time there is a labour disruption effecting rail movements which will still prevent the proper movement of grain and other commodities to market.

I refer to the Minister of Labour's response in question period yesterday to a question from the hon. member for Simcoe Centre. He said: "The Minister of Labour may have time to wait and sort this out but Canadian farmers do not. Present shipments are in danger. They must plan for future crops now and should not have to worry about whether the rail system will be there when they need it. I ask the minister again, when will the government introduce back to work legislation?"

The response from the Minister of Labour was: "I would like to ask the Reform member to remain calm and to refrain from spreading panic among the parties concerned. As we speak, grain is moving in the west, in Vancouver this very day. We should keep in contact with the parties and keep in mind that it is always better to negotiate an agreement than to envision legislating these people back to work".

The hon. member for Simcoe Centre said in his next question: "We have been calm far too long. When is the time to get nervous? It is right now. There have been 13 work stoppages in 29 years. Our western grain growers cannot afford to bear the brunt of another strike. Canada's transportation system must be reliable or our customers will go elsewhere. Once the back to work legislation is passed, will the government take steps to ensure the threat of future rail strikes is removed once and for all?"

The minister's response was: "As usual, the hon. member is going a bit too fast. At this stage, legislation is out of the question, so I will not answer hypothetical questions".