

Labour Relations

Mr. Speaker, I realize that time passes—

● (2050)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Order, please. I regret very much to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted to him has expired.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I think this is a most timely motion, and I cannot but agree with the preamble to it that there is a climate of instability and dissatisfaction for workers, and indeed for the whole work force at almost all levels.

With the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) and others suggestion that wage settlements have been so high that we have been pricing ourselves out of the market, the headline in the *Ottawa Journal* tonight is, "costs dim hopes for cheaper food", and an official of the grocery industry is quoted as saying:

"With settlements running in the 17-to-19-per-cent bracket with fringes and COLA clauses, we are rapidly pricing ourselves out of the business.

These are factors in food costs which will likely continue. I agree with much of this motion; it puts forward some interesting views on what might be done to get us out of some of our problems. But I am somewhat in disagreement with the second paragraph which suggests that certain union officials wield powers far exceeding their responsibilities. This may be so in selected areas, but if unions are properly organized and are responsible to their membership, surely this charge should not be levelled at all union leaders.

In the finance committee it was suggested to Mr. Smith of the Economic Council of Canada that some unions leaders exert influence far beyond what they should or what was reasonable, and his suggestion was that he did not think so, at least in the long run.

It seems to me that it is somewhat of a truism to say that if large unions in many cases have abnormal influence on our society, it is often the fault of the economic and social system which allows or necessitates a concentration of workers, so that union leaders of necessity have to wield their great powers, or are able to do so.

In the third paragraph of the preamble it states that there have been illegal strikes in the past. It is certainly true that work stoppages may sometimes paralyze the economy, but at other times they are necessary to create job improvements and conditions for employees, as well as to force management into more efficient practices which will still retain profitability for corporations in the interests of the dividend shareholders who, incidentally, more and more are becoming the collective workers with pension plans who own many shares in our corporations.

The social Credit motion has brought forward certain proposals which can be supported, at least to some extent, which I think would meet with general approval by all parties. I think it is significant that this motion was proposed by hon. members from Quebec because it is in that province where at the moment there is serious unrest in the labour movement and serious confrontation between the provincial government, corporation management, and union heads. Other parts of Canada may have

[Mr. Olivier.]

their problems, such as the problem experienced in regard to the west coast grain handling stoppage which resulted in serious delays in grain exports at a time when the world's hungry needed our grain and Canada needed the foreign exchange earnings which the sale of grain would earn.

Many of us from the west do not understand the province of Quebec as well as do those from other parts of Canada, but what is happening in that province is cause for concern to all Canadians. No doubt all parts of the country will be faced with some of the problems already present in that province. There is good reason for serious unease right across the country about the confrontation in that province between union, management, and Premier Robert Bourassa. It seems likely that the labour movement in that province will shortly put up a common front and call for a series of illegal stoppages and strikes. As well as affecting the province of Quebec, this will certainly damage Canada's international reputation, particularly in the field of export trade. This is happening to some extent in the grain industry, and also with regard to the Olympics.

The Quebec premier in 1972 dealt with labour's common front by jailing union leaders for refusing to obey the back to work order of his government. It is to his credit that he appointed the Cliche Commission which investigated Quebec's construction industry. Mr. Cliche seems to have laid blame for corruption and lawbreaking indiscriminately and impartially on the unions, on government, and on management, but at the moment the premier has only clamped down on unions. He has made no move to clean up his own party's electoral machine, and he does not seem to have acted aggressively, against corruption in the civil service. It also seems that contractors to this date have escaped disciplinary measures which would have encouraged honesty among contracting companies.

In regard to the Quebec situation the *Financial Post* in an editorial had this to say:

Furthermore, those whom the government appoints as trustees to run the construction unions placed in trusteeship should be unquestionably identified as labour-oriented or they will be unable to maintain or gain the support or respect of the workers involved. Individual workers must be given greater assurance that, if they want to work when union leaders are pushing for illegal strike action, they and their families will not be victims of strong-arm tactics.

I believe that this indicates quite a serious concern to all legislators. Further evidence that an explosive confrontation in Quebec between the powerful labour movement and the provincial government will occur has been detailed in the *Financial Post* of May 24, by a correspondent writing from Quebec city. This correspondent, Mr. Rumball, pointed out that following the aftermath of the Cliche Royal Commission on the construction industry, which showed that that industry was extensively corrupt, Mr. Bourassa's government seems to have made a strategic error in its reaction to the recommendations of the commission. If the assessment of Mr. Rumball is reasonably correct, it certainly reminds us of the great problems involved in dealing with labour and settling strikes by the legislative process instead of by other methods.

The Quebec government seems to fail to attack all sources of corruption simultaneously, and so far it has only brought forward bills focussed on unions, placing