

Government Orders

government showed any concern or if they did, they kept a very low profile.

• (1620)

What amazes me in this dispute is that although it started as a rotating strike, the union maintained throughout its willingness to handle grain despite all kinds of pressures, out of respect for the farmers. After one day, plus a few days later on in only some of the ports, a lockout was declared. Someone over there knew the government had special legislation ready and waiting. They were already prepared for that eventuality, so there was no incentive to reach a settlement through mediation and conciliation during the weeks prior to the strike. If the appointed mediator had trouble reaching an agreement, especially on a clause that might easily have been dealt with, they could at least have tried another mediator.

The minister could have intervened, perhaps directly in a meeting with the parties, but no attempt was made. They preferred to stick with the Conservative or Liberal tradition whenever there is a dispute in our ports that affects the economy of a region or of the entire country, including postal disputes and the public service, which means bringing in special legislation.

How can we expect a normal bargaining process with a level playing field, when one of the parties knows that after a few days on strike, the government will table special legislation? There was hardly equality between the two groups and, in a difficult economic situation, an employer generally lends a deaf ear to union demands.

It is in that sense that I voice my disappointment. The very first legislative measure passed by this government is going to be a special law to settle a dispute which could have been mediated.

I want to make it clear that—although today we gave our consent in that particular case knowing full well that the government was unwilling to pursue any other route—we will not always agree so easily. In the future, the government will be faced with a barrage of interventions and they will have to demonstrate the necessity of such a measure.

We contacted the striking workers and they proposed amendments. They were open to discussion, they were willing to compromise and they suggested amendments to the Bill. The discussion we had with those people shows without a doubt that something was not right out there. There are always two sides to a dispute, but one side was not consulted.

The certainty of a recall bill was always in the mind of the negotiators. They did not have to make any concessions, they did not have to negotiate anything, they knew that a bill would be forthcoming. This is exactly the same attitude the Conservatives had when faced with similar disputes.

The red book that Liberals waved during the last election is quickly turning blue. They are behaving like Conservatives when faced with a dispute like this one. I deeply regret that move by the government and I will vote against the bill. I support the suggestions made by our critic in response to the minister; his speech was truly outstanding.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

• (1625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Accordingly, the bill stands referred to committee of the whole. Pursuant to Standing Order 100 I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the House went into committee thereon, Mr. Kilger in the chair.)

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: Order. House in committee of the whole on Bill C-10, an act to provide for the maintenance of west coast port operations.

(Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.)

• (1630)

On clause 8:

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Chairman, we do this committee of the whole so rarely that none of us are as practised at it as we used to be, but I must say it is nice to be back on the front bench momentarily.

I wonder whether this is the appropriate place to ask the minister a few questions. I have two things. This is the clause having to do with final offer selection. I wonder if the minister could indicate whether or not the fact that this is in the bill is simply a reflection of the fact that this is what the employer in this case had hoped for prior to the stage of mediation or whether this reflects a new policy thrust on the part of the government in labour relations by way of recommending not just in this bill but to the country that final offer selection will come to be seen as one of the ways in which labour disputes of this kind and others might be settled.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Chairman, the hon. member from Transcona himself said earlier in the debate that the idea of final offer selection has very valuable precedents and that colleagues of his in the province of Manitoba introduced such proposals as a way of