

Private Members' Business

economically speaking and we cannot shut the industry of this country down. In the event of strikes, who loses?

The public loses. They are the number one loser. The second loser is usually labour. No matter what kind of settlement they get, if they are off work for any period of time they are likely not going to make that wage back up. The problem is they have to have some kind of hammer to use as a threat if everything else fails. The majority of the negotiations end up with settlement, but when they do not they always have to have that hammer.

We have to invent a new type of hammer, one that is fair for labour and one that is fair for management. We need some system that says you must move your negotiations very close together or chances are you are going to be the loser in this negotiation.

This is a step in the right direction, examining it in the case of the grain. We do not want to come at this all at once as a total revolutionary system for this country. This is a good place to start. This is a good place to work some of the bugs out of the system.

We do have to look for alternatives. Strikes are something that went on in the 1800s. Surely we have to evolve from something that maybe worked last century. We are about to go into the next one. Maybe we need to find new solutions for this country. This is a system that can work, that the unions will look at and I believe they will accept. The primary objector is going to be one or two people at the very top. I believe the worker in Canada will benefit rather than lose from this type of legislation.

Ms. Judy Bethel (Edmonton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on second reading of the bill proposed by the hon. member for Lethbridge.

The proposed legislation, Bill C-262, would seek to ban work stoppages involving the movement of grain from producer to export and to provide for arbitrated settlement in those cases where parties involved in the grain handling and transportation industry were unable to resolve contract differences.

On the surface one cannot argue against the general object of the bill, that is, to keep Canadian export grain flowing smoothly to overseas markets and not to be stalled or halted by labour dispute. Unfortunately, while my honourable colleague and I share a particular desire to see Canada's reputation as a reliable exporter of grain maintained, we are obviously in disagreement as to how that end is achieved.

The banning of legal strikes and/or lockouts and the imposition of arbitrated settlements are measures which only serve to exasperate labour management relations. It will do little to bring long term solutions to problems which we are attempting to address.

• (1800)

I would like to share with hon. members a unique initiative currently under way in the western grain storage and handling industry, one which exemplifies the type of positive and forward thinking which labour and management are capable of applying to human resource issues in the industry.

Following three significant work stoppages in the grain handling and transportation sector, in the fall of 1991 a dialogue was initiated with industry representatives to review the need for improvement in labour-management relations and to consider ways of minimizing disruptions to the movement of grain to export markets. Discussions with the parties led to the conclusion that there was little in the way of support for essential service legislation governing dispute resolution in the grain handling industry. Any system of partial designation would be cumbersome to administer and likely to lead to interminable disputes. A complete prohibition on work stoppages would involve third party determination of contract impasses and effectively remove control of the process from both sides of the industry.

There were two key problems which were identified during discussions with the parties involved in the grain handling industry. First, there was the expectation that government would intervene rapidly to terminate any work stoppages, thus enabling one or both parties to avoid its responsibilities for settlement. Second, there existed a problem of inadequate communications between the parties at appropriate times and levels during the period between bargaining rounds on the longer term issues which, if left unaddressed, might rebound negatively at the bargaining table.

Hon. members will be encouraged to hear that both labour and management expressed agreement on the utility of exploring ways to improve their dialogue and to ensure the future competitiveness of the industry in their own mutual interest, as well as in the interest of the Canadian farmers and the Canadian economy.

At a subsequent labour-management conference for officials of the western grain elevator industry agreement was reached on pursuing the possible establishment of a sectoral council on the industry. A working group with equal representation from labour and management chaired by a neutral government official was established to discuss the possible format in terms of reference for a human resources study which could eventually lead to the establishment of such a sectoral body.

The working group held a series of meetings over the course of the next year which culminated in the submission of an application to the sector studies directorate of the former Employment and Immigration Canada for assistance in carrying out a human resource issue study of the industry. Approval for the study was received and the firm of Deloitte & Touche was chosen by the working group to carry out the industry study.