

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion*

## LABOUR RELATIONS—WEST COAST TOWBOAT STRIKE—IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF SAFETY REGULATIONS

**Mr. Mark Rose (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, we in British Columbia are in the midst of a labour dispute which could have disastrous effects on the whole economy of the province. The dispute of which I speak is in the towboat industry involving about 1,000 men, but the spin-off effects and subsequent reverberations could affect thousands more if the matter is allowed to continue further. The central issue in the matter is not money; it concerns manning and safety regulations which, if a Department of Labour report can be believed, remind one of the factory conditions in England about the time of Charles Dickens.

My interest in this matter is not a "Johnny-come-lately" one at all but goes back to January 9 when I first wrote to the Minister of Transport to see whether I could get a copy of the Elestrom report. This was a study, sponsored jointly by the labour and transport ministries, of the towboat industry and the conditions within it. I was politely refused.

I tried again on March 2 and failed to have the report made public. Finally, on March 18 I concluded that formal and private correspondence was a futile method and so I decided to raise the issue in the oral question period. I raised the question initially with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson) early in April and later on April 20 with the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey). The Minister of Labour's reply, when I asked him when the report would be issued, as reported at page 6044 of *Hansard*, was as follows:

Perhaps never, Mr. Speaker. It was not intended that it be made available to the general public. It was intended to reveal to the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Transport and senior civil servants conditions on the waterfront in the tugboat industry in British Columbia. I am considering releasing the report to the unions and to management as well as senior officials on the coast in order that they may work together as a team to clean up what is an unenviable situation.

Why was this report on a situation which has been described as an unenviable mess by the Minister of Labour not released earlier? I will tell you why, Mr. Speaker. At the time I asked these questions, certain very sensitive conciliation procedures were going on and the release of the report at this time would have caused a number of rather messy things to hit the fan in this kind of labour negotiation procedure. So except for the negotiators, the Elestrom report was kept under wraps until

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

the majority conciliation report was published and was leaked to the press later by the union. The report not only condemns the safety standards of the industry, but I think it condemns this government, indeed any government in the world, that permits in this day and age such galley-slave conditions and tactics to exist in a so-called enlightened industry and country.

Here are some of the highlights of the report. One deckhand in six faces injury each year. One in five on a two-man tugboat faces injury each year, and is off for an average of 30 days. Workman's compensation officials might not even learn of this injury, or a fatality might not even be reported. Only 20 per cent of the boats surveyed had safe manning practices. The investigating team did not see some of the worst boats, some of the company "dogs", nor visit the most notorious "gyppo" boats.

The hours of work are far too long. The report says that working for up to 20 years is too long for sane decisions to be made by the skippers. The crews' conditions are undesirable. There are cramped sleeping quarters and no cooks on some outside boats. Food is prepared in unsanitary conditions. Half of the two-man boats did not have any toilets and the men were required to complete these functions in buckets, the contents of which were subsequently dumped overboard, causing harbour pollution. Incidentally, this is contrary to the Canada Shipping Act.

The report also found there was pitting of one skipper against another and encouraging them to take chances in highball operations with overpowered and undermanned—to use the term in the report—"hot rods". These are high-powered boats noted for speed but not for safety. I think that is enough to indicate the problems involved. When the wives of the men learned of the risks that their husbands had been taking, they backed them 100 per cent, and I am afraid that we are in for a long dispute.

• (10:10 p.m.)

The men at this port are adamant. The "gypos" are moving in and supervisory personnel are operating certain vessels. Serious accidents are bound to occur because many of the supervisory personnel are unfamiliar with the type of vessel they are currently trying to operate. The Fraser River freshet, which causes flooding, is imminent. The history of the towboat industry in British Columbia is a tragic one. No proper inspection service has