

Grain Handlers' Strike

was aware of it before, the double standard used by the government became apparent to me. No matter whether the minister says the increase being offered is 61 per cent, 54 per cent, 48 per cent or 41 per cent under the terms of the Perry report, we find the same government offering the inspectors increases of 6 per cent and 5 per cent over a two-year period. What kind of nonsense is this? Where is the credibility and responsibility of this government?

What was not urgent has now become urgent. Hon. members opposite have had a great holiday. Ministers opposite were not preparing bills, because they have just introduced all those that were dropped in the last parliament. They were having a holiday and gloating over their victory. What they should have done was recalled parliament. In the absence of their recalling parliament the only rational conclusion one can come to is that they are unconcerned about the loss of millions of dollars, about the deterioration of our international reputation, about the economic wealth and well-being of this country.

I hear the hon. member for Middlesex-London-Lambton (Mr. Condon) commenting, but he knows what I say is the truth. He is a labour man himself and understands the situation. He knows that the government destroyed any meaningful negotiations between the parties when they endorsed the Perry report. I shall have more to say about that report because it was not really a final report; it only made suggestions. Why did the minister not mention that?

Mr. MacKay: He did not read it.

Mr. Alexander: We understand that. My colleague from Central Nova (Mr. MacKay) says that he did not read it, and according to the information we on the committee received, you are doggone right that he did not read it at the time the government blessed the Perry report. They had no idea what severe implications there were. In an over reactive, heavy-handed sort of way the government said, "Okay, let's go; this is it". I do not think I am disclosing any confidentiality when I say that the government said to the companies that if they did not accept the Perry report they were under threat of sanctions. As a matter of fact, I will be very pleased when the minister comes before the standing committee—I think that is the proper course to take—and we can find out what the heck went on here. We want to question the Minister of Labour, that great proponent of the collective bargaining process who subsequently destroyed it. I should also like to speak to the minister responsible for the Wheat Board about this question, because he is supposed to see that grain is not only grown in this country but is moved. His input into this matter was disastrous.

● (1540)

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): What about the company line?

Mr. Alexander: Now we hear the minister asking about the company line. I suggest the speech he made was not along company lines or union lines, and was not even made on behalf of the Canadian people. The minister has abdicated his responsibility as Minister of Labour and he should resign because of the mess in which this country finds itself.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Alexander.]

An hon. Member: Give us back Mackasey.

Mr. Alexander: He was a good man. I can say nothing about the former minister of labour except that he was, and still is, my friend. Mr. Speaker, you thought I was going to say something else, but I would just like to stand on that.

Let me review the grain situation as we find it in Canada today. When the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Justice cancelled their planned meeting with grain company officials on August 22, it was on the basis that it would appear unproductive to pursue discussions. At that time, both ministers dismissed the necessity of recalling parliament by claiming that the situation was not serious enough to warrant such drastic action. The minister, according to a news comment made in Vancouver on September 4, said that while the dispute was serious to the farmers in terms of economic repercussions, he did not think parliament should settle disputes which did not have national consequences.

What is the matter with the thinking of the Minister of Labour? This dispute has not only national consequences but international consequences; and this has been the fact for some time. Notwithstanding what the minister has said, a telex from the Canadian Wheat Board to the Minister of Justice, and other information from government sources, makes it clear that the federal government's representatives were virtually unaware of the complexities of the situation. According to Canadian Wheat Board figures, the situation was far more serious and potentially damaging than government officials cared to admit. In the telex to which I have referred, the Canadian Wheat Board illustrated with dates, figures and amounts the gravity of the situation both in national and international perspective.

The Wheat Board claimed that the port of Vancouver is capable of a sustained export volume of a minimum of 25 million bushels of cereals per month. At full operational efficiency, 30 million bushels per month can easily be accomplished. The record for grain exported through the port of Vancouver was achieved in May, 1973, when 36.7 million bushels of wheat were processed in one month. However, due to the circumstances brought about by various labour disputes during the past few years—and other matters, I might add—the Canadian Wheat Board claims that the port of Vancouver has been in a continuous demurrage situation since the August, 1973, national railway strike. The demurrage costs which are expected to be incurred from the present work stoppage could easily reach \$10 million. These debts would be paid from the 1973-74 pool accounts, payable by the producers. I recall the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) and the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams), questioning the propriety of this, but their concern met with a negative response from the government.

Foreign grain contract commitments require a daily unloading capacity of 700 cars, five days per week until the end of December, 1974. The Wheat Board has calculated that under a work stoppage situation of six weeks duration, it would take until mid-May, 1975, to fulfil foreign commitments at an unloading rate of 700 boxcars per day. As a result of this, the Wheat Board felt that its foreign contractees may be forced to look elsewhere for