

*Maintenance of Ports Operations Act, 1986*

affected by what happens in the Port of Vancouver. The longshoremen are located in my riding as are all maritime unions.

I have been in consultation with the ILWU and want to put on the record some of the concerns it is raising. I hope we will have more details on that. Its concern is that if the Larson Report is imposed, as proposed in this Bill, there will be only a 1 per cent increase in wages. The cost of living has increased by 4 per cent. There will be an increased workload. On the bulk shipments they may have to work 12-hour days, which is a very retrograde step. Pensions are very much left up in the air, and the question has been raised whether the referee would define this further.

● (1730)

The unions are also concerned about the container clause. The Larson recommendations were bad enough, in their view, but this leaves it wide open, and that is even worse. At least Mr. Larson advocated some job security. He says that the container clause has diverted traffic to the U.S. only to some extent. The union has offered to give up the clause if jobs are retained. There can be no doubt that the container clause constitutes a legitimate mechanism to serve and preserve bargaining unit work, not unlike clauses under other collective agreements. He also notes that if Vancouver wins new business because of the elimination of the clause, few if any of the displaced workers would get the new skilled jobs operating cranes and so on. Therefore, there are legitimate reasons for not giving up this clause unless there is some guaranteed job replacement.

The union is also concerned that the legislation takes away the right to strike for two years. There are many issues besides those here which waterfront workers will be concerned about. If safety on the job becomes an issue, for example, there is no way to protest the situation. This Bill appears to supersede the Canada Labour Code concerning the right of workers to refuse unsafe work. It is excessively punitive. Unfortunately, the container clause has been used as a scapegoat because it is really a very small symptom of a much larger problem. Even if the clause is removed, the evidence is clear that it will not make our port competitive unless a whole range of improvements are made.

I would like to refer to a backgrounder paper which was circulated to all Members today. It was prepared before the current crisis and quite apart from the issues at stake today. It is put out by the longshoremen's union. It says that Vancouver will not recover the lost business nor win new business unless the railways, the federal Government, the Vancouver Port Corporation, and the western provinces make major improvements in the transportation and goods handling systems in Vancouver and across Canada. We have spent a lot of time and money ensuring that we have the most modern state of the art facilities not only in North America but in the world, said Mic Dinsmore, Director of Marine Operations, Port of Seattle, but, "You have done none of that in Vancouver".

The report talks about inadequate port facilities. We need at least three new modern container cranes right now. The federal Government has to contribute to the capital cost involved because it is a very expensive investment. However, we must invest in this for the future or we will have no future. Why are there no more cranes? Apparently because of an incredibly slow-moving bureaucracy in Ottawa which has not made a financial commitment.

There is also concern that despite the Canada Ports Act of 1981, the Port of Vancouver has not implemented a port user committee as recommended to look at the problems and come up with solutions. It is desperately needed. There is very little port autonomy as well. A port users committee is a very critical ingredient to any changes. It would bring together business, labour and municipalities, shipping lines and railways, in short all those concerned with the port. There must be an upgrading of railways. Our railways are not competitive with the railways in the U.S. We have to invest for the future. We have to have double-decker cars to transport containers rapidly to connect with the ships at our port. Yet our own railways have not committed resources. Instead, they are giving incentives to carry Canadian goods through American ports. There must be a firm commitment from freight forwarders and shipping lines. The shipping lines are winners, whether Vancouver or the American ports are used. They should be requested to issue a clear statement of intent respecting future use of the Port of Vancouver.

I have spoken to shipping line operators. I know they would rather ship through Vancouver, but they use Seattle or Tacoma. We need to have facilities to accommodate them and get a commitment that if money is invested in the Port of Vancouver, that will be their priority shipping point.

The federal Government also has to protect shipping and make sure the policies are pro-Canadian. I referred earlier to the Western Grain Transportation Act. The grain transportation agency is apparently recommending sweeping changes to the Act, including one to allow these cargoes to be transhipped through American ports for shipment overseas. We have to bring in provincial Governments as well.

What I am trying to explain to the House and the people who may be watching is that this is a very complex problem. We need to have action on many fronts. We have to make sure we have a modern competitive port. That in turn will guarantee permanent jobs, as well as an increase in jobs in the future so our young people can get involved.

There is the option of removing the container clause. There has to be job security, as I have said over and over again, if the parties concerned are going to do that. However, there has been no guarantee to date. As was pointed out very adequately in this report, which I urge Members to read, there is no guarantee whatsoever that containers being diverted to Seattle and Tacoma will come back to Vancouver. Just removing a container clause would not guarantee that. We need to have a competitive, modern port.