

West Coast Ports Operations Act

I understand the unfair wage provisions in the Bill are retroactive. If we dragged the Bill out for two or three days, which I was quite prepared to do, where would it get us? It would still get us into a position where we would have unfair wage provisions being retroactively enacted, and the workers would be in the same position.

We fought the six and five for six weeks. We have fought the fight on that and I think the people of the country know it. I say to my constituents as well as to Hon. Members of the House that with respect to the six and five one of the reasons I was elected to the House of Commons was that working people in my riding did not like wage and price controls because they saw them only as wage controls. I say to the working people of Canada that again Clause 4 applies the six and five, but this time to the private sector. It may be longshoremen today, but it will be other workers tomorrow. We will get into a situation where the wages of all workers are controlled, but not prices or profits.

Ordinary Canadians have a gut feeling for justice. They are prepared to co-operate and sacrifice for the country because they all love the country. It is a great country, but the problem is that they see the sacrifices being made by the wrong people. They do not see these sacrifices as being just or across the board. The Government is sneaking in the six and five with this Clause.

I am not sure whether I am permitted to ask the Minister of Labour a question at this point, but I will ask one. If I am not permitted to do so, then it can be considered a rhetorical question. If I am permitted to do so, perhaps he could answer it.

Why should the employers settle before next Monday? In fact, why should these employers return to the bargaining table if the Government has already said that it will be six and five? That is a good deal for employers. Why should they return to the bargaining table and deal with the conciliator's report which suggested about 12 per cent? Why would they go back with this Clause in the Bill? The Minister does not want them to go back; that is the answer. He wants to slip in the back way the Government's six and five program to make some political points for what Keith Davey read in the public opinion poll instead of bringing in a bill—and I agree with the Conservative Party on this—that would at least face the issue squarely so that we could decide the issue on its merits and decide the dispute on its merits.

This is why people from the Prairies, people from my Party and people from all over Canada are against the Bill. The Government sneaks in other unfair clauses. I echo the words of the Hon. Member for North Vancouver-Burnaby, that free men should not be legislated into a straightjacket. Indeed, it is the worst legislation we have seen in a very, very long time. If I am permitted to ask that question, I should like the Minister to respond to it.

Mr. Caccia: Mr. Chairman, not being an employer it is difficult to answer on behalf of one. If I were an employer with a concern for the long-term competitiveness of my harbour,

and looking south of the border with increasing competition coming from Seattle, I would be very keen to come to a settlement which would improve the productivity and the competitiveness of my harbour. Therefore, I would be very anxious for a settlement in the dispute.

Mr. Yurko: Mr. Chairman, my remarks will be very brief. When we discussed and passed Bill C-124 last summer, the Public Sector Compensation Restraint Act, many of us supported it. I supported it because it was based on the understanding that the wage and price controls in that Act were to apply only to the public sector and that voluntary collective bargaining was still the process to be used in the private sector. That Act, C-124, is being applied selectively to a new piece of legislation dealing with the private sector, and I wonder about the legality of such a practice. Because that legislation, C-124, is strictly limited to the public sector, I wonder about the legality of applying it to the private sector in such a selective manner.

Miss Carney: Mr. Chairman, I am speaking to this issue at the moment because my riding of Vancouver Centre embraces much of the Port of Vancouver and I want to emphasize the dangerous precedent which this legislation, as proposed by the Government, would create.

I would like to tell the Minister, who is justifying the imposition of six and five on the basis that it would encourage employers to improve productivity versus the Port of Seattle, that I was told in Vancouver this week that if they impose the six and five on employees, they are likely to get six and five productivity. It does not solve the basic problem of the port, and it works against the traditional Canadian method of dealing with these kinds of disputes. The basis of our amendment is to send people back to work tonight and then send the issue to arbitration.

In particular, I would like to point out the danger of imposing this kind of program in the most unionized province in the country, British Columbia. At the moment that Province is suffering enormously from the impacts of recession, the lack of jobs in the resource sector and the effects of the Liberal Government policy. There is an element of fear, concern and worry about the whole status of collective bargaining in the Province throughout all resource industries. The imposition of this band-aid measure and the imposition of an Act which was never designed for such a situation could be very, very dangerous. I would like the Minister to tell us why he does not feel he could support our proposal—send the longshoremen back to work tonight, get the grain moving tonight, get the ships moving tonight, get the docks working tonight, and send the issue back to arbitration.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order. I have consulted with certain Members and I was wondering whether it is required that we notify the restaurant that we will be sitting later, because I know a number of Members are hoping to eat at some point.

Mr. Thacker: That is an important point of order!