

West Coast Ports Operations Bill

Mr. Benjamin: And also to save his own neck.

Mr. Horner: As my hon. friend comments, he was also making remarks to save his own neck. I am in no position to judge that comment but I lay it before the committee and let the committee judge as it may see fit.

Reflecting upon the hon. member's remarks I attempted to recall when he might have spoken for the good of the country rather than in defence of the party, but could not do so. He seems to be a trouble shooter prepared to rise on any occasion. When the party seems a bit weak and needs certain defence it calls upon his superior wisdom and his comments may or may not help.

I am not trying to judge whether the party in British Columbia needs some bolstering today, nor would I like to be counted as one who suggests that this piece of legislation needs some particular defence. Having followed the hon. member's remarks closely I feel that deep down he agrees with this legislation and wants to give every opportunity possible for the normal and natural forces to work for the general advantage of the system of collective bargaining, of management and unions settling their own disputes, with the least possible government interference.

In light of that I am sure that he would be the first to agree with the amendment which I am prepared to offer to clause 5, on page 4 of the bill. I gave the purport of my amendment this afternoon. I believe that the system of collective bargaining should be given the ultimate opportunity to solve its own problems.

• (2110)

I believe that this piece of legislation was drawn up in haste. I could go on at length to indicate how I reached that conclusion. For example, less than 10 days ago the Prime Minister said that these people should reach their own conclusion and asked why the government should interfere. All of a sudden, the legislation is before us.

The date suggested in this legislation, December 31, 1972. I suggest that was not fully thought out for the good of Parliament and the collective bargaining system. Therefore, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Red Deer:

That clause 5(1) of the Bill be amended by deleting the words "December 31, 1972," in line 7 on page 4 and substituting therefore the words "February 28, 1973".

I am prepared to move that amendment because I firmly believe that, in legislating a solution to any conflicting problem between labour and management, ample time should be given to the two parties to reach a satisfactory conclusion before more restrictive and demanding legislation is brought forward. If, after ample time has been given to both parties to reach a conclusion, there is no way the situation can be solved, it may be said that they need punishment, the strong arm of the law and a very firm hand to resolve the problem.

I do not want to take the time of the committee to enlarge on the point I made this afternoon, so I will briefly summarize the conclusion I have reached. We are now approaching September 1. The solution called for here will bring about the dissolution of this Parliament either tonight or tomorrow. It may well bring about the calling of an election on October 30 or November 6. It is my belief

[Mr. Horner.]

that during the election period we will create an atmosphere in this country in which no meaningful discussion can take place with regard to this problem for which this Parliament has already formulated a solution. The two parties will want to wait until after the election to see who wins. If this government is returned to office, they may or may not negotiate. They may force further government action. If another party wins the election, they may wait to see if that party is prepared to demonstrate a spirit which will create an environment in which collective bargaining can reach a successful conclusion. I like to think that will be the case, but I may be biased.

No meaningful solution to collective bargaining will come about during a federal election. We will pass this legislation and the workers will return to work, but they will not attempt to reach any conclusion until October 30 or November 6. What will happen if there is a change in government, or a minority government with the present government still in power? There will be a period of uncertainty. A period of approximately two weeks after an election is required for the issuance of a writ to determine what party and what cabinet ministers are actually governing Canada. Another two weeks is required to appoint a cabinet. This will take us right into the festive season of December and January, January 1 in particular.

The government has been so involved in the political problem of meeting the electorate that it has failed to proceed logically step by step on this whole question. The date they have fixed is not logical. I would like to see all members of all political parties of this House unanimously agree that December 31, 1972 does not allow ample opportunity for the system to work. It does not give ample opportunity for this piece of legislation to work. It may well challenge the union to force more federal legislation upon them.

I did not reach this conclusion because of the recent turn of events in British Columbia. However, because of that, my conclusion is fortified. I ask all members to give serious consideration to this amendment. It does not change the legislation. If the strike is settled by January 1, there is no problem. The legislation will die automatically and there will be no great upheaval. If the strike is settled, the grain will be moving and commodities will be coming into and out of Canada freely, so there will be no problem. There will be no loss of face. In light of the forthcoming election and festive season, which it could be said are as sure as Christmas, why not give the system ample time to work?

Let us put partisan politics aside in this hour of urgency. Let us agree that February 28, 1973 is a far better date to include in this legislation than December 31, 1972. Let us accept this minor change in this legislation. Let us unanimously approve this bill tonight so that we can give it third reading tomorrow, face the electorate, prepare to do battle and let the electorate choose who shall govern Canada after the normal 59 days' notice is duly given. That is all I ask this House. I am not condemning the legislation. I am not condemning clause 5 or any of the prior clauses. Let us put partisan politics aside and accept this logical suggestion.