

Labour Dispute

had finally been resolved, but the very fact that we are here this afternoon indicates that is not so.

Whatever comfort the government may take from deciding that in the interest of the right to strike no public mechanism is needed, the fact of the matter is that the rhetoric of 1972, and the government's attitude at that time that negotiations had led to a happy conclusion, indicate that we still have not found an effective way of settling these matters when everybody knows that sooner or later the national interest will be affected and parliament will move in.

I can understand why in this particular instance the minister has chosen the Gold report as the basis of the legislation, but I say it is a dangerous precedent. There should be legislation to restore normalcy as far as work is concerned, but determination of the final terms of settlement should be left to somebody independent of this chamber. That is the only proper way to approach this situation, and in the long run only on that basis will both sides to the dispute accept the terms of settlement. They know that we are not in a position adequately to deal with these complicated issues. The questions asked by two members of the New Democratic Party at the close of the minister's remarks indicated just how complicated the issue is in this particular dispute and how difficult it is to get answers. I am sure the minister will try to answer those questions when we get into committee of the whole.

We shall support this legislation, Madam Speaker, but we are going to ask some questions. Surely it is time all hon. members of this House face the fact that we are not taking this action occasionally any more; there is a real pattern of this sort of thing. Everyone engaged in labour-management negotiations knows that in matters which affect the national interest, sooner or later they can expect legislation to sometimes rescue and sometimes impale them, depending on their point of view. As long as we continue this way, there will be a cloud over collective bargaining in the areas of essential services and national interest.

I remember a spokesman for the railway workers saying two years ago that they always negotiated under threat of parliamentary action and legislation. In his opinion that worked against the employees but, of course, in other cases management believe it works against them. In the absence of mechanism to identify labour disputes which affect the national interest or essential services, this pattern will continue. The pressure by unions will be more and more difficult to overcome and more and more demanding as time goes on. In the absence of some sort of program other than this elusive consensus we have been hearing about to curtail inflation, I think we will be back here taking this action again and again. As far as the public is concerned, that is just not good enough. Surely the responsibility lies with the minister and the government for solving these problems in a better and fairer way than we are solving them now. Perhaps legislation could be introduced.

● (1600)

This strike began on March 29. Over and over again members of my party from Quebec, and other members of this House representing Quebec constituencies, have

[Mr. Fraser.]

expressed concern about the difficulties farm producers in Quebec are facing. One after another they have risen in their places during the question period and asked, what is the situation; what is to happen; can the government guarantee grain supplies to Quebec farm producers; what will the government do as ships are being diverted and in some cases not being unloaded because longshoremen take the position that some ships and their cargoes are "hot"?

Day after day members on the government side did not tell us what the facts were. They gave no explanation. Certainly, the government gave no indication that this matter would be settled ultimately by legislation. One week ago an extraordinary debate took place as a result of the motion proposed by the hon. member for Bellechasse and the hon. member for Joliette. They are Quebec members. The debate began at eight o'clock and ended just before four o'clock the next morning. Many Quebec members spoke in that debate. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) who admittedly had been engaged on other matters earlier in the evening, returned to the House but did not speak. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) was not in the House at any time during that debate; neither was the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand). If you examine *Hansard* you will see that not only opposition members, but Quebec members in general expressed their concern about the situation. The government did not attempt to answer those concerns or indicate what would happen. The remarks of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) are interesting because in them one will not find any suggestion that the situation was so severe that within seven days of the debate the government would ask the House, on short notice, to get on with the business of ending the strike.

In the short time I have been a member of this House I have seen this pattern repeated over and over again. Week after week goes by: the members of the House know that in the absence of a settlement, legislation sooner or later will be introduced. But week after week we do nothing and the damage is compounded day after day. Surely that approach to things is utterly ridiculous and nonsensical. That approach seems to be based on the myth that if only we wring our hands enough and utter enough pious hopes, the situation will go away. In the end, we always act in the same way: we bring in legislation and justify it by saying that the strike affects the national interest or some essential service. But surely those areas ought to be identified well in advance. If we are to bring in legislation four weeks after a strike affecting the national interest takes place, is it not more logical to anticipate such a strike before it takes place, to pass legislation and not allow it to happen in the first place?

An hon. Member: But you can't do that.

Mr. Fraser: An hon. member says we cannot do that because it would interfere with the right to strike. What can be more ridiculous than knowing what you are going to do in the end but not doing it at first and allowing the situation to go on and on; and then, after the damage has been done, coming before the House and saying piously, "We have decided we cannot stand it any longer; we must Act." Is it utterly impossible—I see my friend on the government side shaking his head—to establish a mechanism whereby we can be warned in advance of what is