

Labour Dispute at Montreal

agreements signed by the unions as well as by the shipping federation. They were signed with the knowledge that the Picard report would be handed down, we hoped soon. They must have realized at that time that under the law passed by this parliament each of those agreements would be automatically and immediately modified to the extent of the conclusions in the Picard report.

• (2:50 p.m.)

The Picard report became available at the end of October. It was necessary to have copies of it prepared in English and in French because of the large number of people directly concerned and because I felt, as minister, that parliament having passed the legislation members should have copies of the report as soon as it became public.

Mr. Starr: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. When the Minister of Labour claims that parliament passed the bill he should make it absolutely clear that it was the government members who in their majority approved the bill and the opposition voted against it.

Mr. Nicholson: We certainly do not deny that.

Mr. Starr: He is giving the wrong impression to the country.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Ontario knows there is no question of privilege here. He is making a speech.

Mr. Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has had his opportunity to speak on this motion and he made it perfectly clear this morning what he did at the time, as did the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow). I think it is to the government's credit that they introduced the legislation and it went through; otherwise the disastrous situation that had been going on for six or seven weeks might have continued for an indefinite period. But the significant thing, the important thing, is that parliament did pass that legislation, and when the agreements were solemnly signed earlier this year both sides knew that these findings would automatically be part of the collective agreements that had been signed earlier in the year.

When copies of the report became available they were forwarded to both sides on the evening of October 31. The next day, at the opening of this house, copies in English and in French were filed in the house. That was

[Mr. Nicholson.]

November 1. It was not a case, as was suggested by the hon. member for Ontario this morning, where the Minister of Labour arbitrarily imposed any report on the parties. The parliament of Canada made it clear in July of last year that the findings of this commission would be part of the agreements—

Mr. Starr: No, the Liberal party did.

Mr. Nicholson:—which these people had signed some months after the legislation was passed. Rather than arbitrarily imposing this report on the parties, the minister did what the statute directed him to do and forthwith sent it to both parties. From November 1 to November 5 there were several meetings between spokesmen for the unions concerned, the shipping federation and their agents, the longshoring companies.

On Monday, November 6, following extended discussions the unions notified my representative in Montreal and made it public that they were accepting the findings of the Picard commission. At the same time the executive vice president of the shipping federation made a similar statement, which was later confirmed by the president. That was November 6. Both sides having accepted the findings, I think I had a right to assume that they meant what they said. But what happened?

In respect of the Picard report, as minister I do not want to be too complimentary but I must say that I have read the report and reread parts of it several times and I think the commissioner has done an outstanding job. I believe, as was said by one of the hon. members for Halifax earlier today, his findings are sound and constructive. He proposes a formula that should work well in Canadian ports in general, not just in the ports of Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Quebec. But instead of this report being implemented—and I think its language is reasonably clear—a slowdown began.

It should be pointed out for the benefit of those hon. members who have not read the report that in dealing with job security the commissioner said that those people who had worked from a certain date and had established certain rights of seniority were entitled to job security, but they were entitled to job security only in return for improved productivity. There are in the report some productivity charts which show a falling off in productivity notwithstanding technological change and new developments. The commissioner said he would therefore pick a date