

Pacific Coast Longshoremen Dispute

by this strike, is an invitation to anarchy, and a temptation to extremism. It poses a threat to the entire economy of the nation.

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to object to this motion. This involves a matter of public importance and urgency and I hope you, Mr. Speaker, will be able to make your decision without delay.

Mr. Speaker: If there is agreement, as there would appear to be, on the part of all hon. members that adjournment be granted, this of course greatly facilitates the task of the Chair, and I certainly will not use the rules to stand in the way of the unanimous desire of hon. members. This being the case, I will allow the hon. member to proceed with his motion.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, in the last few days in the province of British Columbia a situation has developed which I am sure is exasperating to all Canadians, and is producing not only in that province but throughout this land a feeling of despair, and a fear that there is a gap in the legislation of this country so wide that work can be stopped without a strike and without a lockout.

● (11:40 a.m.)

We have here a situation that is indefinable and apparently cannot be dealt with, but which functions to stop work and prevents the shipment of the produce of this country to foreign markets. This is a situation which even this parliament seems helpless to deal with, and I do not believe it can be tolerated. I do not speak just for the people of my constituency who, I assure you, Mr. Speaker, have the keenest concern in this matter.

I received yesterday a copy of a telegram which reads in part:

—have firm orders with letters of credit apples and pears many offshore markets some now being cancelled account inability to load also advised today several ships planning sail without our cargo. Have already incurred considerable expense in arranging some loading other ports. This open defiance of national interests totally irresponsible and prejudicial to interests Canadian ports as well as industry.

I believe this situation must be corrected forthwith. I urge that steps be taken to this end and I trust that this debate will have some effect in ending a situation that is, I am sure, the most serious strike with the frailest excuse that has been presented to government, labour and this country generally.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[Mr. Johnston.]

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, if the minister wishes to speak now, I would like to hear him first.

Hon. J. R. Nicholson (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I thank the right hon. gentleman for yielding the floor. It may have the effect of shortening the debate, although certainly I do not want to curtail it in any way. I quite agree that this is a very important and urgent matter. It is one that has been constantly in my mind for several days past, particularly in view of the deterioration that has developed during those few days.

I should advise the house, pursuant to an undertaking I gave when in Vancouver on Saturday last, that if a request was received that I intervene again or interest myself in the matter directly by my presence on the west coast, or by assigning other officials of my department to associate themselves with those who are now on the west coast, I would do so. Such a situation has arisen. Not only have I been invited to return to the west coast, but developments yesterday, or perhaps I should say within the last two days, with an international aspect have warranted my going back to the west coast not later than today in any event. The diversion of ships bringing goods into British Columbia ports, to the United States and perhaps elsewhere, is a matter of grave concern. More than once during the last few days I have wished that the estimates of the Department of Labour were still before the house, in order that we could have had a discussion such as we are now having.

This most regrettable situation on the west coast is an extraordinary one, as I have said on at least two occasions in the house. It is not an ordinary labour-management dispute; it is an extraordinary one. To some extent the responsibilities of parliament itself are involved. Parliament in its wisdom, and I think it was very wise in doing so, some years ago established the Canada Labour Relations Board. The board is a representative board, with four representatives from labour and four from management, with an independent chairman and an independent vice chairman neither of whom is appointed from either group. I might say that the vice chairman acts only in the absence of the chairman, of course.

I believe that on the whole over the years the record of jurisprudence shows that this board has performed very valuable services for the Canadian people. It has crossed labour and management lines in many of the decisions it has reached. I have had occasion to study its work as far back as its predecessor