

*Grain Handlers' Strike*

particularly from the farmers in my constituency, is this: get the dispute settled, get the men back to work, get the grain moving. They say this regardless of the merits or demerits of the case put forward by the companies or by the employees. That is the first priority in the minds of the farmers of western Canada. This is why we feel the bill should be dealt with expeditiously. It could be out of this chamber tomorrow, certainly on Wednesday, and it could be the law of the land by Friday at the latest. We still feel the measure should have gone to the Committee of the Whole, or, failing this, that the standing committee need call only the minister and his officials as witnesses in the interest of getting the legislation through quickly.

● (1840)

This is the fourth or fifth time, if my memory serves me correctly, that parliament has been put in this position as a result of an industrial dispute, and until one basic issue is solved it is a situation that will face us almost annually in one industry or another. The issue is basically one of parity. To secure industrial peace in any sector of our economy, parity, or to use a better word, fairness, is essential.

Farmers in my constituency, certainly in western Canada and I believe in all Canada, are fair people. They want to pay their employees fairly, and they are willing and want to provide good, clean working conditions. They want fair working relations and agreements with their employees. Both sides to this dispute, and all of the members of this House, must face up to and deal once and for all with the issue of parity in this industry.

So long as you have the situation where one group of workers receives substantially more pay than another group of workers, doing relatively the same work on the same work sites, you must face the problem of parity every year, indeed daily. I say this because it is intrinsically unfair to permit that sort of situation to continue.

This is not the first time, as I said earlier, that this issue has arisen. I recall when I was an employee on the railway in the forties and fifties that the issue of parity, of fair pay for the same kind of work, was always before us in our negotiations year in and year out. It was not until that issue was reasonably or satisfactorily settled that progress was made by both sides in railway wage negotiations. The same can be said of the auto workers.

I suppose the instance most spoken of—and my good friend from Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) mentioned it—is that of the seaway workers. One can say what one likes about the 30 per cent settlement that Mr. Pearson's government awarded, but I would remind the House that ever since then we have had relative industrial peace on the St. Lawrence seaway. This is because the issue of parity was met head on and dealt with.

In that case you had a situation where men working 150 feet apart for the same employer and doing the same job had a wage differential of \$1 to \$1.50 an hour, and the higher paid workers were on the U.S. side of the border. Once that issue was met and dealt with, and the reality finally faced by parliament, relative industrial peace has been maintained on the St. Lawrence seaway.

The Perry report goes some way toward meeting this issue and facing this reality. Farmers I have talked to,

almost all of whom are active members of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, recognize that this problem has been in existence for years, and they have honestly and genuinely tried to grapple with it, as have their employees. As I say, the Perry report goes some distance toward this end.

I for one do not want to be faced with coming back here a year from now to deal with the same issue in the same industry all over again. After the end of the first year the Perry report award still leaves the grain handlers about 25 cents an hour, and another 25 cents an hour in pension contributions, behind the rate paid to the longshoremen. At the end of the second year they will be relatively even—not completely, but reasonably even.

However, some time this winter the longshoremen will be negotiating a new contract with their employers, and the odds are that they will be given some kind of increase. This means that the grain handlers, even with the increase awarded by the Perry report, will once again be some distance behind the longshoremen with whom they work side by side. I submit that in that event the same problem could be back in front of us once again.

In these kinds of circumstances it seems to me that it will take three or four years of progression before a reasonable semblance of parity is reached. I believe, I hope not naively, that the employees and employers will be prepared to take the time to reach a settlement of the issue of parity progressively. My information—I think all hon. members are aware of this—is that discussions are now going on concerning a merger between the grain handlers and longshoremen. In the long run I believe this will be in the best interests of both the employees and the grain companies. Although it may be painful at times it will go a long way toward ending, once and for all, the issue that men who do the same work should be paid fairly.

The other matter that has been bothering me, and which I know has been bothering people in my constituency, is the cost of the settlement compared with the cost of the dispute. On the figures contained in the Perry report, the estimate of the grain companies is that the cost of the settlement will amount to some \$3.8 million over two years. I have had different figures from both sides to the dispute, and also from neutral sides, regarding what this means to the farmers' pocket. The employees say it will cost about half a cent a bushel. The companies feel it will cost one cent or 1.1 cent a bushel. But even if it costs 1.5 cents a bushel, the farmers say to me "Settle and get them back to work".

Mr. Vogel of the Canadian Wheat Board has presented figures showing there will be \$10 million in demurrage charges this year alone, something in the order of almost three times the cost of implementing the Perry report recommendations. In light of that, and in order to face up to the basic issue of parity, I believe, as many farmers have said to me, that the cost of settling will be far less than, and far preferable to, the cost of the dispute. In other words the dispute is costing the farmer two or three times as much as the Perry report recommendations.

I want to say one other thing about demurrage charges. This question has been raised before. The minister in charge of the Wheat Board has been asked and pleaded with countless times, by members of parliament, farmers and farm organizations, to deal with this issue, one that