

Inquiries of the Ministry

docks is not good. As I think hon. members know, efforts have been made over a period of months in 1966 and 1967 to bring about a better understanding between the parties. These activities have taken place before and since the Picard commission.

There is no authority under which the Minister of Labour can intervene in cases of this kind. The parties must learn that they should try to work out their own differences. Frankly it is becoming much too common for the parties to collective bargaining arrangements to turn to government for an imposed solution. The act places the responsibility on the parties to try to work out solutions for their differences.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): May I ask a supplementary question. In view of the lack of agreement on the interpretation of the Picard report as between the ship owners and the unions involved, which according to the Minister of Labour brought about the present chaotic condition—

Mr. Nicholson: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I did not say conditions were chaotic.

Mr. Starr:—will the Minister of Labour assume the responsibility, in the national interest, of convening a meeting of spokesmen for both sides in Ottawa at once in order to arrive at agreement on this report?

Mr. Nicholson: At I reported to the house yesterday, I have discussed this matter at length with one side last Friday and offered to do so with the other. Officers of my department have discussed it with that other party. It has even been suggested that if there is ambiguity in one or two passages of the Picard report or at least arising out of the fact that the Picard report supplements and amends the existing agreement, that Dr. Picard himself might be asked to clarify ambiguities. One of the parties, the unions, will not accept that suggestion. They say Dr. Picard is *functus officio* and they stand on the agreement.

Under the agreements, there is a grievance procedure and there is provision for arbitration. The parties have their rights, but they have not attempted to exercise them in the manner agreed upon. They are looking to the government to impose a solution. I think it is about time they learned they must work out their own solutions.

Mr. Starr: Will the minister use the stature and importance of his office and summon

[Mr. Nicholson.]

both parties to Ottawa at once in order to help mediate an agreement on the understanding of the Picard report?

Mr. Nicholson: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Johnston: My supplementary question is to the Minister of Labour. Have some steamship companies placed a 25 per cent freight rate surcharge on St. Lawrence port shipments?

Mr. Nicholson: That is my understanding, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): May I ask a supplementary question. Since one of the principal points of dispute seems to relate to the hiring of longshoremen through the hiring hall, will the minister state whether there have been any new proposals to settle this aspect of the problem?

Mr. Nicholson: This is not a practical possibility at the present time, Mr. Speaker, and has not been in the past. It is a well known fact that the stevedoring companies, not only in Montreal but in other Canadian ocean ports, are hired by the shipping companies to load and unload ships. They pay the bill, and in the long run they are the ones who are going to call the tune.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the minister. I welcome his admonishment to the two sides involved, but if I may be a little more serious may I ask the minister whether he would broaden his remarks and caution the parties involved to expedite whatever moves they are going to make before this difficulty begins to affect other already severely crippled ports such as Halifax and Saint John?

Mr. Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I ask hon. members to take my assurance that the minister has admonished both sides and encouraged them to take co-operative action in this difficult situation.

Mr. J.-A. Mongrain (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. Could the minister inform the house whether the crisis that is affecting the port of Montreal has extended to the ports of Trois-Rivières and Quebec?

Mr. Nicholson: My understanding is that it is confined to certain of the piers at Montreal, not other ports.