

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Madam Speaker, I point out to the Minister that it is not a question of any good being done by the Opposition. The reason that we are asking the Minister to do something is because the Government is doing no good in this situation.

Mr. Lalonde: Question.

Mr. Mayer: I would further like to ask the Minister why the Government is so reluctant to become involved because, as I understand it, as of about an hour and a half ago, both parties were willing to sit down and negotiate.

Mr. Lalonde: Why don't they?

Mr. Mayer: Both parties would be willing to accept a mediator. As I understand it, this is the first time in 30 years that a Minister of Labour has refused to become involved by either appointing a conciliator or a board. May I ask the Government to reconsider, to become involved, and to show some responsibility in this very important situation?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Labour has always indicated his full willingness to respond to the requirements of the situation, and so has the Government of Canada. If the Hon. Member's reports are, in fact, accurate, that there is now a willingness to move toward the negotiating table, then I am sure the Minister of Labour will be in a position to respond to the request. However, I would say that it is important that the parties to the dispute indicate their willingness, because they are the ones who must ultimately come to the table and make the agreement. Therefore, when we hear from both parties that they are prepared to respond in a constructive and positive way, obviously the Government will be prepared to do likewise.

Mr. Mayer: They are ready to do it now.

CONTINUANCE OF GRAIN SHIPMENTS

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, I would like to direct my question to the Minister of Transport since the Acting Minister of Labour does not seem to have a feel for the urgency of the problem at all. I direct it to him in the absence of the Minister. The Minister knows that there was no grain handled last weekend. He also knows that, because of the keenness of competition in the world market, any threat of a shutdown is seriously impeding the market at a very difficult time for western grain farmers. I hope the Minister of Transport understands that fact. I want the Minister to tell the House what steps he is taking to ensure that grain will continue to be handled on the West Coast this week, and then throughout the rest of the month.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I can only repeat the spirit of what the Minister of

Presence in Gallery

Employment and Immigration has said. I answered a question yesterday in the same way. There has been an assessment by the Department of Labour that the best way to proceed at this time is to let the parties get together and find their way out of this situation. That is an assessment and a decision made to go that way. I am told, at the same time, that there is not a stoppage in the handling of grain facilities at the ports. Therefore, the position taken by the Government is a conscious one. It is not one which is without reflection. It is one which was arrived at after deep analysis of the situation. I take comfort in the fact that the employees have said that they do not want to strike and the employers have said that they do not want to lock them out. That has all the makings of an agreement.

• (1420)

REQUEST THAT MINISTER INTERVENE

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, the Government has a responsibility. It cannot continue to reach for the silver bowl. There was a refusal to handle grain last weekend, there is a possibility of a work to rule and a lock out, all of which is having an impact on the world market, which impact is very serious at the present time. In view of those facts I ask the Minister, who has a direct responsibility here, why he does not go to Vancouver and take his responsibility in his hands and make sure there is no further slowdown in the handling of grain on the West Coast.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, and when I come back the Member would be the first one to ask why the Minister went to Vancouver and made a mess of it all.

Mr. McGrath: Madam Speaker, the Minister is right in a certain sense. If he does go to Vancouver we will hold him accountable when he comes back. But the point is that he has a responsibility to go to Vancouver and make sure there are no more work stoppages and no more slowdowns. That is his responsibility, and he ought to take that responsibility.

Madam Speaker: Order. I want to remind the Hon. Member for St. John's East that he asked me for an extra supplementary question which I gave him, and he did not ask a question.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF ASTRONAUT PAUL WEITZ,
COMMANDER OF CHALLENGER SPACE SHUTTLE

Madam Speaker: I have the honour to draw the attention of the House to the distinguished presence in our gallery of Mr. Paul Weitz, Commander of the Space Shuttle, Challenger, on its first mission.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!