

Mr. Bell: That is about 10 cents for every word you utter.

Mr. Deachman: Some of the charges range up to \$4,000. This is a situation that is costing us as taxpayers something in the neighbourhood of half a million dollars a week, or about \$2 million a month. This is a serious matter if only in respect to the demurrage.

Many speeches have been made in this House with respect to the movement of grain, but very little has been said about the other factors in this strike. The strike in Vancouver harbour not only ties up the movement of grain affecting the three Prairie provinces but is gradually tying up the entire economy of British Columbia.

Mines in the interior of the province, not having a place from which to move their ore, are forced to shut down. The tow boat industry which moves ore down along the shore is forced to close. Lumber operations along the coast must gradually come to a halt because there are no ships on which to load the lumber. Bit by bit, inch by inch the economy of the province is coming to a halt, involving its mines, its canneries, its forest industries, the movement of autos and other commodities coming from abroad through the port of Vancouver, as well as the outward movement of bulk commodities such as sulphur, coal and potash from the Prairies, and other bulk commodities from British Columbia itself.

In effect, basically we are looking at a national crisis involving half of Canada. I know it is difficult for members from eastern Canada to realize the importance of this to the west, and the extent of its impact upon the four western provinces, just as it is difficult for we western members to realize the importance of strikes such as the one that recently tied up Montreal harbour.

The settlement of the strike at Vancouver in the long run will not be an easy matter. Lying at the root of the problem is the procedure with respect to dispatching gangs to man vessels. This is an old established procedure based on the hiring hall practices in the port of Vancouver. Interestingly enough the hiring hall is owned not by the union, not by a neutral organization serving both the employers and the union, but by the employers themselves. Union members going to hire on as a gang every morning come into a hall operated and owned by the employers. It is also interesting to know that this hall is the only one owned by employers and operated in this fashion on the whole of the west coast between Mexico and Alaska.

Part of the problem lies in an agreement contained in the current contract to computerize the dispatching operations. One must realize that if the dispatching were computerized, the computer now would be owned by the Maritime Employers' Association, and the union employee, for dispatch purposes, would then be at the mercy of a computer owned by his employer. If I were a longshoreman I feel quite certain that I would not want to live any longer with a practice of that kind. I think the solution would be some form of neutral hiring hall or neutral dispatching service which would serve both management and the union.

West Coast Ports Operations Bill

• (2100)

From my own experience and my talk with longshoremen and people working on the harbour both at management and employee level, I want to say that I believe this practice of a company-owned hiring hall is at the basis of the trouble in Vancouver Harbour. I hope that in going about the business of finding a long term settlement to the problems of Vancouver Harbour the minister will look deeply into the practices which exist in the hiring hall and the way in which dispatching is done. That is the basis of the problem we are facing today and it will not be easily solved either from the standpoint of management or the employee.

It is not an impossible question, however, Mr. Chairman. Nor is the question of computerizing the operation of dispatching on the harbour an impossible one. But the solution must be based first of all on the realization that when a longshoreman comes to be hired out to a gang in the harbour he is interested in knowing what his own position is. He wants some guarantees that he is being treated fairly relative to others hired on a gang. He wants to know that the advantages are not being weighed and cannot be weighed in the direction of management and he wants to know that the service is giving him an honest break. Because that is his livelihood.

Mr. Chairman, I say this is a human problem dealing with human relationships, with people who work very hard, honest people who are down there every day to work on that harbour and who do an excellent job in moving cargo through our west coast ports. These are not people who kick against technological improvement; in fact, they are people who recognize the advantages of technological improvement. They are not an enormous number of people; they are 1500 skilled people backed up by 1800 people of lesser skill. Their reputation is not one of striking again and again; we have had long periods of peace on the Vancouver waterfront.

At the core of the matter is the recognition that it is a human problem which must be looked at in human terms. I hope that will be the basis of any investigation to secure a permanent solution. In the meantime, it is my personal feeling that these people are prepared to stand by the bill which we will pass here asking them to continue work while a better means is found to regulate work on Vancouver Harbour. I hope we will meet in good faith, as I am sure they will meet in good faith, the question of finding a way acceptable to both sides for the regulation of this dispute.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Clause agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4 agreed to.

On clause 5—*Term of collective agreement extended.*

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, I should like to speak briefly on clause 5. I listened very attentively to the remarks of the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra on the matter before the House. His remarks caused me some concern and it took some willpower on my part to resist answering him in what might be termed a political debate, but I did wonder whether he was making an attempt to defend the actions of the government in regard to this labour strike.