

Oral Questions

Acting Prime Minister now tell the House, following a series of very vague responses to questions in the last few days, whether any initiatives are being taken to promote a settlement of the dispute which has been leading to the tie-up, and what are those steps?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the steps that can be taken under the existing legislative authority are being taken. We have not reached any decision to go beyond that at the present time. Steps are also being taken to see what can be done to reduce the interference that is taking place in the movement of grain out of these terminals in areas that are not related to the dispute itself. I cannot describe as yet what the success of those measures will be because they are just getting underway.

● (1410)

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the Minister of Labour is not here as he presumably has more direct knowledge of these things than the government House leader. Am I correct in interpreting the minister's answer as an indication that the government is considering certain courses but is actually taking no initiative with regard to promoting a settlement of this dispute at the present time?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, the government is taking the measures it ordinarily takes under the law in order to promote a settlement, but it is not proposing to ask parliament to take extraordinary action at the present time. However, there are two aspects to this dispute, as the Leader of the Opposition probably knows. One aspect relates not to the movement of grain into the ships that would be under the control of the longshoremen, which is affected by the dispute, but to the movement of trucks to the elevators to pick up feed grain for the farmers in the area. We are examining this now to see what steps can be taken which would enable that movement to continue.

STRIKE OF LONGSHOREMEN IN QUEBEC—GOVERNMENT POSITION ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF JUDGE GOULD

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that when the grain handlers' dispute arose last year the government moved right in, endorsing and urging acceptance of the Perry recommendations, even while negotiations were going on, is the government proposing to engage in the same kind of intervention now by endorsing the Gould recommendations and, if not, what is the difference between the two situations?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be advisable to continue with the mediation efforts which are now underway.

[Mr. Stanfield.]

GRAIN

INQUIRY WHETHER DIVERSION OF SHIPMENTS FROM WEST COAST TO EAST COAST PART OF CATCH-UP CONTINGENCY PLAN

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the minister in charge of the Wheat Board. On February 26 the minister announced he was looking at "a number of plans" to move grain "with an attempt to catch up as quickly as possible" after the strike ends, and that reference was to the strike on the west coast. In view of the announcement by the Wheat Board a few days ago to cut grain shipments destined through the Port of Vancouver by 10 million bushels a month and redirecting this amount through the St. Lawrence and the Maritimes, would the minister advise the House whether this is part of the contingency plans to which he referred on February 26?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I would like to check the exact proposition to which the hon. member refers as it has not come to my attention. The fact of the matter is that the contingency plan for the period after the strike was one involving a maximum effort on the part of the railways to put as many cars into the west coast as possible, and a maximum effort on the part of the terminals there to unload for more hours than usual and to clean on an around the clock basis. These efforts have been putting a record volume of grain particularly through the Port of Vancouver, and very remarkably reducing the number of ships waiting there in quick order.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board announced on April 3 that because of labour problems at the Port of Vancouver shipments would be diminished by 10 million bushels a month. I would ask, first, if the minister is aware of this and whether this is now the policy of the Wheat Board, because the answer the minister has just given the House would appear to indicate that the Wheat Board is making announcements of which the minister is not aware?

Mr. Lang: That is right, Mr. Speaker. That can happen quite frequently, of course, because the Canadian Wheat Board is in fact a very independent organization, which hon. members opposite seem to forget whenever it is to their advantage to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: I do not, nor did my predecessors as ministers, try to run the operations of the Wheat Board or interfere with its management, and that has certainly been the very firm practice of this government. I would suggest that the statement that somehow labour difficulties could lead to the diminution of the throughput out of the west coast is a very strange one in view of the fact that the reports which have been sent to me in the last three or four days show an increase in unloadings to the neighbourhood of 650 to 690 carloads a day, which is a near record performance.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister whether he will undertake an investigation to determine whether there is to be a diminution of 10 million bushels a