

Grain Handlers' Strike

unionized or organized workers, representing only 25 per cent of a total labour force of 10,152,000. Therefore, nearly 75 per cent of the total labour force is wholly unprotected against inflation, not only because they are not organized but because their government has not yet faced up to the reality of inflation.

What could illustrate this attitude more adequately than the fact that parliament is now being asked to vote into law legislation that will exert excessive inflationary pressure on the economy and will establish a benchmark precedent which will be used as a further basis for protecting those already cushioned from inflation? If the government insists on being excessive, then let their excessiveness be directed to the neglected 75 per cent of the labour force who desperately require an anti-inflation policy.

I have attempted in all sincerity to bring before the House the legitimate concerns that we on this side have faced and have wrestled with ever since we journeyed to Vancouver and Calgary. We knew that in the long run a position would have to be taken. I have indicated our concern about the proposed settlement being inflationary. Second, I have stated that the spin-off as a result of a benchmark being set would be damaging to the economic well-being of this country. Third, I have stated that there is no awareness of the need to come up with solutions which will bring stability and order to the grain handling industry.

Fourth, the Perry report was not final but, rather, offered suggestions which might have formed a basis upon which the two parties could ultimately reach agreement. Fifth, the bill obliterates the word "restraint" from the government's thinking and its approach to finding solutions to halt or to reduce the two figure, runaway inflation. It disregards 75 per cent of the labour force least able to protect their shrinking dollar. The imposition of the role of arbitrator upon the federal parliament, with power to determine an agreement, is wrong.

● (1630)

In the light of all these circumstances, we find the bill unacceptable, and accordingly we shall not vote for it on second reading.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, once again parliament has been called upon to legislate a settlement in a dispute between management and its employees at a stage of a lock-out or strike and, in the process, to order management to resume full operations and the employees to return to work.

Along with the other members of my party I have always believed the collective bargaining process must be allowed to proceed freely between the two parties concerned, with every encouragement from government and the public, as well as from those more directly concerned with the dispute. We must always do all we can to encourage free collective bargaining preferably with no interference from outside parties.

There is a role for government, at each level, to play in the process of encouraging free collective bargaining. This principle has long become part of our society after decades of struggle by working people in Canada. It is accepted

[Mr. Alexander.]

even by those, some of whom sit in this House, who pay only lip service to the principle. They know it has become an essential part of relations between organized employees and their employers.

Before I go further I wish to say that over the years the overwhelming majority of labour-management disputes are settled through free collective bargaining without strikes or lock-outs, and that most of them are settled amicably. Relying on my own memory I believe that between 75 per cent and 90 per cent of contracts are renewed each year without resort to strikes or lock-outs. This speaks well for the success of the bargaining process.

For every strike or lock-out which occurs, there are nine or ten other disputes which are amicably settled by collective bargaining. But to judge from headlines or the opening news lines we hear over radio or t.v., one could easily be lead to believe that collective bargaining doesn't work although, in fact, the opposite is the case. It does work, and it works well in most instances. However, like all processes it is not perfect since so much depends on the good faith, good will and real desire to reach agreement on the part of the human beings involved on both sides of a dispute. This is why I say there is always a role for government to play, in the area of conciliation and even arbitration, on those few occasions when the bargaining process breaks down.

We in this party do not like to see parliament overriding the bargaining process. I am sure this is the feeling of most if not all hon. members in this chamber. However, we recognize, as we have on previous occasions, that when the bargaining process fails and there is a serious interference with the welfare of the nation or a significant section of the nation, there comes a point at which government should intervene to end a lock-out or strike, to resolve the dispute and, as a last resort, to order men back to work and require employers to resume operations, as is the case in the legislation before us.

Nonetheless, there is a commonsense way for government to intervene and I do not think this course has been followed. In fact, I am compelled to say that the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro), with the assistance of that walking disaster looking for a place to happen, the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, (Mr. Lang), acted ineptly when they announced publicly that the government would legislate on the basis of the Perry report. What little experience I had on one side or the other of the bargaining table, when a third party appeared to assist, at no time did the third party make public statements which could be construed by either of the other parties, as taking sides.

Surely, there was a more commonsense way of indicating the important role which, once in a while, it is necessary for the government to play. The public statements made by the Minister of Labour and the minister in charge of the Wheat Board effectively prevented any resumption of collective bargaining in this instance; one side or the other needed only to sit back and wait for the inevitable legislation. The ministers should have been much less concerned with public posturing and more concerned with getting the dispute settled.

I have talked with the farmers and workers about this dispute over the past five or six weeks. The message I get,