

Government Orders

To conclude, Madam Chairwoman, I would like to answer the hon. member from the New Democratic Party. I just receive a message from the minister which says:

[*English*]

—the minister would appoint an arbitrator only if the parties could not agree themselves as to who the arbitrator to deal with the cases of those employees who were fired or suspended should be.

At this point the parties have not requested the minister to appoint someone to deal with these particular cases.

[*Translation*]

I think, Madam Chairman, that this answers the question from the hon. member regarding the postal strike.

[*English*]

Mr. Nault: Madam Chairman, I would like to switch emphasis for a minute and ask a question relating to the geographic area that we are dealing with. I wonder whether the reason we are here today is because the geographic region we are talking about is so large that it has created a process that cannot work for the employers. Has the department taken a look at that particular issue in its entirety and could it suggest to us whether it would be necessary to make recommendations to make the geographic area smaller or split it in half or something of that nature?

Maybe it is reasonable to suggest that the reason why the employers cannot agree is because they are coming at it from different directions and have different concerns on different issues that they are trying to deal with. The only way to rectify that is to change the geographic area we are dealing with.

Could the member enlighten us as to whether we are giving the board the work load of having to make the decision on who the representative of the employer is going to be on every occasion, as a result of the fact that these employers will never be able to agree on a representative because of the unworkability of the geographic zone?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vincent: Madam Speaker, perhaps I should invite the hon. member for a visit to my riding.

The port of Trois-Rivières and the port of Bécancour are about a quarter of a mile apart, on either side of the St. Lawrence River. The employees' union certification allows them to work in the port of Trois-Rivières and the port of Bécancour. My position is that since the employees are prepared to work in both ports, to switch and travel to and fro—there is a bridge, so there is no problem—normally the employers should be prepared to do the same.

If the employers are willing—and this is in fact common practice—to hire longshoremen who work at the port of Trois-Rivières and send them to Bécancour, and hire those in Bécancour and send them to Trois-Rivières—so far the employers have had the best part of the deal. They have their employees, there has been no collective agreement for six years, and everything is fine. This legislation is important because it will force the employers, either directly or indirectly, to jointly choose a representative, and otherwise the board will choose one.

In a nutshell, the problem is this: For six years, the employees who are covered by a collective agreement have had no one on the other side of the table to negotiate with because the employers, at least some of them, cannot agree among themselves. Our legislation will oblige the employers to appoint a representative so that the employees, our longshoremen, will have someone with whom they can negotiate.

The geographic area as such is not a problem because only a short distance is involved, and the employees can work without any hardship.

• (1100)

[*English*]

Clauses 1 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Weiner (for the Minister of Labour) moved that the bill be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.