

*West Coast Ports Operations Act*

oneself were having some considerable difficulty in arriving at an agreement—and at the point in time when the Minister made his statement the Government was in fact at the negotiating table—if one were unable to see exactly where the negotiations were leading, it would not be an incentive for an outside party to say, “Do not worry about it. If you do not get it solved, we will impose something which will be far less than you have already offered”. Would that be an incentive to continue with negotiations and find a satisfactory resolution to the dispute at the bargaining table? I am sure that Hon. Members opposite can see the rationale. They can understand what was in my mind as I listened to the Minister. As I heard him speak, I thought to myself, “That is the end of negotiations in Vancouver. He signalled to the company that it is all right, the Government will fix it all up at six and five on Monday next”. Of course, I was absolutely right. That is exactly what happened. From the moment the Minister of Finance made it clear that the Government’s intention was to impose six and five, in whatever form, and to settle the dispute on their behalf, negotiations ceased to all intents and purposes. This is what makes this Bill so odious and unacceptable. The fact is that the Government did not attempt to resolve the dispute nor find a way to bring the parties together. It did not go into that last minute, long-term operation, that overnight tough bargaining which brings about a resolution of a dispute in the final moments.

● (1700)

This Government decided a week before that it was going to impose six and five, it was not going to allow the settlement to occur. Therefore, for that reason if for no other, it would be impossible for me to bring myself to support the Government’s action in this regard. It would be impossible for me to lend my support to this scheme cooked up in the back rooms of the Cabinet offices to further inflict the six and five regime on the public and private sector after having imposed it in the public sector. That makes it for me a relatively simple decision on the face of it.

There are, however, many other considerations, one of which is of course the one raised by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin), who made it quite clear that there were conflicting problems here. The Government should have seen that there were problems other than simply the longshoreman and their employers. The Government should have understood that this was having a widespread effect on the economy of western Canada. It should have understood that the farmers were under severe distress as a result of the negligence of this Government. The Government should have been involved weeks ago in trying to find a way to solve the problems in order to move the grain, open the ports and force the employers to accept their employees in their place of work and allow them to do the job they had been willing to do all along. But, no, no, no. The Government had made a decision. You see, it made a decision that it was going to allow this to reach that crisis level and then it was going to intervene, and intervene it did. That is why we on this side of the House find this kind of measure so unacceptable.

It happens over and over and over again. What we are seeing today being supported, I suspect very willingly, by all the Liberal backbenchers and with obscene haste by the Conservatives is only the thin edge of the wedge. It is going to be gradually imposed, little by little, all across the country in ways similar to this. Not openly, not above board, but slowly imposed in every sector little by little. The end result of that would be to undermine severely the collective bargaining system.

**Mr. McDermid:** Exactly what David said.

**Mr. Deans:** I want to say that the collective bargaining system in this country, notwithstanding those who speak out against it, has worked extremely well. It has worked from any perspective you want to take. It has provided a satisfactory means of resolving 90 per cent or more of the disputes between management and labour, without any work stoppage and without any confrontation. So the difficulty now is that as Government begins to use the instrument of back-to-work legislation to impose its economic policy, we can see the gradual erosion of the collective bargaining system as it has applied across the country.

What will be the end result? It will not be labour peace. Because if you take employees and employers who have outstanding issues which they know they must resolve, and if you force them by law to go back to work with those issues still unresolved, there is an accumulation of problems which ultimately will result in a blow-up and serious problems in the workplace. Therefore, if you did not believe in collective bargaining even as a safety valve, it has provided such a measure of opportunity to resolve problems which otherwise may well have totally destroyed the manufacturing sector and the employee-employer relations of this country. So I really do worry about the way in which this has been approached. I worry about the way the Government has, in my judgment, abused, its power. I worry about the way the Government moves in a heavy-handed and uncompromising way to settle things that it knows little about, that it has paid little attention to and that it has made no effort to resolve in any other way. I worry, too, when I hear the Tories talk of their desire to return to free enterprise. They want to get Government out of business, but the first time there is a problem between management and labour they are prepared to intervene on behalf of management every time. Every time!

It interests me, Mr. Speaker, that when companies open and subsequently close the Tories and Liberals tell me that this is management’s prerogative. A company can set up a plant, sometimes with Government grants, operate the plant for a time and then close it down. It can destroy an entire community in the process, but that is seen by both Liberal and Conservative Party Members as management’s prerogative. They can disrupt and ruin the futures of families, but they do not see a responsibility on the part of Government to move in and try to rationalize those situations and act on behalf of the community and the people in the community, the employees who have worked there and who may have put in many, many