

Government Orders

Every day in the country business people and corporations make decisions that are not necessarily in the national interest. They make investment decisions. They make all kinds of decisions that are not in the national interest but which are in their self-interests. When they do that people simply say that is the way the world works. These people act in their own self-interest and that is the invisible hand of Adam Smith working its wonderful way in the world and we just have to trust that this will all work out for the best. They are just showing good business sense when they look after themselves.

When working people try to look after themselves and try to put their self-interests forward in an aggressive way that says if you do not do this we are going to withdraw our services, this is sometimes regarded by some, not necessarily the minister, in the country as a heinous act.

People are doing this all of the time. We have had capital strikes in the country from time to time when people say: "I am sorry, if I cannot make the return I expect on this particular investment I am not going to make it. If I cannot do this I am not going to do this". This happens all the time. However, when it is done by the business community it is just called good business sense. When we respond to it we are just trying to create the right business climate.

● (1600)

I just wanted to share the offence which I take not in anything the minister said, but in some of the comments which sometimes attend occasions like this when people comment on the actions of strikers and ask: "Why do they not do what is in the best interests of the country?" I would like to see everybody act in the best interests of the country. If that is what the minister has in mind in the coming reforms he spoke of, then I will be behind him, but we will wait and see.

With respect to the port of Vancouver, in a larger policy framework, decisions are made all the time in transportation policy particularly with deregulation, et cetera, which have caused more and more traffic to proceed on American rail lines and to proceed to American ports. All this has happened in the name of creating the right business climate for shippers, for the railways, for truckers and what not. This harms the port of Vancouver. This harms the Canadian national interest. But this is all taken like the weather: something we cannot do anything about.

Well something can be done about it. There could be a different macro policy framework in which it is ensured that people use the port of Vancouver and are not tempted in any way, or even permitted in some cases, to use the port of Seattle or any other American port when Canadian ports are waiting to provide services.

The minister mentioned he would like to see changes in how labour relations are dealt with. I am not sure exactly what he means but I have a suggestion or two. One of them is that he

could bring in anti-scab legislation in the appropriate areas. We have been calling for this for a long time. It is certainly one of the things which might prevent many labour disputes and many strikes from occurring in the first place, or certainly not to occur for the length of time they often do.

Although it is not in the federal jurisdiction I think of a strike at Northern Blower in my riding. They have been on strike for almost two years now. I see these poor guys out there every day when I drive to my constituency office. If we had had legislation to prevent the use of replacement workers that strike would have been over a long time ago. These people would not still be out of work and there would not be the acrimony. There would not be the situation which occurs there now and has put a lot of people in a very difficult position.

I am sure there are many other things the minister will be considering, but I would ask him to please consider instituting at the federal level that kind of legislation and perhaps other ways of making sure there are no strikes.

There are two kinds of strikes. There is this kind of strike which gets dealt with very quickly. Then there are the other kinds of strikes like the one at Northern Blower and many other places that drag on and on and on. They are very destructive of people's lives and in many cases their relationships with former workers and colleagues.

I know the minister has a great many tasks ahead of him in terms of social programs. Perhaps he has too many. I have a great deal of respect for the minister but I do not know that anybody could do everything that is on his plate. I hope at some time the government considers that and provides him with some relief, particularly in this respect because I know the minister is going to be preoccupied with the social program review and will not be able to give his full attention to this kind of thing.

Our position is that we regret this has happened. We are opposed to it, as we have always been opposed to any imposition on the collective bargaining process. We think this could have been avoided had the government acted sooner or had the government permitted those who wanted to continue handling grain to handle it. However, we are prepared to help the government get this particular bill through and we will have more to say on the matter as the day continues.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating the government for bringing the legislation to the House. Reformers are pleased that the government finally listened to our persistence in Question Period to settle this issue. I would also like to thank members of all parties for their co-operation in allowing the legislation to be dealt with quickly.

I want to speak on behalf of western Canadian grain farmers in making it very clear to the House that this disruption should never have happened. Legislation that provides a long-term solution to this problem should have been passed years ago. In this regard I would like to pledge leadership on behalf of Reform