

Government Orders

It is for that reason, again, that I just want to go back very briefly and urge the government to (1) consider advising whatever person or panel of arbitrators is finally appointed to consider the serious pension issues that have been raised by the employees at Thunder Bay, and (2) to give very serious consideration to the request that has been made for a three member panel so that we can have a solution that the industry, the employees and the community at large can live with. Hopefully we will see some continuing peace and justice within that community and that industry for the next number of years.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I am rising to participate ever so briefly in this debate today. I just want to commend the government for one aspect of this bill. We, as my hon. friend from Kenora—Rainy River has indicated, are in support of the legislation in principle. We believe it is necessary at this time. So there is no misunderstanding as to why we support back to work legislation today and yet not have supported the back to work legislation with respect to the Public Service, I want to make it clear that we are supporting this bill in part because it contains an arbitration or mediation clause.

What the government is doing by this bill is appointing an arbitrator—they call it a mediator/arbitrator—to adjudicate on the matters in dispute between the parties and effect a collective agreement between the parties. The bill that was introduced to force the public servants back to work contained no such provision. It simply ordered the public servants of Canada to resume their employment and it gave them a zero per cent increase. We objected to that legislation because of its manifest unfairness and we would, of course, oppose such a bill in future. That is clearly unfair. The government should never have proceeded in that way.

In this case it has returned to an element of fairness. It has at least provided that an independent third party will adjudicate the matters in dispute. That of course is what it should have done in the case of its own public servants. What it did in that case was act as judge, jury and ultimately executioner for its public servants. It should have appointed a third party arbitrator who could have determined what was a fair contract in the circumstances between the government as employer and its employees.

This bill at least is fair. I know my hon. friend from Kenora—Rainy River has striven to ensure that such legislation was not necessary, but unfortunately it appears that the talks are not continuing at least in a way that will lead to a settlement. He has indicated that we as a party will support this bill in principle. I am pleased to have participated in that discussion. I want to make it clear that the principal reason we are doing so is because of the change in this bill from the previous bill in that it provides for an independent third party to adjudicate the matters in dispute.

On that basis, we will support the legislation.

Mr. Dan Heap (Trinity—Spadina): Madam Speaker, I want to underline certain points about the bill to order the grain handlers back to work. With the rest of my party I understand the need to get the grain moving. In particular, I understand the need of the farmers to get even the measly \$2 per bushel that may be all they get. I am also aware that there is a different kind of need on the part of large trans-national operations such as Cargill which are taking over the world marketing of grain little by little, but moving fairly fast.

I am informed that the big issue is pensions. The amount of grain moving through Thunder Bay has been declining. The number of jobs moving the grain has been declining. The remaining workers are very naturally concerned about the pension system.

It seems that the employers refuse to discuss that. They are not bargaining in good faith and are not willing to address an issue that was legitimately on the table. It is an issue that is of extreme importance not just to their employees but also to many of the residents of Thunder Bay. Those pensioners if they have a decent pension will be spending their money mostly in Thunder Bay where they have lived most of their lives.

It is unfortunate that the weight of this bill may be directed primarily not against the employers who are unwilling to talk about the chief issue, but against the workers who use the only means they have to bring the employers to the table on that issue.

As has been mentioned by my colleague from Churchill, the scale of the fines is superficially equal: \$100,000 on the employer, \$100,000 on the union if it does not follow the legislation. That is in the spirit of the French proverb that I understand in English says that "The law in its majesty forbids rich and poor alike to stale bread or to sleep under bridges". In other words, Cargill can simply chalk up a \$100,000 fine to expenses and take it