

*Air Traffic Control Dispute*

Parliament should have the right to know of the circumstances that are involved and the reasons why the government has rejected the recommendation of the judge whom the government has appointed to study the matter and make recommendations. We have recently experienced a strike at Air Canada because of the government's inaction. Parliament cannot at this particular time leave this matter in the hands of the government, which has proven itself incapable of handling similar situations in the past. The economy of the country cannot stand further abuses because of the lack of action by the government. The situation is even more important owing to the involvement of the government in the dispute.

The recommendations of the judge are acceptable to the employees of the association. The people of Canada are entitled to an explanation as to why these recommendations are not being accepted by the government.

Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that these are very urgent and vital matters at the present time.

**Hon. J. W. Pickersgill (Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot conceive of anything that it would be more urgent to debate, if in fact the allegations made by the hon. gentleman were correct, because I am sure all of us would agree that it would not be in the national interest to have all the civil aviation in this country tied up by a strike at any time, and particularly at this season of the year. However, I do suggest, sir, that the situation the hon gentleman has alleged as one requiring an urgent debate has not been correctly stated by him. I am not imputing motives in saying that; I am merely saying that the situation is that Judge Robinson was asked by me as Minister of Transport to give certain advice to the government.

The judge saw fit to divide his report into two parts. I asked him whether he could expedite the second part as much as possible, and the last advice I had from him was that he did not expect to have it until January 21. Therefore I suggest it would be quite irresponsible for the government to seek to found upon a partial report, which after all is giving advice to the government, any decision it might take. I want to emphasize the fact that Judge Robinson was not a mediator; he was asked to advise the government on certain points regarding conditions of employment. Because he was not a mediator there was

[Mr. Starr.]

nothing final that the government could responsibly do until the whole report is in, because the subjects on which he has not reported are directly related to those on which he has.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, there is another and more compelling reason why we should not depart from the ordinary procedure today—though this might not be true tomorrow—and it is this: My hon. friend the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Benson) has arranged for a meeting tomorrow morning with the representatives of the air traffic controllers, who are represented by three different associations. Discussions are going to be continued. We do not know—we are merely surmising—what the result of the strike vote which is now in progress will be. It seems to me that to have a debate based on surmises and hypotheses instead of on facts would not contribute very much to our enlightenment or to the negotiations.

I am sure that the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr), who has had great experience in these matters, knows that it would be very difficult in circumstances of this sort, at a time when the government is seeking to find an accommodation which will meet the situation and is still waiting to receive the full report, for the government to make statements in connection with the question, because they might prejudice the negotiations.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, urgent though the matter is, that any disturbance of the ordinary procedure, at a time when the matter is being actively pursued by the government and this particular group of very essential employees, would not contribute to a solution of the problem, and would be very apt to prejudice any accommodation. For those reasons I suggest that it would not be opportune to depart from the ordinary business set down for today, in order to have a debate at this time.

**Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) has in my opinion gone far beyond the question of urgency but has discussed the matter itself. I hope that in seeking to reply I will be given the same latitude that he enjoyed.

The minister admits that this is a matter of national urgency. If the air traffic control staff withhold their services it will be even worse than the Air Canada strike because it will tie up all aircraft in Canada, not merely the aircraft of one company. This would be a disastrous event, and it will be particularly serious if it comes at this season of the year when so