

Maintenance of Railway Operation Act

and will bring about a much heavier burden than would have been the case if the government had provided a subsidy to cover these costs.

I thought this afternoon the Prime Minister was in error in referring to the negotiations and quoting hearsay statements from his colleagues. Of course, the statements must have been given to him by somebody else, but he was quoting in parliament the exact questions and replies that were made during these negotiations. I had understood that the press was barred. I had understood that they were confidential negotiations. I would be of the opinion that the only possible way of bringing about a settlement through negotiation would be to have these discussions apart from the public, without the press and without the Prime Minister at some later date giving his version of the questions and answers that took place. I do not know what the reaction of anyone will be to the Prime Minister's statement. I have talked to no one. However, I suggest that by his statement this afternoon, disclosing in this indirect and back door method something that went on at a confidential meeting, the Prime Minister has done much to undermine the possibility of agreement in future negotiations and the possibility of preventing difficult situations in the future.

I think the Prime Minister was in error in what he did. He may have felt that he was making a great debating point but I think he contributed nothing to good labour-management government relations in this country. The trade union movement, as I see it, is in general a responsible movement. When Frank Hall on television, after negotiations had completely broken down and the government said it would be introducing this legislation, was asked whether he himself was in favour of doing so and whether the members of his union and those associated with him would obey the law, as a good Canadian he said, "Of course the law will be obeyed". Then he said "Even if the law is an ass". I suggest that the law as presented to parliament here should not have been necessary.

Mr. Brunsden: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is this a debate on a bill or is it an attack on the Prime Minister?

Mr. Argue: Mr. Speaker, I was in the house when we had closure. I was in the house when we had extremely violent debates. However, I have never heard anyone suggest—

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. member has any particular point of order to raise, I will consider it.

[Mr. Argue.]

Mr. Brunsden: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is simply this. We are discussing a bill. The hon. member has launched into an attack on the Prime Minister and a defence of certain other people.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is correct when he says we are discussing a bill. But debate has ranged over the whole area of labour and railway relations. It has not been confined to the bill. The question of subsidies is nowhere to be found in the bill and, strictly speaking, the hon. member is not speaking to the bill. But this is a matter of great importance and free and wide discussion has taken place. Unless hon. members want me to restrict the debate, I do not propose to restrict it in that respect. I take it that the particular reference to the Prime Minister had relevance to the statements made earlier by the Prime Minister. I do not feel that they should have been stopped either.

Mr. MacInnis: Will the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Argue: When I sit down I shall be glad to hear from my hon. friend any questions he chooses to put.

Mr. Speaker: I expect that the hon. member who has the floor will not deal with the point of order inasmuch as it has been resolved.

Mr. Argue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would never have referred to the statement by Mr. Hall on television if I had thought that, by my reference to it, I would be out of order. What I cannot understand is the sensitivity of some hon. members in asserting that this statement was an attack on the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member is definitely out of order in referring to the hon. member's sensitivity. He has a right to raise a point of order, as has any other hon. member, whenever he thinks it is proper to do so without adverse comment on his having done it.

Mr. Argue: I was saying that the action of the government has done much to undermine the confidence of trade union organizations in the ordinary process of conciliation. I had gone on to say that the members of the trade union movement, through the chairman in charge of negotiations, had shown themselves to be good, responsible Canadians. They were prepared, as I knew they would be, to obey the law even though they felt the law was in error and was a mistake.

In the road ahead it will be for Canadians to decide whether or not the course which the government has taken was the best one. I think future events will show that the