

Then what was the position? A reaction set in; reactions always follow in matters of this kind. There were efforts made to induce the government to permit these men to go back to their old positions, regardless of what had transpired. If the government had yielded readily to the pressure brought to bear upon it, it would have been unworthy of being a government; it would have been unworthy of supporting the prosecution carried on by the hon. gentleman as a lawyer. But the government adhered to its policy, although in the filling of vacancies that arose from time to time in the postal service of Winnipeg, they made an exception in giving preference to postal employees who had not been guilty of any open acts of violence. Ultimately a very large number of old employees found employment. I think this is a fair summary, and I think my hon. friend will say it is a fair statement of what transpired.

Mr. THORSON: With some exceptions.

Mr. BENNETT: There may be some exceptions.

Mr. THORSON: Very serious ones.

Mr. BENNETT: Of course, the hon. gentleman has had a much wider knowledge of the circumstances than I have. I only have them from reading the law reports and the reports in the press and the memoranda issued from time to time with respect to the situation that developed. But it is sufficient to say that a very substantial number of the four hundred who did not go to work that Monday following the opportunity given to them, subsequently found employment by reason of there being vacancies in the postal service in Winnipeg which they filled.

The question is, in what capacities were they employed; what was their contract of service; did they go back to their old positions or did they go in as new hands? The hon. gentleman stated this afternoon and, from my reading, correctly, that they came back as new hands, as those who had not formerly been in the public service. They came back just as, to my knowledge, some twenty-five or so conductors of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company came back to the service during the last two years, after they had been dismissed.

Mr. THORSON: Were the Canadian Pacific conductors taken back as wipers, or anything of that sort? Were they not paid as conductors?

Mr. BENNETT: I am coming to that. They went back as conductors having lost their pension rights and their seniority as employees of the company.

Mr. THORSON: They were not paid as apprentices.

Mr. BENNETT: Some of them, because there were no vacancies for conductors, came back as brakemen although they had formerly been old and trusted conductors. The same situation obtains in this case. It is not fair to talk about wipers or engineers or anything else in this matter. The question is to determine what the contract made by the country was with those who came back to work. There is an axiom of law that was, I am sure, invoked by the hon. gentleman in his prosecution, namely, that every man must be fairly presumed to contemplate the result of his own actions and when the opportunity for repentance is given and not availed of, the law no longer looks upon grown men as infants but looks upon them as men of understanding able to appreciate their conduct and actions. Therefore when they chose not to repent, but rather to defy constituted authority and to throw their lot in with those who desired to destroy our country and its institutions, they must have understood what the natural and logical result of that action would be. They took the chance; they declined the invitation, and at least one or two hon. gentlemen on this side of the house will perhaps at this moment be recalling the language of a great American poet who said:

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,

Some hon. MEMBERS: Carried.

Mr. BENNETT:

Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right.
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

That is carried, I have no doubt. The law attributes to these postal employees that knowledge, that intelligence, that power of determination, that power of choice by which they declined the invitation of the country notwithstanding their violation of their oaths of office, notwithstanding the weakness that had yielded to the influence of their tempters who would destroy the government of Canada. They said: We choose to remain out; we choose to throw our lot in with the strikers; we choose to throw the power of our numbers