

Maintenance of Railway Operation Act

rights of the great body of unionized workers in this country. That was the reaction to the bill of 1950. However, that will not be the reaction of most people in the course of time to the action taken by this government.

I said at the outset that we recognized that this strike was one that had to be dealt with effectively, that a strike could not be allowed to take place, but that it should have been accompanied by a settlement that provided justice to all parties concerned. The board of conciliation knew of the situation that confronts the government. It was aware of the fact that freight rates were frozen. It was aware of the fact that the royal commission had not made a report. It was aware of the attitude of the companies. In the face of all that knowledge, this board, whose chairman was appointed by the right hon. gentleman, obliged to recognize all the facts in the situation, unhesitatingly recommended an award, which we say should have provided the basis of settlement in this bill.

I say to the government, then, that this bill does not resolve any issue. This bill is characteristic of this government which, when with important issues, promptly shelves them or postpones them. Grievances are laid aside. Once again the government has failed to meet the requirements of responsible national leadership.

Mr. Walter Pitman (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, my formal opening remarks in this house must begin with words of thanks both to the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) and to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) for the extremely kind welcome which was accorded to me a few days ago.

(Translation):

Would you kindly extend my thanks to the hon. member for Berthier-Maskinonge-Delaunaudiere (Mr. Paul) for having so cordially and wittily greeted me.

(Text):

One of the great contributions of a great prime minister and a Conservative government in the nineteenth century was the creation of a national transcontinental railway system. That prime minister attempted to marshal the private enterprise of this nation in order to create this system. He failed both economically and politically. Then this great prime minister made a courageous decision. He realized that it was a national necessity and that the resources of the nation, both in land and in money, must be given to this enterprise. Thus the principle was established that, in the cause of a national necessity, all Canadians should bear the responsibility and the cost.

The maintenance of a national transcontinental system is Canada's price of union.

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

Other nations have a price to pay. Some must maintain dikes. Others must maintain costly defence on their borders. Others must maintain canals. Canada must maintain a national transcontinental system based largely on rails of steel.

This principle has been forgotten, namely that the price of union must be paid by all Canadians, not by the few men who happen to be paid by and in the employ of the national railways of this country. That is the group who will be paying this price—I refer to our price of union—at least until May 15. I say this because the wages of these men are being frozen by this legislation on the basis of the minority report, as the hon. member for Essex East (Mr. Martin) has suggested.

These men are being underpaid by any standard which you wish to accept, and several have been attempted. These men have been forced to accept a durable goods standard which they themselves do not want. They are now being forced against their will to continue working at a wage which has been set by a minority report when they indeed would be less than willing in some ways to accept even that given by the majority report; and there is no assurance that this situation will change. The government has said that it is not taking sides. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that by freezing wages it is taking sides and that a government, in maintaining the status quo, does not relieve itself of responsibility.

The suggestion has been made that the royal commission report will have a great effect on these negotiations next May, that there will be a more favourable atmosphere. Let us assume for a moment that in spite of all the railways have said to the contrary, that after adjusting freight rates fairly, after raising freight rates in certain parts of Canada, that report does allow the railways to raise the wages of these men. May I suggest that now we have a new standard, not a durable goods standard, not a Wood-Gordon standard, or any of the other standards; we now have a standard based on a royal commission decision with regard to freight rates, and we now have a decision that the ability of the railways to pay is going to be the basis of what the railway workers will be paid.

Certainly in the area of private enterprise this has great relevance, but we are not dealing with anything that can be called private enterprise; we are dealing virtually with a public utility; we are dealing with national necessity. Indeed, this makes the entire issue at variance with what we have been speaking about today. What if next year the railway income goes down? Where does that leave the unions? It is now completely undecided whether the railways can pay, and