

Air Traffic Controllers

public will feel better about it as well, even though with the planes flying there is still the dispute hanging over our heads, the failure to agree. The agreement that will be now legislated by parliament will be an agreement affecting public service employees. That is not a comfortable position for any of us and it is not something in which we should be involved, so I urge the government to make the changes in the legislation for which we are asking. It will then improve labour relations with the public service and it will be a feather in the cap of all hon. members of the House.

Mr. Leonard C. Jones (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, just think that we left this House last Friday night when negotiations could and should have been taking place between the employer, the Government of Canada, and the employee, the Canadian Air Traffic Controllers Association! Within a very few hours, as a result of the actions of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) and as a result of his abdication of responsibility to the people of this country and to his employees, we were called back by telephone, by telegram and, in my case, even the RCMP were out trying to find out where I was, all at the taxpayers' expense. All that costs a lot of money. Some of us came by jet, some of us came by DC-9, and some of us drove, but, by golly, they got us here. In any event, the bill is one for the taxpayers to pay.

It seems to me that there is an abdication of responsibility by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) and his colleagues. Why is that? It was their responsibility to negotiate a contract. As late as yesterday they had the chance to negotiate. I think every member of the House is prepared to discuss and vote for the clauses in the bill which provide for the resumption of air traffic controllers' services in this country, but the other provisions are terrible. But I think that we should not have to legislate even those provisions to resume air controllers' services when there was a chance to negotiate. This makes me think of one famous bank. I am not particularly proud of banks in this country, but one of them had a report one year which recommended less talks. There was a chance to talk on this agreement, but the government abdicated its responsibility.

Late yesterday CATCA issued a press release which I should like to read into the record. It reads as follows:

In a final effort to reach a negotiated settlement and end the existing air traffic control strike CATCA has made a new offer of settlement to the government. In that offer we have again stated our willingness to accept the Anti-Inflation Board's decision on the question of whether or not wage increases resulting from classification changes are within their regulations.

We have proposed that only CATCA's proposal of an 8% across the board increase, and an additional average increase of 4.6% resulting from classification changes be incorporated in the new agreement and submitted to the AIB for approval. Pending receipt of the AIB approval an interim salary adjustment of 7.43% would be paid to the controllers.

In order to facilitate acceptance by the government of this solution we have agreed to the government's position on all other outstanding bargaining issues. A reply to our proposal was requested as soon as possible, and we again undertook to have the normal air traffic control system in Canada in operation within six hours of a settlement.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

If it was not fair of the association to make that final offer, then I do not know what you could call it, but they were stepped upon by their employer, the government.

I have had some dealings with unions throughout the years and I have found that it is never necessary for any union to resort to a strike if the employer is fair and reasonable. In this case the employees went the last mile.

● (1750)

Yesterday afternoon, even after they had started their strike, they went the last mile. But no way; the government was not prepared to negotiate. The government wanted this parliament to assume its responsibility for it. The government abdicated its responsibility not only to the people of Canada, to the airlines and to the employees who are employed by the airlines, but also to the travelling public.

It is not a very nice thing to come from a labour constituency and be asked to legislate people back to work. That is something that happened in the slave trade. People were forced to work. The air traffic controllers wanted to work yesterday, but the government would not accept their proposal. It was a fair proposal. The controllers were prepared to let the AIB settle the matter, but the government knew what the AIB would say. I suggest that the government misinterpreted the whole purpose of the AIB. It is not supposed to replace arbitration boards or arbitrators or any other form of the process of collective bargaining.

The government made itself a dictator to decide how it was going to be done, and it almost declared how the AIB should interpret the guidelines. I suggest that the minister reconsider the wisdom of his ways. We want these people back to work, and I think they would be prepared to go back to work. They indicated that yesterday. Let us pass legislation which would provide for the resumption of air traffic control services, which would provide for an arbitrator or an arbitration board and which would get this over with now, once and for all. However, it should be done in a proper manner, not in the manner outlined by this bill.

I think it is wrong to ask this parliament to reconvene on short notice to pass legislation of this kind. If the government was going to pass legislation of this kind, it could have told us Friday night or even Thursday night. The legislation could have been brought before us at that time. But no, the government puts the taxpayers of this country to more and more expense. I am told that the airlines estimate they are losing \$3 million or \$4 million a day. Who pays the deficit of one of the airlines, Air Canada? The taxpayers pay that deficit.

Goodness gracious, the money lost in the last two days could have paid any salary increase the air traffic controllers are seeking. This whole thing is an example of mismanagement on the part of the government. It is another example of the abdication of the government's responsibilities. That is what mismanagement is all about.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, we have been asked to pass back-to-work legislation a number of times.