

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

This is a Liberal newspaper speaking. This is not a critic of the government but one of its supporters, Mr. Speaker.

For those persons who feel that the amendment which has been moved or the speeches which have been made are obstructionist I will read the next sentence:

The opposition should hold up the bill and fight for a more realistic wage proposal. The right standard is not to be found in the excessive wage increases won by the dock and seaway workers, but in a formula based on wages in the durable goods industries.

The editorial winds up with these words:

The government's proposal for continued negotiation under a federal mediator, followed by arbitration, if necessary, is pointless time-wasting. There is no reason to believe that genuine negotiation will take place. And considering the sharpness of the railwaymen's discontent, more waiting seems likelier to heat them up than to cool them off.

It would be far better for Parliament to impose a decent settlement now. That is the way to get the railways moving again, to insure an equitable deal for the workers, and to maintain a degree of respect for Parliament and the law. That respect is now jeopardized by the government's folly.

Mr. Pickersgill: I wonder whether the hon. gentleman would permit me to ask him a question?

Mr. Douglas: Certainly, if Mr. Speaker will take into consideration the time taken by it.

Mr. Pickersgill: I would ask the hon. gentleman whether he subscribes to the view expressed in the editorial he just read, that this parliament should set wages?

Mr. Douglas: You have done it. You have done it.

Mr. Pickersgill: We have not.

Mr. Douglas: I have already expressed my opposition to wages being set by parliament. But I plead with the government that if it is going to set wages, then in heaven's name set decent and reasonable wages.

● (5:00 p.m.)

Mr. Pickersgill: I wonder whether the hon. gentleman, who is always fair and reasonable, will permit a second question?

Mr. Douglas: When the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate starts to hand out compliments I know there is trouble ahead. Very well.

Mr. Pickersgill: I would ask the hon. gentleman whether he can point out any place where this bill sets wages. Does the bill not

[Mr. Douglas.]

state a figure and allow that figure to be increased by mediation or by arbitration?

Mr. Douglas: I can save the hon. gentleman sputtering much longer. May I put it in a single sentence. This bill sets the wage at which a man will be required to work and tells him that anything more will have to be got as a result of the finding of an arbitration board in the event that negotiation does not produce a settlement. If that is not setting wages, I do not know what is.

The Minister of Transport, who is sputtering to himself in his seat, is not going to deceive the railway workers of this country into believing they are not being hijacked into going back to work for wages which they do not know. Nor does the minister know what they are going to be. They may get nothing more than is provided in this bill. They have no guarantee of a single dime more than this bill provides, and the minister knows that. Let the hon. gentleman not try to split hairs and wriggle around to get out of the tight position in which he finds himself.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Douglas: If the minister wishes to make a speech he can make it, but he is not going to take up my time. Unlike the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, I have limited time at my disposal. I want to make a case and I do not propose to have my time frittered away by nonsensical questions. If the minister wishes to make a speech justifying the government's position I am sure we will all listen to it.

The basic weakness of this legislation is that it may not be effective in getting the men back to work. That is the most serious aspect. Throughout the history of this country the labouring people have been among our most law-abiding citizens and I hope they will continue to be so. But if the government wants people to respect the law, then the law must be deserving of respect. If the government wants the workers of this country to hold parliament in high regard and obey the laws, this parliament must be careful to ensure that the laws it passes are just and fair. This law is neither just nor fair.

These men are not unaware of the fact that if this law is passed it will force them back to work under conditions imposed upon them and about which they have no say whatsoever. They are not unaware of the fact that while their wages will be set by someone else, partly by parliament and partly by an arbitration board, the government and parliament