

*Maintenance of Railway Operation Act*

base period, and still going up. Two groups of people are suffering primarily from this condition, both as producers and as consumers—the workers in industry and the producers on the land. The producers are paying more for their machinery, more for their supplies, more for their repairs. The workers are paying higher rents and higher prices for food and other supplies. They are the groups among the consumers who are most vitally interested in this transportation problem. Let me say that just as we fought and will continue to fight discriminatory freight rates, so also we fight substandard conditions for any of our workers in our transportation industry. We have no more right to ask producers in the maritime provinces, in British Columbia or in the prairie provinces to bear an undue share of the cost of transportation than we have to ask the lower paid men in the railway unions to bear an undue share of the cost of transportation.

There is a wide misunderstanding in the country—and I know this from my correspondence—regarding this strike. Many people are under the impression that the strikers are the more highly paid operating personnel of the railway; that is not so. The unions involved in this strike are the non-operating unions, covering the men who sweep out the cars, the men who handle the freight and express—what you might call the little people in our railway system. These are the people who are striking for a better standard of living. When you compare their wages with those of employees doing comparable work in the same towns and cities, you find they are lower.

I believe this whole matter, Mr. Speaker, stems from the failure of the government to safeguard the Canadian people during this post-war period, and particularly do I say this in relation to the rapid inflationary increase in the cost of living. We cannot expect that any group of people will long suffer the disadvantages that the present situation has brought upon the groups I have mentioned. If we look at this bill we find that all it does, as I have said, is to provoke further discontent, and to provoke a fear that this compulsory feature will be taken as a precedent in the future. If these objectionable features of the bill were eliminated I believe the government would find that there would be substantial support for the resumption of railway services, and the reopening of negotiations from the basis which was reached last Saturday.

The bill does not contain any deadline for the commencement of the forty-hour week. As a matter of fact I believe it is generally known—I think the Prime Minister or the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg) mentioned it yesterday

—that in that particular the difference between the negotiating parties last week was only a few months. We should remember that the railway men had come down many months from their original position as to when the forty-hour week should go into effect. The date the men wanted was June 1, 1951, and the railways suggested September 1, 1951. The bill does not say that the forty-hour week should go into effect at a date on or before September 1, 1951, the date furthest away. There is nothing in the bill to that effect, and it may mean nothing to the arbitrator. I believe the leader of the opposition is quite right in saying that clause 3 of the bill contains no real guarantee, except of a temporary nature, with regard to wages.

Again, with regard to the forty-hour week, the understanding is and was that if the forty-hour week came into effect—the railway management did not disagree with this—then the take-home pay should be the same. The bill now before the house contains no guarantee of that. Consequently no matter how much one may want to see the railways resume operations, every member of the house should scrutinize the bill and understand its implications. I suggest to the government that, having regard to the debate and the objections or suggestions that are made, it should give an undertaking that the objectionable features will be eliminated in the committee stage to enable hon. members to support what purports to be the purpose of the bill, namely, the resumption of railway transportation in this country. May I also repeat what I have said before: if we pass a bill for the resumption of railway transportation, if we do all the other things that will be expected of us to get the railways running, we shall not have solved the transportation problem in this country.

I believe that out of this meeting of parliament must come a consideration of the whole Canadian transportation problem. What we require in this country is a national transportation policy and a national transportation system, not necessarily entirely publicly owned. It should at least be a system which will integrate every form of transportation, and which will give fair and reasonable service at fair and reasonable rates to all parts of this country. At the same time it would enable the transportation system generally to earn a sufficient amount so that it would not have to pay substandard wages or charge any class of its customers in any area the discriminatory rates that we now see.

I am disappointed in this bill. On Monday night I thought we were going to get something from it. I thought that perhaps the Prime Minister, since he said in the house yesterday he had received a lot of advice,