

Maintenance of Railway Operation Act

transportation facilities resulting from the dispute between the railways and the unions representing the non-operating employees of the railways. I find that the last time that this was done, instead of a pro forma bill being presented, was in 1937, when at this stage of the session the then prime minister introduced as Bill No. 1 a measure respecting alteration in the law touching the succession to the throne. Doubtless our first item of business this session should be to see that railway transportation throughout the country be restored as soon as possible. For that reason I am asking leave to introduce this bill instead of the usual pro forma bill which goes no farther than first reading.

I would also suggest that the house do not, as is customary on the first day, adjourn after the formalities, but continue the sitting this evening. I would propose this evening to open the debate on the second reading of Bill No. 1. I do not think that first reading of the bill can be the subject of debate, and I do not intend to comment further at this time; but I shall make a full statement when the house resumes after dinner. I shall suggest afterwards that a special motion be dealt with concerning procedure in the house. All hon. members realize that the interruption in railway services is occasioning more than inconvenience—I will not use any stronger word—every additional hour that it is prolonged. I am sure that it will be the desire of hon. members to give due and serious consideration to what should be done in that regard, and to do so as expeditiously as circumstances may warrant, so that the decision of the representatives of all the people of Canada may be made known at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Green: Is the bill available?

Mr. St. Laurent: I have the bill, in which certain typographical corrections have had to be made. It will be available for distribution. The deadline has been set at 7.45 p.m., and it will be available for distribution then. I hope that in the meantime I shall receive from the printer a few copies so that I can make one available to the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) and one to each of the leaders of the other groups. I have asked that the other copies be not distributed until there is a copy available for every hon. member of this house. I have asked that that request be rigidly adhered to, because I can see no reason why any but the leaders of the groups should have priority over anybody else; and particularly, in spite of the great interest taken in the matter by our dear friends in the press gallery, I can see

[Mr. St. Laurent.]

no reason for any copy being available to them until it is available generally to members of this house.

Mr. Speaker: Has the hon. member leave to introduce the said bill?

Mr. Knowles: Would it not be in order, Mr. Speaker, to ask the Prime Minister to give us a brief explanation of the bill now?

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Knowles: It is in order.

Mr. St. Laurent: I think the brief explanation is complete at this time; it is a bill to require the resumption, at the earliest possible moment, of railway transportation services by the railways and by their employees.

Mr. Knowles: On what terms?

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, either at this time, or when the subsequent motion to amend the procedure is introduced, the procedure which it is understood will be followed tonight might be indicated. Perhaps the Prime Minister might feel that this would be the appropriate time to do that.

Mr. St. Laurent: I have had interviews with the leaders of the various groups. I have assured them that it is our desire to avoid, if possible, the taking up of time in discussion of procedure, and that with that end in view we would try to meet the wishes and convenience of the members generally. It is my intention to move for the temporary suspension of the rules which had to be suspended at the special session of 1939 in order to enable the matters that were then so urgent to get consideration; then, when His Honour has reported His Excellency's speech, to move that it be considered as soon as Bill No. 1 has been disposed of. Then I shall ask the house to agree to sit this evening, which would be in accordance with the rules, though not in accordance with the practice; and I shall ask the house to sit tomorrow morning and tomorrow evening, though it be Wednesday, and each day at eleven, three, and eight, and Saturday also, if necessary, until this bill has been disposed of.

I had intended to suggest that that same rule apply to the other matter referred to in the speech from the throne, the international situation with which we have to deal; but I have been informed that it would not be the desire of a substantial number of hon. members to commit themselves at this time to three sittings a day in respect of anything but this emergency legislation dealing with the interruption of the railway services. I do not want to ask the house to do anything that would not be agreeable to practically the