

House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—TENTH PARLIAMENT

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

TUESDAY, May 12, 1908.

The SPEAKER took the Chair at Three o'clock.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE.

Mr. J. J. HUGHES. I rise, Mr. Speaker, to a question of privilege. In the Halifax 'Herald' I find a report of an interview between an alleged prominent labour leader of the Railway Employees Organization and myself, which is entirely inaccurate. The interview is given as follows, under large headlines:—

It is a well-known fact that an interview was held recently between J. J. Hughes, Liberal member of parliament for Kings, Prince Edward Island, and a prominent labour leader of the railway employees' organization, when the former unhesitatingly expressed himself as utterly opposed to any sort of labour organizations and would not give his support to measures emanating from them if brought up in the House of Commons on their behalf.

PROBUS.

Tennyson says:

That a lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies,
That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright.
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.

This is exactly the case in regard to this interview.

On my way from Ottawa to Prince Edward Island at Easter I met a man who claimed to be a labour leader and an organizer of railway employees. He told me that he belonged to the United States, and that he was going to Prince Edward Island to organize a union of the government railway employees to demand shorter hours of labour, and asked me whether I would support such legislation if it were introduced in parliament. I told him I would not promise in advance to support any legislation. I said that I doubted whether the hours of labour of railway employees were excessive, and one of my reasons for so doubting was that for every vacancy that occurred in the government railway service there were from one to a dozen applications; that I did

not think so many young and middle-aged men would be so anxious to enter the service if the hours of labour were unduly long or the wages unduly low; that I did not think the hours of labour of the railway employees were any longer, if as long, as those of the farmer, the fisherman, the store-keeper, the clerk in stores, the mothers of families in poor and moderate circumstances, the editors and other workers on newspapers, the members of parliament, the ministers of the Crown and the thousands of people who had to work for a living and obtain it as best they could.

He then asked me if I were opposed to labour unions and brotherhoods, and I answered 'No,' providing they were formed for the purpose of improving the social, the physical, their material and the moral well-being of their members by every legitimate means; but that I was opposed to such unions and brotherhoods if their object was to force from parliament legislation unduly favouring themselves at the expense of the rest of the community; that the labour unions and the railway brotherhoods had exactly the same rights in this country that all other classes of persons had, but not one right more; that under our constitution and laws no class of men in Canada could suffer injury or wrong without receiving speedy and ample redress, and therefore we could settle all our troubles and difficulties without the assistance or advice of foreigners; that, in my judgment, our labour unions and railway brotherhoods were quite capable of managing their own affairs without the interference of professional agitators from the United States; that there was one kind of legislation I would promise to support in advance, and that would be legislation to prevent him and men like him from coming into this country to stir up trouble where none existed and to manufacture grievances.

He informed me that he would come in to Canada as often as he wished and comport himself as he wished; that the labour unions and brotherhoods of this country were strong enough to crush any member of parliament who opposed their views, and he would see that my words and attitude were reported in the proper quarter.

I presume, therefore that the report in the Halifax 'Herald,' which has been copied