

Lay-Offs of Railway and Other Employees

I for one feel that this adjournment motion is well founded, but failing that we are counting on some sort of reply from the minister. I take this opportunity to point out that in my opinion this is one of the most serious matters we have had to face in the maritimes. This whole transportation problem, of which the lay-offs in Moncton are a part and concerning which a protest was made the other night, gets to the roots of confederation promises.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas) did not deem it advisable to give us a copy of his motion in French but, in any event, the question he brings up in his motion is very important and most urgent, since it concerns the massive lay-offs at the C.N.R. Such lay-offs create economic chaos and brings insecurity to several families. Indeed, hundreds of employees were dismissed on the 1st of November and I am told that others will be laid off by the 15th. Now, this creates an alarming situation for people who have worked for the C.N.R. for 15, 18 or 20 years.

Just the same, Mr. Speaker, I feel that those lay-offs are not taking place only in the C.N.R., but in many other fields throughout the country. If an emergency debate were to be held—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member at this time. I know that he has some interesting points to submit to his colleagues, but I remind him that he must restrict his remarks to the question of urgency of the debate. He must only deal with the necessity of adjourning the regular business of the house to discuss, not any other matter, but the definite matter referred to in the motion of the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam.

Mr. Caouette: I thank Your Honour for this information and I shall restrict my remarks to the terms of the motion.

I simply wanted to draw a parallel between the urgency of this matter and that of other economic situations in our country related to precisely the same state of affairs. Even if we were to discuss these lay-offs all afternoon, it would not give work to C.N.R. employees tomorrow morning.

These people are suffering the consequences of an obsolete economic system

[Mr. Bell (Saint John-Albert).]

that applies not only to them but to the whole population. That is why I say it is not so urgent to discuss the question of the railroad employees because we will not solve it this afternoon, but we should face the whole economic questions in Canada and let the government or the Department of Transport discuss with the authorities of the C.N.R. anything relevant to this particular case so as to find the means to restore order in the economic field.

So, I do not believe that the urgency is as pressing as the motion now before us suggests.

[English]

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, once again we are confronted with this same matter of urgency of debate. I imagine the first question we must consider, and which I hope Your Honour is considering in respect of your ruling, is when would we have otherwise an opportunity to discuss this very serious national problem. The leader of the New Democratic party has dealt with the lay-offs on the railways and has shown that this is not a problem which is local in nature but is one which exists across the country. There have been 800 lay-offs in the city of Calgary alone. This is a matter which is national in scope and I ask, when can we discuss it. I think we must take into consideration the fact that because of the new rules and the guillotine method many questions remain unanswered; opposition and other members of parliament are unable to obtain answers from the minister.

I support the motion of the leader of the New Democratic party in this regard and I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you should allow this debate. Not only is this matter national in scope, it is also all wrapped up in the problems in respect of the loss of the coal markets, the loss of the wheat markets, the high freight rates and so on. All these things are interrelated with the lay-offs. The railway companies have no work because there are no wheat or coal markets. This in turn can also be related to the comparative cost of transporting coal in Canada and in the United States. One cannot isolate these things. We have not had the opportunity of obtaining answers from the government because of the new rules.

• (2:50 p.m.)

Mr. Howard Johnston (Okanagan-Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, we in this party are prepared to support this motion this afternoon. Having regard to the seasons we have