

Inquiries of the Ministry

Post Office Department, dated since January 1, 1951, having to do with collective bargaining rights, the forty-hour week and any other matters affecting rates of pay and/or working conditions.

NEWFOUNDLAND**R.C.A.F. TRANSPORT ON SPECIAL FLIGHT FROM ST. JOHN'S TO GANDER**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Prime Minister, of which I have given notice. I should like to know what representations were made by the premier of Newfoundland as a result of which instructions were given for an R.C.A.F. plane to make a special flight from St. John's to Gander last Thursday night with a German national on board and to pick up another German national at Gander who was arriving by a Sabena plane from Germany that night. I raise this question because according to press reports this was part of the general political activity which has been taking place down there recently. I am asking what representations were made which resulted in this plane being made available.

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): I thank the leader of the opposition for sending notice of his question to my office so that I could have the matter looked into and get whatever information was available. On Thursday evening the premier of Newfoundland telephoned my office and asked if an R.C.A.F. plane could fly a government official—not a politician; that was his statement—from St. John's to Gander that evening. He said that the matter was urgent and that no other means of transport were available.

The matter was brought to my attention and I said that I could not give any order for any such flight but that it was the general policy of the government to meet reasonable requests from provincial governments when it was possible for us to do so. I suggested that they try to get in touch with St. John's to find out more about it and I especially warned them to make sure that it had nothing to do with the election that was in progress down there.

I understand that the deputy minister of national defence tried to get through to St. John's by telephone, but after several attempts he found that it would be several hours before he could do that. He communicated this information to my office and it was brought to my attention. I said, "Mr. Smallwood told us in his first message that he had been in touch with the officer commanding the air force down there and perhaps that officer knows what this is about;

perhaps you could let him know that we do not want to refuse to do something which may be important—I do not know—but perhaps you might tell him what is the policy of the government in such circumstances. If you cannot get an answer from him, let him take the responsibility of deciding what would be proper in line with government policy". I said that I did not want to do that as Prime Minister, that there was an Acting Minister of National Defence. I said, "You can tell the acting minister what my views are without their being instructions from me, and determine with him what you had better do about it". I understand that, after discussing it with the deputy minister, the acting minister saw that that kind of message went to the officer commanding the R.C.A.F.

Mr. Coldwell: Who is the Acting Minister of National Defence?

Mr. St. Laurent: The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Lapointe). I understand the flight was made. I do not know whether there was a German national on the inward or on the outward flight. We will inquire as to how the officer commanding the air force down there attempted to carry out this general policy to be of service to provincial governments but to be careful not to take part in any political controversies.

Mr. Drew: Since the Prime Minister has indicated that he will be getting further information I would point out that the definite, undisputed facts, as set out in the press reports which have appeared, are that this plane went to meet a Sabena aircraft arriving from Germany that night and that on that plane was a Dr. Sennewald, who has become a figure in the political campaign under way in Newfoundland; that on the plane going to meet him was a German by the name of Brown Wogan; and that he went to meet this man for purposes which were quite apparent. I should like to know why a special plane should have been made available.

Mr. St. Laurent: All I know is that the policy of the government of Newfoundland, whether it be proper or improper, has been to try to bring industries from overseas to be established in Newfoundland. Mr. Smallwood did tell me about some of his projects and I hope they will be successful. I shall make further inquiries and endeavour to see, on the one hand, that we do not refuse to do reasonable things for provincial governments, but also that we do not comply with requests that might be regarded as unreasonable.