

Supply—Privy Council

at the very first hearing when the commission was starting here in Ottawa I was a spectator and I noted that at this hearing it was made clear that the royal commission was going to keep completely away from the problem of railway labour.

We get all kinds of ironies and paradoxes. We have had one very recently in connection with the uranium industry. Here we have an almost classic one, namely that of a royal commission that on its very first day deliberately eschewed any responsibility or any interest regarding the labour side of railway problems. Yet we are waiting for their report as the solution or the advice to the government by means of which to get us out of one of the worst labour-management snafu's we have had in Canadian railways.

It seems to me that this was most unfair to the commission because, from my observation of the commission during its earlier hearings and through following the evidence, I believe that the decision to keep labour matters out of the commission sittings was taken at the advice of the executive. Here we have a commission that started with one complete part of railway operations outside of its jurisdiction; and the other even more contentious issue, namely that of the Crowsnest pass rates, was deliberately ruled out as an issue more specifically by the Prime Minister in his statement in which he set up the commission. Yet while facing one of the worst crises that the railways have had in Canada not only with regard to freight rates but with a strike deadline on May 15, we are waiting with bated breath for a report by a commission that has deliberately stayed away from labour problems.

I feel that very rarely have royal commissioners been put or placed themselves in such a peculiar position. I was critical right at the start of the number of people who were on this commission. The royal commission a decade ago was concentrated really in three men. This commission has been larger and it seems to me that an almost impossible burden has been placed upon these commissioners over the period since they got started. It seems to me that such an unwieldy group of commissioners makes it very difficult to hope for coherent and consistent reports. I do not know whether we shall have minority reports from the commission. However, it seems to me that this is an example of the wrongful use of a royal commission. The report and the use that government indicates it is going to make of it—that is as some kind of solution to the problem—can only be an interim one since obviously this commission did not deal with the whole range of railway or transportation problems that was dealt with by the royal

commission a decade ago. Anyone of us looking back at that old royal commission will agree that in the majority or minority reports or special memoranda prepared by Dr. Angus and Dr. Innis, we have an insight into and a conception of our railway problems a decade ago that were most useful to everyone. I do not see how we can possibly get them from this particular royal commission.

I should just like to underline the fact that we have perhaps the worst railway crisis of our history facing us within a month or a month and a half and everything about it seems to hinge upon this royal commission report. When we had the maintenance of operation bill here before us early in December the Prime Minister indicated that negotiations were going to continue in the interim and that strenuous efforts were going to be made to solve the deadlock. Instead, at least according to word from the people in the unions, no progress at all has been made. Negotiations in effect are a dead issue at the present time. The railways are hard and fast in the position in which they were last December and so are the unions. So far as we know the government has been waiting all this time for this royal commission interim report that has not yet been received. It seems to me that on a domestic issue this is brinkmanship of a kind that we should not expect from a government that has had three years in which to survey transportation problems.

There is nothing we can do at this time to express our displeasure at or our low opinion of this kind of approach to transportation problems. However, I feel that we in our party should express right now what is almost our dismay at what we are faced with in the transportation field within the next six weeks and the complete lack of any indication as to how we are going to get out of it on any kind of reasonable basis.

The Deputy Chairman: Shall vote 720 carry?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, I think the hon. member for Port Arthur has made a strong case for a statement from the minister which will, as he hopes, throw some light on this extremely important and indeed extremely dangerous situation; and one which is, so far as we know, completely frozen having regard to relations between the railways and the workers. No doubt one reason why it is frozen is that we were told that it could not be unfrozen until this royal commission had made a report in which would be included recommendations which might be effective in dealing with this matter.

As my hon. friend has just pointed out this is a royal commission which told us