

None of us in this House envies him the task with which he has been confronted during the past three weeks. He has toiled long and hard and worked night and day trying all avenues to secure a negotiated settlement of the non-operating workers dispute. No one in this nation can say that the minister shirked his duties throughout this difficult period.

Having worked on the railroad for 27 years, I believe I am very close to railroading. I cannot, therefore, escape taking a very close interest in this dispute, although I pledge to you, Mr. Chairman, that I will be as fair and as unbiased as I can.

The legislation which has been presented to the House represents a starting point from which continued collective bargaining, mediation or binding arbitration can begin. The employees of the railroads will have a lump sum of retroactive pay in their pockets at an early date. I am sure that the negotiations which take place will consider the allegation that the railway workers' wages in past years have fallen below the wages being earned by organized labour in general, working in other industries across this country. I am also quite sure the negotiations will include a long, hard look at the increases in the cost of living which have occurred in Canada in recent months.

The question of job security is another very important consideration which must be given attention in future talks. This item is exceedingly important to the workers' peace of mind and sense of well-being. The announcement which the Minister of Labour made, setting forth an industrial inquiry commission, is essential to the attainment of a good settlement. The costing of pensions has remained central to the negotiations which have transpired. Further, they represent the salary on which one day the employees and their families will have to live.

We have been told for many years that the railways are essential to the well-being of the nation and her people. This fact has once again been proven through the last few weeks, especially during the days of the total shutdown. It is, therefore, also essential that the members of this parliament remember that the railway workers are essential people in our economy and must have the right to a decent living wage, good working conditions, reasonable pensions, and job security.

I think that every member must realize that every hour during which the Canadian railroads remain paralysed worsens the tragedy which is affecting millions of our citizens. Right at this moment more than 1,200 men, women and children are stranded on Cape Breton Island, desperate for transportation to Newfoundland. The establishment of immediate ferry services between North Sydney and Newfoundland must be considered an absolute priority. Crews must be provided to man ferry services immediately. The amount of mental suffering, agony and anguish is already beyond belief.

Western farmers must have their grain shipped to markets throughout Canada and internationally. Interruption of essential transportation links with our island provinces and with Vancouver Island has serious implications. Workers all across the nation are being laid off and great financial losses are bound to result.

Railway Operations Act

All the railway workers realize the hardships their strike is causing. They also know that in terms of dollars per week they do not take home enough money. These workers are responsible people who are only looking for a fair and just settlement without the use of the only weapon which they usually have, that of the strike. Having talked to hundreds of workers, I am convinced that the men and women involved do not like the idea of a strike. All they want is the right to work and earn a decent living wage so they can maintain their homes and raise their families at a decent standard of living.

At the present wage level, I am told, many rail workers do not even qualify for a National Housing Act loan. Mr. Chairman, it is unthinkable that in this great country of Canada many employees in an essential service cannot afford to own the roof over their heads. This is what married life is all about: this is the dream—the right to work hard to save a down payment, followed by the purchase of a home of a married couple's choice and then, again through the process of hard work, to pay for the house and also to make improvement to it, all the while making monthly payments.

I must say that the railway workers are all hard working, responsible citizens. During the war years many of them responded to the call of their king and country so that our way of life would not fall and our right to freedom would be maintained. Also at this time all the railroad unions agreed not to strike. The membership of the non-operating unions, shopcrafts and running trade unions agreed to work longer hours. These were all very patriotic gestures, but since the war all these good deeds have been forgotten. The workers have fallen behind other workers in wages as well as working conditions. Mr. Chairman, these workers, all solid citizens, are working for wages in the lower brackets. I think it has to be said that this group of workers has been very patient since last November and they have waited a long time. I know these men are law-abiding people.

For a moment I would like to imagine something. What I would pretend at this juncture is that I am an arbitrator. What I will relate to you is the way in which I would approach these talks as an arbitrator. First, however, we must note that I am certainly no arbitrator. I am one of the little men. I was one of the men who worked for these meagre wages. I am not a mediator or arbitrator who receives \$50 per hour or \$250 or \$300 a day for the sole purpose of recommending what workers should receive in terms of benefits. However, it does raise the point that I may be in the wrong business.

Maybe, indeed, we should all take a look at the field of labour relations. At any rate, given that I were an arbitrator, I would approach the wage situation as follows. I would work on the principle that the workers' wages should in some way reflect the annual growth in the company and in the economy. I know quite well the growth which has been achieved in our gross national product. I know equally well the growth in revenue experienced by both CNR and CPR. I am also quite aware of the subsidies which are provided to them.

As an arbitrator, and being conversant with management and labour's position in this case, I feel that many of the workers' requests are not unreasonable. The average