

Inquiries of the Ministry

government is not acting on the report of Mr. Justice Robinson, and what reason there has been for the delay which has brought this situation to the point where the employees have no other recourse than to take a strike vote?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of National Revenue and President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, first of all the hon. member spoke of a threatened strike. A strike vote is taking place. As a result of the hon. member's long experience in labour matters I am sure he is well aware that no strike is threatened at this point. A strike will be threatened when the associations involved say they are going to strike, after they have the results of the vote, and move toward setting a strike deadline.

The second point I wish to make is that discussions have been going on for some time with employees concerning the report of Judge Robinson. In respect of the discussions which I understand will take place tomorrow, I have requested that I be allowed to meet with representatives of the three associations. We will continue to discuss this particular matter.

Mr. Douglas: I have a supplementary question. The minister still has not answered my question as to why the government has apparently consistently refused to accept the recommendations of its own conciliator appointed by the Minister of Transport?

Mr. Benson: First of all, Mr. Speaker, Judge Robinson was not a conciliator.

Mr. Douglas: I did not say he was.

Mr. Benson: Yes, you did. He was appointed to examine certain working conditions in respect of air traffic controllers and report back to the government. The government is entitled to consider these recommendations, but it is not bound by the advice of Judge Robinson. It is up to the government to consider whether or not an acceptance of such recommendations would be in the best interests not only of the employees but of the people of Canada as a whole, to whom the government is responsible.

Mr. Douglas: I have a further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. No one is denying the government's right to consider recommendations, but let me ask the minister for a third time why the government has refused to accept these salary recommendations?

[Mr. Douglas.]

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to answer this question after I have discussed the matter with the employees association.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Did the government ask Judge Robinson to bring in a report on the salary and wage question?

Mr. Benson: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Eric A. Winkler (Grey-Bruce): I have a further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the minister whether the government has rejected the proposal?

Mr. Benson: There were no proposals. These were suggestions of someone hired by the government to look into working conditions in respect of these particular employees.

Mr. Winkler: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Has the government rejected those recommendations?

Mr. Benson: We have not got them all yet.

Mr. David MacDonald (Prince): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the President of the Treasury Board. I wonder whether he can tell us why, then, Judge Robinson did introduce his report in two parts. Could he tell us the reason why Judge Robinson submitted the first report on rates of pay?

Mr. Benson: I think this question would have to be submitted to Judge Robinson. I have no idea why he split his report.

Mr. Diefenbaker: You have no idea of anything in connection with this matter.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the minister's answers I would ask him this: What instructions were given to Judge Robinson, and therefore what was his function?

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): The minister doesn't know.

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, if my hon. friend would wait just a moment, I have the order in council here. I will be pleased to read it to him to indicate the terms on which Judge Robinson was appointed.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the desire of hon. members that the order in council should be read? I assume it will be long and may be more in the nature of a statement than an answer to a question. Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.