

Airline Firefighters Strike

did not do so, we would be in violation of our own law. We have no choice. If someone should have another suggestion, perhaps he could make the suggestion, but this is how we must proceed on the side of the government.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Who is on the side of the people of British Columbia?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): I just spoke about the people of British Columbia. What is the situation? On the part of the government we have Treasury Board which received a mandate from the government to negotiate in the name of the government. I am not a party in this; I am just the victim because I am supposed to operate an airport. If I have no firefighters at the Vancouver airport, surely I would not take the risk of having a serious accident in British Columbia just because I wanted to operate an airport without firefighters who are essential to the operation of the airport.

As I have said, at this time the representatives of the department are not trying to negotiate with the firefighters; they have no mandate to negotiate. I told them this previously, and again over the phone. I told them they can tell these men that there is a lot of sympathy for their situation, but that we must proceed according to the law and according to the union structure we have in Canada as well as the bargaining rights which were awarded according to the law. We must proceed in that way. If we were to continue otherwise, there could be another situation tomorrow that would be worse, and there is no doubt that there could be a good deal of sympathy for a strike all through Canada. We could have a problem because the firefighters are not treated equally. I do not have to pass judgment on this, but I have the figures and it strikes me, as I am sure it strikes others, that the disparity is so great that I understand the reaction.

● (2130)

I would like to tell the firefighters, if they were here, "We are trying to understand your side of the dispute, and we want to see if we can reconcile with your demands the system which we have so far as collective bargaining is concerned". This is what we are trying to achieve. I do not think there is any other way out.

I announced at eight o'clock tonight that the operation of the airport will be resumed tomorrow on a partial basis, a very limited basis. I think that if we can at least do something, not with the union members, not with the firefighters or strikebreakers but with the supervisory personnel who accepted voluntarily to operate the airport and who were notified, as were the unions and the strikebreakers, in order to prevent the worst from happening—because all the airports now, except military airports, are closed—then we are ahead. I hope that these firefighters, who are being told at this moment that this will be the situation tomorrow and that we are doing it, not in order to break the strike but because normally they should not be on strike, will accept that.

Their union voluntarily opted for arbitration. Whether they were right or wrong they will find out later on. Probably their judgment will be different, but normally they should abide by the arbitration decision. However, they took the other route, and of course in the circum-

stances we can do nothing else. I am doing the best I can to try to provide some service in Vancouver as well as in other places later on, and at the same time to try to solve the human problem which is at the basis of the difficulty confronting us. I do not see what else I can do. If somebody has a better idea, I would be glad to hear it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: May I ask the minister a question?

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Does the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) wish to put a question to the minister?

[English]

Mr. Nielsen: Did I understand the minister correctly to say that all the MOT airports in British Columbia are closed as a result of the firefighters strike?

Mr. Marchand (Langelier): Most of the airports are closed.

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to express my appreciation to you and to my colleagues in the House for allowing us the opportunity to discuss the very serious situation that has existed in British Columbia since Friday. I listened to the remarks of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) with keen interest. I have been awaiting an announcement by him of the action he took to avert the very serious situation that exists in B.C. right now, and not only that but to attempt to avoid its spreading throughout this land.

The situation in British Columbia is not unique. There is a similar one in Edmonton, Winnipeg and other areas in Canada. We questioned the minister yesterday and again today about the action he will take. He told us he is dispatching two senior officials of his department to Vancouver in an attempt to get together with the people who are illegally on strike, this against the advice of their association or their union, in an attempt to find a solution to the problem. It is quite obvious to me that what these two senior officials did in British Columbia until eight o'clock tonight was to go around the airport in Vancouver, make telephone calls throughout B.C. and communicate with the minister here in Ottawa recommending the action that he has implemented tonight. I have here the press release that the minister issued from his office tonight. It reads as follows:

Flight operations at Vancouver international airport will resume on a restricted basis at noon tomorrow—

Emergency services will be restored permitting these operations by a volunteer crew of supervisory personnel.

They will work tomorrow afternoon and then begin an eight hour day starting Thursday. The ministry, in agreement with commercial operators, will establish operations between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on a regular daily basis.

The emergency service will permit the unlimited operations of DC-9 and Boeing 737 jet aircraft or others that may fall under the 120,000 category limit. Under this limit flights by the larger Boeing 727 aircraft will be permitted but on a restricted basis. Passenger aircraft which still will not be able to make use of the airport include DC-8's, 707, 747 and the Lockheed 1011. These are all larger capacity jet aircraft used extensively on international as well as on domestic operations.