

*Maintenance of Railway Operation Act*

Laurent), even though I always hesitate to do such a thing. We suggested to the Prime Minister last Wednesday that every attempt should be made to settle the strike before parliament met, because we expected that both the management of the railways and the workers would wait until the house had come to a decision before either resuming negotiations or attempting to come to an understanding regarding the resumption of traffic on our railroad system. As a matter of fact I suggested to the Prime Minister a procedure he subsequently followed, that of calling together the union heads in an attempt to get their minimum demands, calling together the management in order to get their maximum concessions, and then endeavouring to bridge the gap. The two groups were called together on Friday, but apparently an attempt to bridge the gap was not made. Negotiations were resumed, and when that was done, concessions were made by the negotiating committee on behalf of the unions. At 4.30 on Saturday afternoon there seemed to be considerable optimism, at least among the union representatives; and it was unpardonable that at 7.30 that evening, when they met after taking recess to clarify their positions, the president of the Canadian National Railways should have abruptly brought the negotiations to an end and prevented any possibility of arriving at an understanding before this house met. I say emphatically that no matter how much we thought Mr. Donald Gordon might contribute to the welfare of the Canadian National Railways and the Canadian people, as I did, by his earlier statement to the union leaders of a final offer and by his action last Saturday evening he has lost the confidence of the men, and I believe he will never regain it. I regret to say, in other words, that I believe his period of usefulness as president of the Canadian National Railways has come to an end.

I have given this brief recital because it is with a great deal of misgiving that I enter into this debate. I do not like this bill. When I read the preamble it led me to believe that, the railway companies and the bargaining agents of the employees having appeared to agree that existing wage rates should be increased and the forty-hour week introduced, the legislation would involve a settlement along those lines. Had I stopped at the preamble, or had the preamble of this bill constituted the law, I should say there was much to be said for what is contained in the preamble. As the leader of the opposition says, however, when you examine the bill itself it contains much more than appears on the surface. The rules that have been negotiated by the men over a long period of years, and which in no way enter into this wages and hours dispute, under this bill may be thrown

[Mr. Coldwell.]

into the discussion. All matters which the railways or the men care to bring before an arbitrator, if one is appointed, may be the subject of new negotiations. Even a layman who knows very little about railway rules appreciates the fact that those rules have been agreed upon, having regard to the differing circumstances within the various railway systems, over long periods of years. An attempt was made by the railway management to introduce the rules as a bargaining point but, as I understand it, as late as last Friday that feature of the discussion was eliminated by the railway companies. They recognized the impossibility of reaching a speedy agreement in relation to the railway problem if those rules—and I give this only as an example—were thrown into this discussion.

As members of this house we must bear in mind that this bill, if adopted by parliament, of course will be very carefully scrutinized by the legal advisers of both sides. I have no doubt the legal advisers of the railway companies will take full advantage of every point in their favour contained in the bill now before us. Consequently it seems to me that instead of having before us a bill which will assist in bringing about the resumption of railway transportation services, and which will promote a better feeling in the industry so that we may not face interruptions of this kind again, in reality the bill will throw the fat in the fire, whatever the outcome of the strike, and we shall be plagued with difficulties all along the line for months and perhaps years to come.

Then, of course, there is the feature of compulsory arbitration, which has been emphasized by the leader of the opposition. In this democratic country we have built up a labour code, a way of doing things, which in the past has worked well. I believe that if more conciliation and a less dictatorial attitude had been shown by the railway managements, collective bargaining would have achieved results and this strike would have been avoided weeks ago. But we are faced with this situation, and I must say that I believe the policy of the government ever since the end of the war, supported by a large majority in this house, is responsible for these disputes. The beneficial controls over our economy, which during the war worked well and prevented disputes of this kind, were hurriedly dispensed with. In the beginning when that was done the Minister of Finance told this house that he hoped and believed the cost of living would level off somewhere between 140 and 150; I think 145 was the figure he used at the time. Where is the cost of living now? It is over 167 as compared with the