

Forthwith upon the coming into force of this act, every railway company shall resume operation—

“Forthwith” means immediately, right at that very moment on the very day. The first amendment I moved carried with it the same implication that the workers would be called back to work forthwith. The minister rejected that earlier today saying that that was an impossibility because all the people would be standing around doing nothing.

Mr. Nielsen: He changed his mind.

Mr. Howard: He does not have a mind to change, like the hon. member for Yukon. If the minister now intends to say clearly and unequivocally that he accepts the first principal point I put forward in the amendment that the workers be called back on the very first day this bill comes into force, then he is accepting the point I put forward earlier. If that is not it, then he is playing games with me. What does he mean?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): I could dwell on what has been going on. “Forthwith upon” can impose an obligation upon the railway companies to proceed as quickly as possible. It does not mean that it will be done immediately. It does not mean the next day.

● (0040)

An hon. Member: What does it mean?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): In all honesty I cannot say to the hon. member for Skeena that it will be the next day. The reason I am saying this is simply that it may be impossible for the railways to get everything in working order and ready to absorb all the employees within a day. I suggested at one point that even if there were adherence to this legislation immediately by all the workers it is not possible for the railways to be in full operation by this weekend. There are people on the railways who disagree with me publicly in that respect, including union leaders.

I am saying that the time interval which is permissible and which is limited should give the needed flexibility. Otherwise it seems to me to offend logic to cast an obligation for all this to happen within one day. That is simply my point.

Mr. Muir: Mr. Chairman, I wish to have some clarification. The minister said “as soon as possible”. Does that mean that if a foreman does not like certain workers or their attitude during the strike he can make “as soon as possible” three weeks from the end of the strike, four weeks, or two weeks from its completion, and when these people approach their members of parliament about not being able to return to their jobs, to whom do we go? Do we speak to the Minister of Labour or do we go to the CNR and, if we do, what is the interpretation of “as soon as possible”? I have sat in the House for many years and even asked the minister who is now in charge about when such and such a thing will be done. His answer has been “as soon as possible”. Six months later someone else asked the same question, and again the answer was “as soon as possible”.

What is the interpretation of these words, and what will happen to these workers? The reason I ask this is that I am

Railway Operations Act

concerned about the workers of this country. No leader of any party in the House has a monopoly on concern for the workers. They stand up so sanctimoniously and wrap themselves in a cloak of purity. They say they are the only ones who care about the poor, the disabled, the widows, the orphans and the workers of this country. As I look around this House on all sides I see men who were formerly hardrock miners, fishermen, coal miners, farmers, and many types of workers. For example, the Minister of Veterans Affairs was a farmer. Are they all great millionaires and men who only worry about the rich guy? I think we all worry about the worker. I certainly do. I have spent my days in the unions and in the coal mines and I have worked hard for the unions and the coal miners. I have been on picket duty and on strike and I did not receive a retainer fee of \$100 a day from the CLC or from anyone else.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Muir: I ask these questions because I am concerned as an ordinary Canadian about the workers of Canada. No leader of any party, no one in the House, has the right to say that they are the only ones who worry about the worker. For many years the Minister of Transport has worked in the labour movement. Has he thrown his concerns out the window; has he forgotten about the workers? I ask the minister about this because I have been listening to certain people to my left. I want certain assurances—and here I agree with the hon. member for Skeena—about how soon these men will go back to work and whether they will be given their proper duties to fulfil, and will not be discriminated against by a boss who feels he wants to get back at the workers. I am sure that many of us are concerned. Let us not listen to a lot of damn foolishness from one man rising in the House and saying he, the little god above all, is the only one who cares about the workers of this country.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): In reply to the hon. member for Cape Breton-The Sydneys may I say that these words were used in an effort not to tie this down to a particular day in case it was not workable. The hon. member liked the phrase “forthwith upon”. The closest analogy to that would be “almost immediately”. You do not impose an obligation within a day if the results are likely to be ludicrous.

This casts a definite obligation on the companies to proceed in all haste to hire each and every employee regardless of whether or not they were on strike, and they are obliged to do so almost immediately. I think it would be unreasonable to require them to do so in almost one day within the coming into force of this bill, in terms of the practicalities involved and the knowledge of how much time the railways will need to achieve full operation. I think this clause does give the protection sought by the hon. member for Cape Breton-The Sydneys as well as that sought by the hon. member for Skeena.

Mr. McGrath: Perhaps we could settle this simply by referring to the Oxford dictionary. We said at the outset that we thought the minister's amendment is a much stronger one than the one proposed by the hon. member for Skeena. That is borne out by the definition of “forth-