

Railway Operations Act

We all know, just by talking to our wives, by going to the grocery store or by reading the paper, that every day the price of groceries, bacon, ground mincemeat for hamburger and macaroni, goes up. So what happens is that members of the union are unable to accept what three or four months ago they would have been delighted to accept. It is in that light that I move, seconded by the hon. member for York Simcoe:

That subclause 16(3) of Bill C-217 be amended by adding the following subparagraph:

and shall in respect of wages specifically provide for the adjustment of wages to any increase or increases in the cost of living where the arbitrator is satisfied that such adjustment has not been previously or adequately provided.

The minister has said that the arbitrator, if appointed, will as a matter of course look at the rate of inflation and look at the escalating cost of living. We are saying here to the arbitrator that he must look at the cost of living and the rate of inflation in making an award. We must remember that the 34 cents we have now agreed on for the first year and the 6½ per cent for the second year, and so on, were based on the assumption that there will be some inflation.

• (0150)

But how much inflation? The arbitrator must make an award and he must look at the last couple of months. I am sure that the arbitrator will want to look at the inflation figures that may come out in a week or so from now with respect to the cost of living index in August. Perhaps those figures will reflect the 6 cents increase on a loaf of bread and the 3 cents increase on a quart of milk. What we say is that you cannot expect men to take home in real terms less than they used to under previous collective agreements.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blenkarn: I hope that the committee will accept this amendment unanimously.

The Deputy Chairman: The committee has heard the amendment of the hon. member for Peel South. Is there agreement?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Chairman, we followed with interest the proposal that has just been made; we support that motion because it takes into account the cost of living, an extremely important factor. It is the basic reason for the present conflict, as it is for most if not all present labour grievances in Canada.

Mr. Chairman, I have but one most important observation to make in this connection: we will support this proposal objectively, but I wonder, once again, why the Progressive Conservatives voted against a similar motion a while ago.

[*English*]

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Chairman, so far as the intent of the amendment is concerned we have no basic objection. The only question I have is whether the hon. member might not want to reflect for a moment and consider whether it might not be appropriate to submit this amendment to clause 16 (2) where it can be embodied

[Mr. Blenkarn.]

as a special direction to the arbitrator to take into account the cost of living as suggested in the wording of the amendment.

Mr. Blenkarn: The problem is that subclause (2) reads that "the governor in council may, by order". We are saying that he shall take into account inflation and analyse the figures. Where the arbitrator is of the opinion that the 34 cents, the 6½ per cent and the 1½ per cent do not properly take into account inflation, he will take into account inflation when he is making the award. We analysed this pretty carefully and felt that the best place in which to put it was in subclause (6), which says that no award or decision of the arbitrator shall provide for a reduction in any wage rate established by this act. We want to go further and say that no award of the arbitrator shall ignore the fact that purchasing power has changed.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Mr. Chairman, I think I can now be more specific. Under subclause (3) we are now prepared to move an amendment. We have given to the opposition parties some samples of amendments with reference to other matters, one of them being job security which will be a special reference to the arbitrator under subclause (3) of clause 16. I suggest that taking the cost of living index into account can also be a special direction to the arbitrator if he is satisfied that it has not been otherwise taken care of. So I suggest an amendment to subclause (3) which will read that an "arbitrator appointed under this section shall"—and then we can carry on with the wording of the special direction embodied in the hon. member's motion.

I wonder whether the matter could stand for now, and we could come back later to this clause.

Mr. Blenkarn: If the minister has an amendment that will embody this direction, that will be satisfactory to me. We are prepared to accept the drafting of the minister.

The Deputy Chairman: Is the committee agreed that we stand the amendment moved by the hon. member for Peel South?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Chairman, is it not now possible for the minister or for some other minister to move the proposed amendment to clause 16? I could send him my copy of it, if he has lost his.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Chairman, I will be pleased to move the following amendment:

That Bill C-217 be amended by striking out lines 14 to 17 on page 12 and substituting the following:

"section (1),

(a) shall closely examine the job security demands of the union and fully explore the feasibility of a job security plan based on the principle of attrition;

(b) shall not alter or amend any existing work rules or practices in a manner that could have an adverse effect on rates of pay, earnings or employment opportunities; and

(c) shall, for the purpose of the arbitration, have all the powers conferred on a conciliation board under section 175 of the Canada Labour Code".