

The Address—Mr. Mongrain

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, and I should like to repeat it even though I may seem to over-emphasize this point, that strikes, for the most part, represent an obsolete way of solving labour disputes and that in our modern society we should find quicker and less unpleasant ways for workers to manifest discontent than to go on strike.

On this subject, I always quote someone who is an expert in labour matters and certainly can not be accused of anti-unionism; I am referring to Mr. Walter Reuther, the American labour leader who has often said: "It is high time the unions stopped settling their problems at the expense of the community". He also said—and I think this concerns us directly—"It is time also for governments to give them such means of settling their problems which will allow them not to depend on strikes alone".

Just to show, Mr. Speaker, how much the strikes cost the country, I will give you the 1967 statistics. For example, I see that in 1962 Canada had 290 strikes; in 1963: 318; in 1964: 327; in 1965: 478; in 1966: 582; every year the number of strikes increases; in 1967: 958. It is a constant progression. Those 958 strikes in 1967 involved 419,942 workers which represented a loss of 4,044,660 workdays.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that every time a worker is on strike, two or three others will inevitably find themselves out of work. If a firm ceases its activity, carriers will lay off and merchants will feel the pinch. Therefore, to go on with my argument, I shall simply say that for each striker, there is another worker who finds himself idle. I shall not magnify facts and I shall try to be conservative, in the ordinary sense of the word not in the political sense. If 419,942 workers struck in 1967, it means that double that number, or 839,884 Canadians, have wasted time in 1967 because of strikes: 8,089,320 work-days would have been lost. Imagine the fantastic loss of 8 million days of work. Productivity would be affected. Workers would be deprived of part of their earnings, the Canadian economy would be short of that much money. If those workers earned \$1.50 per hour—you will notice I am being reasonable because there are not very many workers in this country who still work for \$1.50 per hour; some earn up to \$4, \$4.50 an hour but I do not want to look as if I am exaggerating—and if they worked an eight-hour day, that means that in 1967, Canadian workers were deprived of an income of \$97,071,840; and the same goes for

the Canadian economy. That certainly did not help productivity. Please note that I speak only of the strikers. I do not refer to the whole economy which suffered because certain sectors were brought to a standstill for one month, two months, six months. I only mention the strikers because otherwise the money the workers or the Canadian economy lost would amount to hundreds of millions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I maintain that I say this in a constructive way. I do not want my comments to be interpreted as a condemnation of the government. Far from it. I know the government is now taking steps to improve the worker's lot. I also hope that an agreement can be reached between the three parties, the worker, the employer and the governments and there can be some kind of a truce.

● (5:40 p.m.)

Here is where I would like to make a constructive suggestion. As I said earlier, since we have a new government, a new team, I could say that we have a new Liberal party with a new program. We are in a difficult position in international affairs. It is not only in our country that there should be, between the representatives of labour, management and the government some kind of tripartite agreement to declare a truce, for a period of at least one year, maybe two, to give the government time to put into force new measures which will give more justice to the workers.

If, each time the government is tripped up—to use an expression which is not out of Bossuet—by drawn out strikes which keep half, if not all, our ministers busy, they have no time left for the constructive policies we need in this country to create a just society.

It seems to me that that should interest all Canadians who concern themselves about the common weal, especially the lot of the wage-earner, the people with low incomes. Mind you, I do not necessarily blame trade unions as being responsible for the strikes. There is probably a responsibility at the three levels and that is precisely what leads me to say that there should be an agreement between all three with a view to a truce. And I think that the first to benefit from that would be the wage-earners and the workers precisely.

Mr. Speaker, evidently there will always be in our country people who take pleasure in making demagogic statements for all sorts of reasons: electoral perhaps, selfishness, promotion of certain unions. I would like to appeal