

Air Traffic Control Dispute

and we have this recent experience which shows that a debate like this can be useful. I suggest that Your Honour should allow this debate.

Mr. David MacDonald (Prince): Mr. Speaker, first of all I think I should remove any misunderstanding there might be in the mind of the hon. member for Red Deer, or of any other hon. member, that negotiations are going on today, because negotiations ended after a seven hour meeting yesterday, with no conclusions being arrived at that were worth while.

I think we should have a look at some of the things behind this situation because it seems to me, as another hon. member has suggested, that the government simply wants to delay and delay. This is a matter that has not come before the government this week or last week. It has been a matter of some concern over the last number of months. It was in the face of a strike threat back in May that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) instructed both associations which deal with air traffic controllers that he was willing to appoint a commissioner, and in his letter on that occasion he mentioned specifically that he and his government would give immediate consideration to the findings of the commissioner. Five weeks after the event is not "immediate consideration", in any man's language.

Another question which is important in my mind, and in the minds of other hon. members, is that a strike is imminent. There is no question of the outcome of the vote that is presently being taken. Anyone who has talked to air traffic controllers in any of our major cities knows that it is going to be a vote for a strike. The only question at issue is when the strike might be called, and in view of the fact that the government has fobbed off the air controllers time and again, I would judge the strike is going to take place within the next few days.

I think it comes close to becoming immoral when a government which appointed a commissioner on its own terms, and outlined his terms of reference, is not willing to accept his report in good faith, in the same good faith as it was accepted by the air traffic controllers. They have accepted the recommendations of Judge Robinson, and it is my understanding that Judge Robinson is disappointed at the action of the government in not at once implementing his report, which deals with pay rates which are reasonable. I, for one, would like to

[Mr. Knowles.]

know why it is that the government has been so anxious to suppress this report—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that at the moment the hon. member is making a very strong argument with regard to the substance of the motion and not with regard to the limited question now before the Chair.

Mr. MacDonald (Prince): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport himself opened up a number of these questions and has left himself open to that kind of criticism this afternoon. One of the things we should not forget in this matter is that this will not be a strike such as the Air Canada strike; it will be a strike against everything flying in this country. We have seen reports from both Air Canada and American air lines that if this strike takes place there will be nothing flying in this country during two or three of the busiest weeks in the year. In view of that I say it would be folly if we did not deal with this issue in debate, hoping that through our debate we may force the government to act reasonably in dealing with these air traffic controllers.

Mr. Speaker: After hearing the comments made by hon. members from both sides of the house the Chair, of course, can have little doubt but that the question raised by the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr) is of the utmost importance and of a most urgent nature.

● (3:10 p.m.)

The question which must be decided by the Chair, on behalf of hon. members, is whether or not there is an urgency of debate in accordance with citation 100 of Beauchesne's fourth edition, based on precedents and practice of the House of Commons. The question proposed by the hon. member for Ontario is based, by his own admission, on an assumption. I believe I can use his own words to indicate that he said it seems obvious that the vote taken elsewhere today will be in favour of strike action. Possibly there is a presumption that could be the result, but I suggest the point was well taken by the Minister of Transport when he said this is not a fact but a hypothesis or a presumption.

The Minister of Transport argued a point which, although some hon. members feel may not be relevant, I think it is. In view of the fact there are to be negotiations tomorrow morning, we must decide whether this debate, if there is to be a debate on this very important and urgent question, should be held this afternoon rather than tomorrow or some other