

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

come first and the national interest at this time demands the resumption of rail services. This is the first priority, though the other factors to which I have referred are admittedly of great importance. I am merely placing first things first.

These contributing factors, the fringe benefits which are involved as well as the over-all picture of a rapidly rising cost of living, can and must be settled later. Today it is the strike which must be dealt with. To stand before this house for more than half an hour and play to union leaders in the galleries is merely to becloud the issue. Let us return to realities.

The legislation before us makes four basic proposals in this strike emergency which has quickly become a national crisis of the greatest magnitude. First, the railroads are to resume operation immediately this bill becomes law. That is why we are here. Transportation is the lifeblood of a nation and unless transportation is performing its function well the whole economy is sick. Second, an interim wage increase has been set at 4 per cent plus 4 per cent as a basis for negotiation later. This does not set the wages. As I interpret the provision this is merely a guarantee of a minimum floor level which the workers can expect from the negotiations which are to take place. It is not to be arbitration in the first instance; it is to be direct collective bargaining.

Should these negotiations end in agreement on a greater amount, that is what the workers will receive. The provision in the bill represents an assurance that there will be at least a minimum. I am bound to agree with this because it is what Mr. Justice Munroe recommended. He recommended 4 per cent for the first six months, 4 per cent for the second six months, 4 per cent for the third and 6 per cent for the fourth half year period. This legislation refers only to the first year because it is expected that the negotiations which are to continue will take care of the second year. That is exactly what Judge Munroe recommended and to try to deceive the public into believing this is only a 6 per cent increase is wrong. It is a 4 per cent increase plus a 4 per cent increase, exactly what it says.

An hon. Member: What is the average per year?

Mr. Thompson: It averages 6 per cent. But the figure was arrived at in the light of the 18 per cent which was recommended by Mr.

Justice Munroe and to say it is less than 8 per cent amounts to misrepresentation. This is a guarantee of an immediate floor, an assurance which is a reasonable one even though it may not meet the demands of the unions.

I say we must face this second point for what it actually is. In the *Ottawa Citizen* of today I notice an editorial which is extremely relevant to this legislation. It states in part:

The increase proposed in the legislation, at 4 per cent from January 1, and an additional 4 per cent from July 1, is plainly merely a point of departure. It is based on the recommendations of Mr. Justice Munroe, chairman of one of the five boards of conciliation that sat on the railway wage dispute. The government had to start somewhere, for the men have had no increase in almost three years, their last contract having expired on December 31 last. Justice Munroe's proposal was probably as good a starting point as any.

● (6:30 p.m.)

But that is evidently all it is. The government is not imposing this increase on either the unions or management as the terms of the final settlement. If the government did impose a wage increase, however large, democracy would be on the way to the graveyard.

Therefore it is not the responsibility of parliament to arbitrate and set the terms of the final agreement between management and labour.

For if the government could decide the level of industrial wages, it could come down on the side of low wages as easily as on the side of high pay. Union members who have felt the government should take more assertive action and impose a wage settlement, ought to think of the power of government to reduce as well as to raise wages.

In that connection I might refer to the action taken by Prime Minister Wilson in freezing wages. That is what he has done.

Only the processes of collective bargaining, with government intervention kept at a minimum, can protect the democratic rights of workers.

Let us not forget that.

Third, this legislation provides for continuing negotiations, for collective bargaining until at least November 15, a minimum of ten weeks. If we read the legislation carefully we find there is provision within it whereby if the report made at that time indicates that negotiation is going on satisfactorily it can continue even beyond that date. So in the third instance this legislation is providing for the continuation of free negotiations. For the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam to refer continually to this as compulsory arbitration is not correct because compulsory arbitration is something which lies beyond the period of negotiation mentioned in the bill.