

Threatened Rail Strike

that I am sure is felt by every hon. member of the house, that in spite of the strenuous efforts that have been made in accordance with the best democratic practice it has not been possible to reach an agreement on this important matter. The Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) has announced that legislation will now be introduced to deal with this question. It goes without saying, as he has mentioned, that whatever legislation is passed by the house will be respected and obeyed by trade union members and anyone else who is covered by it. I think we can all count upon that.

We will do everything that we can on this side to facilitate and expedite consideration of this legislation. We will be happy to collaborate with the Prime Minister in considering it tomorrow. We appreciate that it is not possible to have the legislation printed until tomorrow. It would be of great assistance to us to have copies in some form this evening and the Prime Minister has indicated that that could be done.

Without saying anything further, and of course without committing ourselves in any way on the stand to be taken in regard to the legislation, we will do our best to facilitate parliamentary discussion of it.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed regrettable that the negotiations that have taken place have now broken down with the result that this is the course upon which the government is determined to embark. I feel that the employees are not only law-abiding citizens at all times, as everyone recognizes, but I am certain they will obey the laws of this country. They have been in a very strong position in all of these negotiations. They have had in their support the fact that they have accepted the majority conciliation board report. I think it is greatly to be regretted that an agreement has not been obtained on the basis of that report.

I want to say that it is my judgment the railways have been callous in their attitude. They were quite prepared to see a railway strike. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that the railways have been laying off workers across this country at a greater rate than would be necessary if they were dealing only with a falling off in traffic. I say, therefore, that the railways must accept the chief responsibility for the fact that negotiations have broken down.

Then I suggest that the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker), in asking the house to support a measure which merely postpones the evil day until May 15, is not presenting a proposal to solve the difficult situation. He is merely postponing it by saying, let us postpone it to May 15 so we do not have to

deal with it today. I feel that the introduction of the royal commission as an argument in the issue is wrong. I do not believe it should have been introduced. I believe the government has raised this merely as an alibi to avoid its responsibility at this time.

An hon. Member: Utter nonsense.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member will have an opportunity to debate the matter. At the present time, all that is in order is preliminary comment on the situation that has been announced.

Mr. Argue: I think the government itself, in these negotiations, has failed in its responsibility by not suggesting other alternative procedures that I believe would have resulted in a settlement. As a last resort the government should have been prepared to grant a subsidy of the amount referred to in the discussion yesterday. No one wants a strike. A strike will do great damage to our economy. But I suggest to the Prime Minister that legislation which requires the workers to maintain operation of the railways in this country is legislation that is repugnant to Canadians and should not have been necessary at this time when other action might have been taken.

Mr. Diefenbaker: This statement goes beyond what I think is fair comment. I just want to say that we shall meet the hon. gentleman tomorrow, if he consents to the discussion taking place at that time, and we shall then ascertain the degree to which labour and the farmer can be brought together in an alliance.

Mr. Argue: Stir up disunity.

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue) care to make any statement with respect to the request that the legislation be introduced and discussion facilitated tomorrow?

Mr. Argue: My understanding of the rules is that the government has the right, and it is normal procedure, to present a bill for first reading. At that time, if a request is made for second reading of the bill and the debate to take place we will give that request consideration and reply at that time.

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure whether the suggestion is that an order be made at this time because, as I understand it, the bill could not be read the first time without unanimous consent. If the house would authorize such consent—does the Minister of Justice wish to speak?

Hon. E. D. Fulton (Minister of Justice): You have made the point, sir, that I was about to make. Normally there has to be 48 hours'