

time now for the Treasury Board to take a positive step and to take the two sides, the government and the employees involved in the six weeks old strike, back to the bargaining table with some form of a new offer or at least a recognition of the potentially serious situation that is developing with respect to our defence capability?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I have always said that the government would be ill-advised to negotiate in the House of Commons. The employees who can legally go on strike do so. However, as far as the Treasury Board is concerned, we do our utmost to settle it in the shortest possible time.

[English]

STRIKE OF DOCKYARD EMPLOYEES—DATE OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO EMPLOYEES' PROPOSALS

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question to the one asked by my colleague, and I should like to direct it to the President of the Treasury Board. Has the government in effect rejected the conciliation board chairman's position by remaining silent and, if so, when will the board respond to the latest proposals of the employees of the east and west coast dockyards?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I have nothing to add to the comment I made earlier.

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[English]

MANPOWER

SUGGESTION THAT EMPLOYERS BROADEN THEIR RANGE OF HIRING PRACTICES—MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. F. A. Philbrook (Halton): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. Is the minister aware of a study recently prepared by two research economists for the Ontario department of labour which indicates, first, that the availability of jobless benefits has been overemphasized as a cause of the unemployment job vacancy problems, and second, that the reluctance of employers to hire women, the young, minority group workers and persons from economically poor regions is a major reason for the coexistence of unemployment and job vacancies, and therefore is the minister prepared to have the Canada Manpower Centres urge employers to broaden their range of hiring practices?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the study carried out for the Ontario government in 1974 and I was pleased to hear what was said about employers' practices, which just confirms what I have been saying in several public statements. I am also gratified to note the impression that jobless benefits from unemployment insurance have been highly overrated as a problem, as some people claim they are.

Oral Questions

TRANSPORT

REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE NO BRANCH LINES CLOSED UNTIL HALL COMMISSION REPORTS AND CLARIFICATION OF ALLEGED STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. It has to do with the deeply aroused fear all over the prairie provinces, and particularly in the small towns and villages, over the question as to whether or not the minister would be prepared to give his assurance that there will not be any closure on the prairies of railway lines until the Hon. Emmett Hall Royal Commission reports.

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the right hon. gentleman was in the House at the time we indicated how we are going to proceed. A certain number of miles of railway is frozen, for all practical purposes, until 1980. Some other lines of railway are frozen until next January, and there are 500 miles which can be negotiated with those who are interested. The only railway lines or branch lines which can be closed now are those 500 miles.

● (1430)

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister this because the expectant minister of transport, the Minister of Justice, during the election campaign in Saskatchewan made the statement that there would be no closures until after the report of the commission, including the 500 miles now spoken of by the Minister of Transport.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: The minister says he did not say it, but I heard him.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not know how many ministers of transport there are over there.

Mr. Blais: One more than over there.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That hon. gentleman has a voice we have not heard on the western plains since the buffalo ceased to roam, and it is equally intelligent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: I ask the Minister of Justice now whether on Friday last a Mr. Owen Buss of CJVR in Melfort got in touch with the minister by telephone in connection with this and told him that he, too, had heard the minister make this statement? What has the minister to say to that?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, throughout we made it very clear in all statements that when dealing with the 525 miles of line the very purpose of not protecting it was to indicate that the regular CTC proceedings could proceed, and I don't think anyone misunderstood that. There was some misunderstanding about the 6,000 miles, which are the subject of the Hall commission, and we indicated that as far as we were concerned we were prepared to protect some or all of those lines