

THE SENATE

Thursday, September 7, 1950

The Senate met at 3 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers and routine proceedings.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Senate resumed from yesterday consideration of His Excellency the Governor General's speech at the opening of the session and the motion of Hon. Mr. Dupuis for an Address in reply thereto.

Hon. Thomas Reid: Honourable senators, in rising to take part in this debate I want at the outset to congratulate the honourable senator from Vancouver South (Hon. Mr. Farris) upon the excellent speech he made yesterday.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. Reid: I believe his speech outlined the railway strike as no other speech in parliament has done. My honourable friend made certain proposals to the government as to what he thinks should be done as soon as possible to remedy such situations in the future. I have one comment to make about his proposal with regard to the secret ballot. I think it was a very timely suggestion, and one that should be put into effect, if for no other reason than to protect the ordinary union worker. I make that statement as one of the two senators here who have served in the industrial field for many years and who still hold union cards. I know what methods of intimidation can be used, and have been used, against certain union workers when they openly voiced objection to what their union leaders wanted. It is all very well to say that these ballots went to headquarters and not to the locals, but the locals have a way of finding out things. Information leaks back, and those who vote against handing over control or the say-so to union leaders often find themselves intimidated by fellow-workmen who in many instances may themselves be looking for some kind of promotion. So I hold that if for no other reason than in the best interests of the ordinary worker belonging to a union there should be the democratic right to cast a vote secretly in any labour dispute, as there now is in municipal, provincial and federal elections. I repeat that the rights of the ordinary worker should be fully protected by the secret ballot.

May I say that while in my opinion the honourable senator from Vancouver South (Hon. Mr. Farris) made an excellent presentation and offered some very valuable suggestions, he dealt with only one aspect of the railway problem. I feel that honourable senators will agree with me that our great railway problem is still unsolved. As I see it, the recent strike will have the effect of accentuating some of the difficulties now facing the railway. Anyone who has given even cursory study to the situation will, I think, agree that one of the principal causes of trouble lies in the fact that although the companies spend large sums for the improvement of passenger service the revenue they receive from passenger traffic is relatively small and still dwindling. Further, competition from planes, trucks and buses—which latter competition will be increased after the Trans-Canada Highway is built—will bring about even more restricted revenues for the railways.

Anyone who has travelled across the continent knows that at times many coaches are empty, and that by no means all the passengers in coaches are paying their fare. In a coach in which I was travelling recently there were eighteen of what in railway parlance are termed dead-heads. That is, there were two members of parliament with their passes, and sixteen other passengers, all of whom had passes. Under conditions like that and faced with a decrease in fare-paying passengers, how can the railways carry on? As to freight, many business firms found out during the strike that they could ship more economically by truck than by rail. And with the building of pipelines to carry oil east and west from the Prairie Provinces, the railways will suffer another severe loss of revenue.

So, honourable senators, I contend that the railway situation is one of the serious problems confronting parliament. It is my hope that a special standing committee of this chamber will be set up to study the whole matter, and that out of its deliberations some means of helping the railways will emerge.

I am not going to deal with the criticism that we have heard of Donald Gordon, nor with the praise of Mr. Gordon that was expressed yesterday by the senator from Vancouver South. I will only say that anyone who is looking for a "goat" had better pick on the public, because that is the role the public will have to play in this railway situation. In this I am thinking particularly of grain growers whose product has to be hauled across the country, and of the price that consumers in British Columbia and other provinces will have to pay for it. I foresee