

*Railway Operations Act*

to make foolish remarks, but they do not have to. Therefore, I shall try not to do so, Mr. Chairman.

I think that we must also consider the growing concern of the people over the dispute. They want to know whether the government has acted in a cautious way at the appropriate time. It is very easy to condemn the government for not having acted sooner. We now have had the opportunity to listen to several hon. members and to acquire certain information. If the government has not up to now adopted rigid positions, it is because it wants to leave this to the responsible parties in the dispute. In fact, I wanted to give them time to explain themselves and to find a solution through the present negotiation process without necessarily coming up with the bill now under study.

On the other hand, I would be tempted to say, if I wanted to act in a partisan way, that the government waited till the population demanded the adoption of legislation to justify its position. I honestly think that if the two parties do not come to an agreement, considering the great difficulties and the inconveniences that this dispute has caused to the Canadian population, it is absolutely necessary that the government should legislate.

Therefore, the population expects action from Parliament and not necessarily from the government. I think this is where the role and responsibility of each hon. member comes into play. What should each member do and what should be the attitude of Parliament? We know perfectly well that the government needs a majority to adopt a bill and I think that, as hon. members, we must consider in a very objective way the interests of society.

Therefore, it is not time to rejoice from the embarrassment that this has caused to the government. It is not a question of finding out if the official opposition could find there some political capital. It is not either a matter of showing, as the NDP is doing now, that the workers are opposed to the bill, which would be close to political partisanship. I think that what is important now is that the people have proof that the members of Parliament are behaving as administrators in the case of a dispute which is so expensive for the country. It is this way, I think, that Parliament will regain confidence from the people.

Therefore, in the case of this dispute, it is the interests of society which must concern us and guide our decisions. I know some amendments will be moved. I therefore appeal right away to hon. members, to the government: be objective enough to accept amendments that can help the workers and do justice to all interested parties.

Now, I feel it is imperative that the government should see the problem in that light. It is also imperative for the parties of the opposition to present amendments that are truly objective and not merely of such a nature as to prove, in an eventual election campaign, that one party was more favourable than another to the employees concerned in this conflict. To my mind, we will not deserve the respect of the people if we do not hold the government responsible for all the difficulties the employees are now up against.

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) stated this morning that we are not here to solve the conflict but to bring back order. We also know that this bill will not

[Mr. La Salle.]

necessarily solve the problems of the workers. It will enable the parties to resume negotiations in the hope that they will reach an agreement. It seems to me that through the proposals made on both sides the initial stands of the interested parties can be drawn closer together. I hope that a satisfactory settlement will be arrived at for the employees, as we should protect them. We also know that we should be realistic as regards the possibilities of the companies concerned.

● (2030)

I could also avail myself of this opportunity to blame or to invite the government to watch closely the problems, as stated by the hon. member who preceded me, as far as the pension fund is concerned. I too have seen employees who are affected by this dispute and are far from pleased with this plan. Other employees told me about sick leave, a field where glaring defects exist. Therefore, I shall limit my remarks to those two problems which directly concern those employees by inviting the minister responsible to correct the situation for the good of the employees and bring about the justice to which they are entitled.

Like many others, I am inclined at the outset to be greatly disappointed with the slowness of negotiations; we are naturally inclined to blame the government for its failure to establish negotiation mechanisms capable of bringing those negotiations to an end within the stipulated time. It is hard to accept that a group of workers should have to finance an eight or nine-month retroactivity period. It is absolutely unfair. On the basis of that consideration I stand, of course, on the side of the employees who complain that they have to finance salary increases which come with a year's delay. To what extent have the companies concerned in those disputes benefited by those amounts of money they did not have to spend during those months? They certainly made profits. When the settlement takes place, and I hope it will be acceptable to the employees, there will surely be a retroactivity period, but what guarantee or what compensation will be given, for instance, to the employees who lost a salary increase during eight or nine months? The bill does not mention it and I feel that we should consider the possibility of compensating the employee who has lost money during a certain period. The company has surely collected interest on that money. It is therefore a glaring injustice suffered by the employee. We must ask the government to set up some permanent consultation procedures to carry out the negotiations within the prescribed time.

I learned this afternoon that there was something more important than the negotiation procedures and the information made sense to me. It seems that it is still more important to provide unions with information on productivity; the unions should obtain data on future markets. We are well aware that during negotiations or when a union is seeking a salary increase for the employees of a certain industry, the large companies have the necessary means to obtain data on future markets. It may be that when a company readily accepts a settlement it is in its interest to do so; the union being unaware of that is pleased to see the negotiations concluded in such a short time and feels that it has made a good deal. However, since the company has information on the future market and well-grounded information on the general productivity, it