

*Legislation Respecting Railway Matters*

As to the fourth requirement of a just strike, the reasonable hope of winning it, let us say that this is a question of common sense. In public utilities, the hope of winning is almost a certainty as far as the unions are concerned because they represent an extraordinary pressure group while the people cannot long be deprived of essential services. But in regard to such pressure, the unions are taking on a heavy responsibility—the people must be spared excessive hardship—true, the unions have some rights, but the people also have rights which can be summed up in the right to essential services.

Public opinion has a major role to play and it may happen that a series of strikes will arouse public opinion in such a way that the people will clamour for legislation to restrict the right to strike. On the other hand, public opinion would be in sympathy with the unions if they were refused truly efficient arbitration to give them full justice.

Where does the responsibility lie for this railroad strike? I do not wish to belabour the point but let us say in brief that to my mind, it is the present federal government and the railroad, indirectly, as I observed at the beginning of my remarks, the previous governments also share in the responsibility, as well as the previous legislators and the labour unions.

● (7:10 p.m.)

The right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) has failed, in the present dispute, to take his responsibilities either in calling parliament before the strike, or in appointing sooner a mediator without ties to the executive, that is to say, in the present case, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) who acted as mediator between the employers and the unions while the employers are in a certain sense, related to the government, to the executive; well the mediator could not be considered by both parties, at least by the employees, as a competent mediator, as a mediator capable of looking at the problems objectively and impartially.

Since 1963, the present government and the Prime Minister should have acted to implement several recommendations in the MacPherson and Freedman reports. They should have acted since 1963. As the hon. member for Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette) noted this afternoon, we are stifled here in the lap of the federal government, by quantities of reports. Let us take the case of the railroad dispute or the problems of railroad transportation in Canada. It is not a new dispute. We

[Mr. Allard.]

received the last report in 1962 and before that, the two previous ones of the MacPherson Commission for the formulation of a railway policy in Canada. Well, the present official opposition was able to look into the recommendations and study for at least one year, if not more, the first reports, but no legislation was introduced. I understand that at the time the official opposition did not have as much time as the present government, then in the opposition, which came to the fore when those reports were submitted and has governed the country for the last three years. It is fantastic to say and a real shame to note that the persons responsible as legislators of the country have not introduced any legislation to implement the recommendations of the MacPherson Commission or some of them.

Therefore, the second bill tabled yesterday by the Prime Minister is more than four years late. During the nine months of negotiations previous to the present railway strike, the Prime Minister should have followed more closely and alertly the development of the dispute.

How disappointing are the answers obtained to the various questions we put in this house, to the government, to the Prime Minister and to most other ministers. There are some exceptions, because today I got an excellent reply from the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Marchand) when he gave me the assurance he would look into the 178 cases of injustice in the employment service and that in every case the person involved would be granted a personal interview.

This is a positive answer, a grievance faced squarely which will be redressed without delay. Not later than yesterday I put a question to the Prime Minister. I asked him to tell the house whether he intended to take immediate action to settle the dispute which threatens to bring about most certainly a strike of postal workers on October 18.

That is an impending thing, which is on the threshold of Canadian economy. And again, the right hon. Prime Minister stood up, charming as ever—he always has a very diplomatic and flexible answer, he is conversant with the situation—and answered me that he wanted to analyse the matter and consult with the Postmaster General (Mr. Côté). Well, that is the kind of questions that, during the nine months of negotiations, the hon. members directed to the Prime Minister and to other ministers of the present government concerning the impending railway strike, and