

Maintenance of Railway Operation Act

Mr. Nugent: That is the part of the difference the hon. member would like to look at.

Mr. Pickersgill: I think it is the whole difference. As my hon. friend, the Leader of the Opposition, says in his amendment which I think I should recall to hon. members:

This house declines to proceed with the second reading of a bill the provisions of which establish a compulsory and discriminatory wage freeze for railway employees—

A compulsory and discriminatory wage freeze: it is that and only that which makes this bill quite unacceptable.

Perhaps I may be permitted to recapitulate our position very briefly as the Leader of the Opposition presented it to the house yesterday. We believe that our position is just to the public interest in that it would keep the railways going. We believe it is just to the workers because it would give them wages that are fair and reasonable. We believe it is just to the railways because we recognize that the situation of the Canadian Pacific Railway—and for that matter of the Canadian National Railways although its situation in fiscal terms is quite different—should be taken into account in the general review next year.

We are opposed—and here we differ from the hon. gentleman in the corner—to prejudging this situation by any recourse to a subsidy in the present circumstances. We feel that this question of subsidy is totally premature, that the whole question of railway finances cannot be resolved until the report of the royal commission is received and the government has had a chance to consider it, but that the C.P.R. and C.N.R. in the meantime can perfectly well pay these additional wages. Neither of them is going to go into receivership in the next five months because of the small sums herein concerned. We think it should be clearly understood, however, that their financial situation will be taken into account when the time of review comes next summer.

I come now to my final point. I know that there are many in this country who are gravely concerned about a tendency toward rising wages, rising prices and the cycle that comes therefrom. That is an argument widely used to justify the kind of action the government is taking at the present time. I want to indicate why that argument is not sound.

I must say that I share that general concern as does, I am sure, every responsible hon. member of the house. It is a concern felt not only by hon. members of this house. I have in front of me a speech made last September by Mr. William Mahoney, national director of the united steelworkers of America in Canada. I want to read into the

record an extremely significant sentence contained in that speech. Mr. Mahoney said:

As far as the labour movement is concerned, a cut in the cost of living is just as good as a pay boost, as a means of satisfactorily sharing the national income.

I know there are many of us who feel that for other people outside the labour movement a cut in the cost of living would be a much better way to distribute the national income fairly than by wage and price increases, but if that sort of thing is going to be done it has to be done across the board as a general policy. It would be and is totally wrong to discriminate against one small group of people because one believes that that kind of general policy would be desirable.

It is for those reasons that I am only too happy to support and vote for the amendment of my hon. friend the Leader of the Opposition and it is for those reasons that I appeal to the government to accept the policy underlying that amendment.

Mr. Gaffney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member kindly said that I might ask him a question when he concluded his remarks. I simply ask the hon. gentleman this question. Would he indicate to the house if he feels in his general approach to the problems of labour this afternoon he is in general agreement with the premier of Newfoundland, Mr. Smallwood?

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, I doubt whether that is the kind of question it would be proper to answer, but my answer is "I do".

Mr. McCleave: Would the hon. member permit another question?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member's time expires when he takes his seat. It was only because he had promised to answer a question that I permitted one to be asked. If the hon. member will accept another and the house has no objection, I will permit it.

Mr. McCleave: I think the hon. gentleman said he would accept general questions at the conclusion of his remarks and that is why I did not interrupt him at the time.

Mr. Hellyer: That is only the hon. gentleman's interpretation of what was said. The hon. member for Bonaville-Twillingate (Mr. Pickersgill) made no such statement.

Mr. McCleave: The hon. gentleman said that the provisions of this bill would make it a crime for the employees not to go back to work. I wonder if the hon. member could point in the bill to a provision involving the creation of a crime?

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, I am not a lawyer and perhaps the hon. gentleman could