

Air Traffic Control Dispute

There is, however, one error in the report—I do not say this to be critical of Judge Robinson. But there is an error in the report in that he has assumed a person can become an airline despatcher in two years. In theory this may be so, but we have checked with Air Canada and we find that one in the past ten years has become an airline despatcher in a period shorter than five years. The most usual period is nine years. By taking this longer period, the salary scales computed by Judge Robinson and included in his report are automatically thrown out.

As I say, we accept the principle that, man for man, with equal service in this particular field through assistant despatcher and on to airline despatcher, and through the various grades of air transport controllers, equivalent rates of pay should be given. What we cannot agree to is the proposition based on the calculation of rates of pay on the assumption that a person becomes an airline despatcher in two years. In Air Canada that is not the case.

Mr. Speaker: I wonder whether this would not be an appropriate time for the Chair to intervene and bring to the attention of hon. members that there are only about 35 minutes left for debate this afternoon. I am referring to no one in particular, but perhaps hon. members might wish to exercise some personal discipline in limiting the length of their speeches so that more members might have an opportunity to take part in the debate. The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Benson: This is the basic problem we had when dealing with Judge Robinson's report.

Mr. Nielsen: May I ask the minister a question?

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Nielsen: I am sure the minister would be most happy to answer my question.

Mr. Speaker: Does the minister allow the hon. member for Yukon to ask a question at this time?

Mr. Benson: If hon. members opposite would allow me to finish—and I do not intend to speak at great length—I will be pleased to answer any questions they may have if it is within my ability to answer them.

For the reason I have given, the government was not able to accept the full report of Mr. Justice Robinson. This has been the subject of our discussions with the air traffic controllers over the past two weeks at least.

[Mr. Benson.]

With regard to the meetings which have taken place with the air traffic controllers I am told we met with the controllers whenever they requested to meet with us. Furthermore, we agreed to discuss the first part of the report without waiting for the second part of the report to come to hand. Again, the adjournment last week from Thursday to Monday took place at the request of the air traffic controllers. We have always held ourselves ready to meet with them and discuss this matter.

On Monday night we felt we could not accept the full report of Judge Robinson. Their position was: we must have the full report or we shall not be satisfied. The C.A.T.C.A. withdrew its negotiators at that point.

We met again this morning. As I indicated, I met personally with the members of the three associations. One of the difficulties here—a difficulty which does not exist when there is collective bargaining; and I would remind hon. members that there is really no basis for collective bargaining in the civil service at the present time—is that employees who are air traffic controllers are represented by three organizations and it is necessary to meet with representatives of these organizations separately.

● (5:10 p.m.)

This morning I asked them to come altogether to meet with me.

Mr. Woolliams: What are these organizations?

Mr. Benson: I mentioned them earlier. They are the Public Service Alliance, the Professional Institute and the Canadian Air Traffic Controllers' Association.

Mr. Lewis: The latter has the majority.

Mr. Benson: I am not going to get into a jurisdictional dispute as between the various associations at this time because presently we have no system for certifying anyone as a bargaining unit, but I hope with the assistance of the house and the committee we will get that very soon after the New Year.

This morning, as I mentioned earlier—

An hon. Member: What offer did you make?

Mr. Benson: I am not going to indicate to the house what offer we have made to the air traffic controllers.

An hon. Member: Because it is embarrassing to you.