

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

leaders have acted strictly according to the rule of law up to this point. They are to be commended for that. The tragedy of the situation has been the failure of the government to take strong action prior to this crisis. It is five years now since the MacPherson report was tabled in this house. In his first Throne Speech more than three years ago, the Prime Minister promised that railway legislation would be brought forward. The Throne Speech in each subsequent session has contained the promise that railway legislation would be implemented. There has been no action.

The railway employees do have a legitimate complaint. They have gone now for eight months without an agreement with railway management. It is my impression that even more important than wage increases are the complaints of railway workers with regard to working conditions, conditions which have been neglected for years. In addition, the cost of living continually goes up and up. However, at this time the responsibility of parliament is to get the trains rolling again, to outline the basic terms on which further negotiations may be based, and to provide a time limit for those negotiations, after which arbitration must take effect.

We have a second responsibility, and that is not only to deal with the railway legislation but to deal with the underlying causes of the strike, namely, the cost of living which is continually going up and inflation which depreciates the purchasing value of the dollar. Therefore we expectantly wait to see the first phase of the legislation that will be brought forth. The second piece of legislation to which the Prime Minister referred is something which I believe will need weeks of study and will necessitate the bringing together of all aspects of the transport industry, labour and management in order that a solution can be worked out. Some positive steps will also need to be taken by the government with relation to financial policy to solve the problem of inflation and the rising cost of living.

We remind ourselves, Mr. Speaker, that we are here to deal with the strike and we must deal with it effectively. We trust the government will now be able to bring forth this legislation and let us get on with it. I believe that the eyes of the nation are upon us. So far as our party is concerned, we pledge ourselves to get on with the legislation.

Mr. Pearson: I know, Mr. Speaker, that under the rules I have no right to speak again. However, there have been one or two procedural points raised and if the house so desires I could deal with them at this time. It might shorten the debate later.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Pearson: The right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) said it would be helpful—I think he used stronger words than that—if members of the house could have the railway bill available to them before the strike legislation is debated.

This seems to be a reasonable request. The right hon. gentleman may recall that I have indicated to him that if the house could forgo debate on the resolution stage of that particular bill, which debate we know is often redundant, pass the resolution and begin debate on that bill on second reading, then perhaps this afternoon we could get first reading of the strike legislation and the passing of the resolution and first reading of the railway legislation. Then we could go on with second reading of the strike legislation and debate it or, if the members felt it desirable to have a look at this legislation for an hour or two, that could be arranged.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Before the Prime Minister goes on, and in order to get at the heart of this matter which is the strike situation, perhaps the Prime Minister would agree that it would be beneficial if we had available to us what I might call the railway bill. There is no reason why we should start in part way and accept the resolution without debate. If the house were in agreement we could have a copy of the bill given to us. We are trying to co-operate. There is no reason why these two bills should not be made available. Otherwise the position is going to be that the government will simply introduce the resolution and then there will be no debate on it. We will not have that information we usually have on these matters. We will be passing something about which we do not know anything.

We might be denied a speech by the Minister of Transport and that might put us into a transport of woe. On the other hand, it might not. What possible reason is there for not allowing us to see this bill, even without following the usual formality? Let us have it and then go on with the strike bill.

● (3:40 p.m.)

Mr. Pearson: There is only one difficulty in following that course, and if that difficulty