

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, one point perhaps should be clarified with respect to the remarks made a few minutes ago when an hon. member raised a request as to abandoning the right to debate questions on the motion for adjournment at ten o'clock and using that time for debate on the railway bill.

Mr. Starr: No.

Mr. McIlraith: That point got lost in the subsequent discussion.

Mr. Starr: Only because of your remarks.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, as the member who has the item posted for the late show, I was prepared to surrender it for tonight if we could come to some agreement about the supper hour. Since the hon. member for Ontario has said that the rules must stand, all right, let the rules stand.

Mr. Starr: I made that statement in view of what the government house leader had said.

An hon. Member: We want justice.

Mr. Starr: What does the hon. member know about justice?

• (6:20 p.m.)

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, we have an amendment before the house, the subamendment having been ruled out of order. The subamendment brought out a principle which is very important, one of which we should take cognizance. To have accepted it would have meant taking over the right of railroad management to take part in the negotiations which must continue with the railroad unions looking toward a settlement of this strike. In other words, it would be placing parliament in the position of an arbitrator and I am confident that neither the union leaders nor their membership want this. The door must not be closed to negotiation. When parliament acts it is compulsion, whether we like it or not. I should have thought that the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas), who raised this question, need only look at the situation which exists in Great Britain at the present time and the action taken by the prime minister of that country to find verification of what I have said.

As to the amendment itself, it seems to me it has no other purpose than to do away with the entire legislation which is before us in the form of Bill No. C-230. It would kill the bill. In my opinion this is not the time when

[Mr. Speaker.]

such a proposal should even be considered by members of this house.

If there are provisions in this bill which are considered to be unsatisfactory there will be an opportunity to deal with them by amendment in committee of the whole. That is the proper way in which to correct weak points in the measure. Certainly, however, to kill or eliminate the bill which has been presented to us is not a responsible way in which to deal with the crisis which has brought this emergency sitting into being.

Having said this, let me make it clear that we agree there are many faults in the economy and that union members have many legitimate complaints. There are many aspects of this strike which lie, so to speak, beneath the surface, and these can never be dealt with until some of the gross errors affecting the economy have been corrected. Until we have a financial policy which is adequate to care of the economic needs of our country we shall continue to face problems of this kind.

This we admit. But the legislation we are dealing with now, and the reason we are here, concerns the crisis which has been precipitated by the strike action that the railroad unions have taken. To deal with this situation is our first and most important responsibility. That is the number one priority. So let us return to the priorities and deal with them in a positive way remembering that it is the welfare of the nation and the well-being of the economy in general which are involved.

I say again that the immediate crisis which faces the nation centres on the railroad strike. Our jog in parliament is to end that strike and get the railroads running again. It is not our immediate job to conduct an inquiry into the reasons behind the strike or to determine why the strike came about. There will be another time for that.

There is a great deal behind this rail stoppage. Lack of action in the past, poor working conditions and other factors have all contributed. The strike does not reflect any single problem; it is a symptom of something which is much deeper, a problem which the government must recognize and toward the solution of which it must direct its legislative program.

Nevertheless the country cannot be plunged into irretrievable loss and economic chaos while all the rights and wrongs are debated in parliament. The national interest must