

Inquiries of the Ministry

would not be in the public interest to table it at this time. I would therefore ask the hon. member to withdraw his motion.

Mr. Gilbert: I will, Mr. Speaker, subject to the reservation that I will put the motion on the order paper again at a later time.

Mr. Speaker: The motion is dropped.

Order discharged and motion withdrawn.

• (2:20 p.m.)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

LABOUR RELATIONS

DISPUTE BETWEEN RAILWAYS AND LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS—STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Labour. Can he bring the House up to date and give us any information regarding the success, if any, in bringing the labour dispute involving our two national railways to a successful conclusion?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): I thank the hon. gentleman for the reasonable way in which he posed the question, indicating his experience as a former Minister of Transport. He appreciates, if other members of his party do not, that prejudgment of labour negotiations at a period as delicate as this, particularly in the field of transportation, can only have a detrimental effect. I would hope nobody would presume or want to presume—I know the hon. gentleman does not—that the democratic rights of the workers should be removed from them prior to an emergency. I have often said that when and if public interests supersede those of the private parties, I will be prepared to assume my responsibility, but I would not go as far as some hon. members in presuming when that moment should be.

DISPUTE BETWEEN RAILWAYS AND LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS—INTERVENTION BY MINISTER OF LABOUR—STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Labour. In view of the very serious dislocation to the economy of western Canada caused by the fact that the strike of locomotive engineers now covers nearly all of western Canada and the fact that a strike vote is being taken which may affect all of the railway systems throughout Canada, I should like to ask the minister if the time has now been reached when he might meet with both of the parties to this dispute to see if his good offices could be used to bring them closer to an immediate settlement?

[Mr. Jerome.]

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Once again, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for being rather ambiguous in my reply. I cannot very well divulge the confidences of one side or the other or what role, if any, I have played behind the scenes in this dispute. Let me say that I consider it premature at this moment for the Minister of Labour to participate officially in the negotiations.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, I have no desire to embarrass the minister or in any way obstruct the possibility of an immediate settlement. However, in view of the fact that the House and the people of Canada generally are deeply concerned about this matter, can the minister tell us if negotiations are continuing and if there seems to be some progress, so that people can have some hope that a settlement is likely in the near future?

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, negotiations are going on at this moment in Montreal in the shopcrafts and non-operating groups. There was a meeting this morning between the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the CNR, but I am not prepared to divulge the outcome. I understand another meeting is now in progress between the negotiating team of the BLE and the CPR. Unless the hon. gentleman would suggest to me that I take compulsory action against the men who are on strike in the west, perhaps prematurely in the eyes of their national bargaining unit, I can only suggest that things are going on as well as I would anticipate at this very delicate time.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, I asked the question in the hope that the minister could divulge whatever information he felt free to give. I say to the minister that at no time did I suggest that he take any compulsory action, and no one has suggested that. We are asking the minister whether he, himself, can use the prestige of his office and his own personal expertise for dealing with a situation like this in an attempt to bring about an early settlement.

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I think I indicated to the hon. gentleman who asked a question on behalf of the official opposition that I was prepared to do so at the moment when, in my judgment, it was appropriate. The only reason I alluded to the members of the BLE who are on strike out west is that the hon. gentleman had introduced that in his preamble. I had made no reference to them. I am simply saying that I have divulged all I can without jeopardizing the dispute and the negotiations now going on. If I am forced to divulge more, I think all of us will then have to bear the responsibility if I unintentionally jeopardize what could be a successful conclusion.

DISPUTE BETWEEN RAILWAYS AND LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS—RETURN TO WORK REQUEST BY MINISTER

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the minister. Since the minister has more or less suggested a