

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, January 24, 1961

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

LABOUR CONDITIONS

THREATENED RAIL STRIKE—REQUEST FOR RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the house will recall that in the debate on third reading of the Railway Operation Continuation Act on December 2 last I said that I would do everything I could to bring the parties together and regularly call them together to assure that discussions would continue and that justice would be done.

Accordingly I have written to the chairman of the negotiating committee as well as to the representatives of the railroads requesting the parties to the dispute affecting the non-operating railway employees to meet together and resume their negotiations for the settlement of the dispute. The Minister of Labour will make available to the parties the conference room of the Department of Labour at Montreal, and will provide whatever other facilities are suitable so that, pending the receipt of the report of the royal commission on transportation, the position of the matters at issue may be reviewed and an endeavour may be made in the national interest to come to an accommodation that will resolve their differences.

Furthermore, I have advised these parties that the minister would provide any advice or assistance to facilitate the meeting. In that connection I pointed this out in the letter:

It is imperative when determined steps are being taken by the federal government to stabilize the Canadian economy and maintain its growth that every effort be made to avoid a cessation of railway transportation and the drastic dislocations which would result therefrom.

Accordingly I have asked the co-operation of Mr. Hall and those he represents and the presidents of the two railways and the other railways affected to co-operate in the resumption of negotiations.

Mr. Hazen Argue (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, this announcement by the Prime Minister comes, of course, as no surprise. I can only say that I think it would have been much better to have done more to have this situation settled in December than to have the problem still with us. I express the hope of

this group that when the parties come together the government will not only make available to them the facilities of the Department of Labour, but that the government itself will take an active part in the negotiations by making proposals and by trying to bring the parties together so that in fact an agreement can be reached.

I would have liked the Prime Minister to elaborate a little in regard to his reference to the royal commission on transportation. Our view is that after the eventual settlement of this dispute it should be government policy, and we make that request, that in no circumstances should there be an increase in freight rates.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. member, in going into a discussion of the royal commission and its report, is enlarging the scope of the statement which was made from the government benches.

Mr. Argue: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order you have raised, I was not endeavouring to discuss, nor do I think I was—and I think you will agree on reflection—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Argue:—the report of the royal commission itself, nor the report of the royal commission even in relation to the government's announcement. What I was discussing, however, was the statement of policy that the Prime Minister made last December, and I make the suggestion and the request that in no circumstances should there be an increase in freight rates.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It was at that point that I thought the hon. member, in going back to an earlier statement, was departing from the practice.

[Later:]

On the orders of the day:

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): I should like to ask the Prime Minister a question arising out of the announcement he made a few moments ago about the invitation to resume negotiations in connection with the railway dispute. Has the government any proposals to submit to the resumed meetings which may facilitate the search for a solution to this important and difficult problem?