

*Airline Firefighters Strike*

● (2100)

There is something unsatisfactory about a situation that compels men who are otherwise law-abiding to decide to take the law into their own hands and withdraw their services, despite the fact they must appreciate that the great inconvenience they are causing will hardly win them any friends among the general public. It is because this unhappy situation has developed that a total of 211 men in the province of British Columbia have now withdrawn their services as firemen, and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand), in a move for which I commend him, has very sensibly and appropriately closed ten Department of Transport airports. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, we cannot take the chance of a grave accident occurring; we must have firemen at the airports to carry out the duties in which these men are so well trained.

The fact of the matter is—and there is no running away from it—that these men believe their legitimate interests have not been adequately handled under the present negotiating system and so have withdrawn their services. British Columbia is now without air transport, either from within the province to the outside and back, or within the province itself. This, I say with respect, is a matter of the utmost urgency not only to my own province but to all of Canada, so it is proper that tonight we debate the matter.

It seems to me that if we reach a situation, no matter how complex, where a number of men have withdrawn their services, with the result that the public interest is no longer being served, then there is a duty upon the government of the day to do something about it. It is very easy to say that this is an illegal strike and that the men should go back to work. Today's *Globe and Mail* reports that these firemen have said they will go to jail rather than comply with the injunction that has been obtained against them in the courts. I do not for one minute condone that attitude, Mr. Speaker, but nevertheless that is the fact. It is also apparently the fact that at least for some time it will be extremely difficult to replace these men. They are highly trained, they are skilled, and they are worth-while people in our community. But they have withdrawn their services and as a consequence British Columbia is isolated. What is also important, communities within the province are isolated.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, tonight we must search for some way of bringing these men back to work, and bringing them back to work before the stoppage results in any further harm being done to the province of British Columbia and this country. We must bring them back to work before inevitably we have to allow the law to take its full course and to visit upon them the punishment that the law must visit upon those who break the law, especially in a case where the public interest is transgressed. Surely it is in the interests of all of us to find a way to end the stoppage now before we must resort to the harsher methods to which a community must ultimately resort if there is to be a difference between civil order and anarchy.

Yesterday the Minister of Transport was urged by members of the opposition, especially members from the province of British Columbia, to go to Vancouver to meet these firemen. Why, Mr. Speaker, were we asking this? We were asking it, surely, because all of us recognized, as I think the Minister of Transport recognized, that decent men do

[Mr. Fraser.]

not take these very severe measures unless there is some justice in their complaint. If there is some justice in their complaint, and if there is no means by which they feel their complaint can be heard and dealt with, then finally in frustration they do what men have done before in our tradition—they break the law; and they have very honestly said that they know exactly what the consequences of this will be.

There is no denying the fact that within the Public Service Alliance there is a division of opinion about the variation in pay about which these firemen feel so strongly. Therefore, we urge the minister to go to Vancouver, along with representatives of Treasury Board and the Public Service Alliance, and meet these men. We urge the minister to bring his officials as well as representatives of Treasury Board and the executive of the Public Service Alliance, together with the dissident firemen so as to find a way in which these firemen will have confidence that the complaints they are making and the aspirations they have in their own legitimate self-interest can be resolved.

The minister has said that he cannot do this. As reported at page 1226 of yesterday's *Hansard*, he said:

We have a certain number of laws in this country which regulate labour relations between employees and employers. You have the Public Service Alliance of Canada which is certified to represent this group, and Treasury Board is negotiating with the certified agent. Treasury Board cannot negotiate with anybody else because this is an exclusive bargaining right.

Most of the members of this House understand exactly the dilemma in which the minister finds himself. In the strictly legalistic sense there is some merit in the position that the minister has put forward. But with respect, as the minister has himself admitted, this is not an ordinary situation. It is a situation where we have a strike, not by the union itself but by a dissident minority of the union. The usual order has broken down.

The minister informed us that the Public Service Alliance has told these men they must return to work, but they have not done so. The laws of the land say that they have no business doing what they are doing, yet they have not returned to work. We have a situation where the usual system has broken down. In a case such as this, can we sit back and take a rigid position? Can we say that although under normal circumstances we would be dealing with the Public Service Alliance, in a situation where nothing is normal a minister of the Crown cannot go to Vancouver to talk to these people? These people, Mr. Minister, are citizens, as we all are.

Surely the minister is not going to break faith with the Public Service Alliance of Canada, organized labour or any other group within the community because he takes it upon himself to do the one thing he can do at this time, which is to go to Vancouver and meet these people in an attempt to decide on a formula through which they can express their particular grievance.

● (2110)

It is clear that this strike cannot go on forever. The minister said he sent two members of his department out there, but the fact is that only tonight are those men meeting with representatives of the dissident firemen. What have they done while they have been out there?