

*Inquiries of the Ministry***LABOUR RELATIONS****REPORTED PARTIAL AGREEMENT IN NEGOTIATION OF RAILWAY DISPUTE**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): My question is directed to the Minister of Labour. In view of the fact that last night, at midnight, the second deadline set for mediation following the recent rail strike expired, is the minister in a position to make a report on the state of these negotiations?

Hon. J. R. Nicholson (Minister of Labour): The mediator did report to me early this morning. There were four groups of unions involved in the mediation proceedings. The report is not a long one and perhaps it would be as well for me to read it.

First, agreement on terms of settlement has been reached between the railway companies and the negotiations committee of the ten railway shopcraft unions. The terms of settlement, subject to ratification by the membership, involve a three-year agreement which covers, among other matters, improvements in wages and fringe benefits, a differential in skills and a provision for negotiation to finality on the adverse effects of technological change.

That, I think, calls for some commendation of the mediator, because of the important part which the Freedman report has played in these negotiations. At least there has been agreement by the parties to work this thing out to finality. If this is done there should be no need for legislation as suggested in the report.

The second group of employees, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, is still in negotiation with the companies. These employees have asked the mediator to advise the Minister of Labour that they desire to continue these negotiations under his auspices. An order in council was passed this morning pursuant to that request and mediation will continue with a further direction to the mediator to report not later than December 17.

Negotiations to date between the railway companies and the residual non-operating railway employees have not resulted in any agreement, and as I have previously mentioned, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Transport and General Workers withdrew from the negotiations late last week without notice to either the railway companies or to the mediator.

[Mr. Benson.]

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): Since the Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General workers has withdrawn from the negotiations, being unwilling to continue under the mediator, may I ask whether the clause which provides for compulsory arbitration will now be put into effect as far as this group is concerned?

Mr. Nicholson: In view of the request which has been made and the decision of the government to extend the mediation period it seems highly desirable that as many of these issues as possible should be settled before reference is made to an arbitrator, should it be necessary to resort to compulsory arbitration. I do not think any decision on this aspect should be taken until the results of this further mediation process, which constitutes genuine collective bargaining, are known.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): I did not quite understand the minister's explanation of the state of these negotiations. Where agreement has not been reached, is mediation now ended by virtue of the fact that the extension was granted only until November 30? Or is the minister taking some other step at the request of the mediator, or either of the parties?

Mr. Nicholson: We have extended the term of the mediation to include all groups, even though only one of them has completed an agreement. Encouraging progress has been made in the case of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, furthermore the residual non-operating group is meeting in Montreal this afternoon. I am hopeful that negotiations may soon be resumed under the guidance of the mediator.

In regard to the Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers, again many of the items there are common to the other three, and I think in the long run we would be better off if we defer making any decision with respect to arbitration. But let us hope it can be avoided by an agreed settlement on the eve of Christmas.

Mr. Lewis: On a point of clarification, Mr. Speaker, the minister used a term which got me a little confused. He spoke of the terms of mediation. Did the minister mean the terms of the order in council passed this morning include all these groups?

Mr. Nicholson: It is an extension of the original order that was passed back in September.