

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

The union representative favoured the retention of the right to strike if negotiation failed. The railway representative favoured—and I quote—final and binding impartial determination, by an arbitrator, if there were such failure. It was apparent, said Judge Little's reports, that the union did not expect this issue to be resolved by the normal processes of collective bargaining and was convinced that the only solution was by way of legislation. The boards then decided that no useful purpose would be served by a specific recommendation. "We believe," the reports say, "that the differing viewpoints will not be resolved by negotiation. The only alternative therefore is legislation." But they added:

We trust that, when the ultimate decision is made in this regard, those making it will bear in mind the broad implications which it will undoubtedly have for many industries and commodities and will accordingly look beyond the interests of the parties hereto and the mere settlement of one industrial dispute.

Mr. Speaker, the serious study of the Freedman report which is now being made is being conducted with this in mind. The implications for industry generally, and which are of far reaching significance, are being, and must be, taken into account in this study. There must be no unnecessary delay in this work. We must press ahead with it, as we are; but adequate time is required for study because of the great and general importance of the issue at stake. I hope it will not be long before the government will be able to make a report to parliament as a result of the studies which have been made. Changes in working conditions which affect job security represent a vital problem to the worker. It is hoped that difficulties can be resolved in the processes of collective bargaining.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish to spend a few minutes on the events leading up to the reassembling of parliament. Although the government did not formally intervene in the work of any of these boards until the boards had reported and the decision taken to call a strike, there had been very useful informal discussions—very serious and useful ones—with the railway union leaders before August 22. I had the privilege of presiding at one of those discussions.

When the decision to strike was taken on August 22—which strike was to begin four days later—the government, as the house knows, intervened formally and immediately. The decision was taken at noon on August

22. That afternoon I wired the parties concerned and proposed mediation through the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister allow a question? Was he not informed of the strike date on Sunday evening, on his return from New Brunswick?

Mr. Pearson: No, Mr. Speaker; I was not informed, nor was the decision taken, until noon Monday. The right hon. gentleman this afternoon used the date of August 21 as the date on which we were informed. That does not happen to be accurate. That was the week end which, according to him, I was loafing around Campobello. I must confess, Mr. Speaker, to being an indolent person, but on that Saturday I had work to do in the morning and I flew to Campobello in the afternoon and spent the evening with the Premier of New Brunswick. I spent the following day with the President of the United States and returned to Ottawa in the evening. I spent part of the evening attending a meeting of the strike committee of the cabinet.

That was not exactly a lost week end, Mr. Speaker. I would have been much happier if I could have been spending that week end fishing out in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Diefenbaker: You had the opportunity of going to Saskatchewan and did not take advantage of it.

Mr. Pearson: When the decision was made Monday morning—and we received notice of it at noon—I wired the parties at once and proposed mediation. That offer was accepted. Many things began at once, with which the Minister of Labour was acquainted. At this point perhaps I may be permitted to mention the skilled and valuable assistance that was given by the deputy minister of labour, Mr. Wilson. If I may, I should like to pay a tribute to the deputy minister and other officials in his department who had a very busy summer.

• (8:50 p.m.)

The effort on both sides was and remains, sincere and genuine; there was good will as well as frankness. But the time was so short, and the situation such that no settlement could be reached before the strike date, though a better understanding was reached and some points were cleared up.

Even after the strike began mediation continued, and will continue while this legislation is being considered, in the hope that an