

Inquiries of the Ministry

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

AIR CANADA

STRIKE OF MECHANICS—INQUIRY AS TO PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. H. Russell MacEwan (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, in view of the importance of this matter to the country, I ask the Minister of Labour whether he can report on the status of the Air Canada negotiations with its employees.

Hon. Bryce S. Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, the negotiations between Air Canada and the International Association of Machinists broke off last evening. At the present moment there are no meaningful talks going on between Air Canada and this particular group of employees. I have no way of predicting how long it will be before the employees and employer resume negotiations, and I can only point to the fact that there are alternative methods of transportation in this country.

Mr. Woolliams: Whom are you fooling?

Mr. MacEwan: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister whether he will take it upon himself to try to get the parties together. This matter is very important to transportation in this country.

Mr. Mackasey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I returned from a short holiday a week ago yesterday I did precisely that and succeeded in getting both parties to resume negotiations. I believe they began negotiations a week ago yesterday. I am rather pleased in one respect, namely that the parties were able, particularly on Friday of last week in Ottawa, to clean up all non-monetary issues which were at that time hampering the discussions of the monetary issues and which, according to both parties, had priority. These items have been cleared up, and when the negotiations broke off last evening there remained only the monetary clauses.

I will be very pleased to take the suggestion of the hon. member into consideration, and when both sides request the assistance of the Department of Labour or even of the Minister of Labour and are prepared to ask for that assistance jointly I will be happy to give it.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the Minister of Labour whether he has been able to inform Air Canada

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

on behalf of the government that the corporation is not tied to any official or unofficial guidelines with regard to the limits which they are permitted to offer to the negotiating union, so that the two sides may negotiate and bargain for a settlement in the normal way.

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. gentleman has raised a very important point. This morning I reviewed *Hansard*, and from this I see that the Prime Minister made it quite clear last week that Air Canada has the right to bargain with its employees independently of government intervention. I could not continue my role as Minister of Labour if I thought there was government interference in any Crown corporation.

Mr. Lewis: I hope there is not.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Labour. Has the government received any information from the International Association of Machinists that it might instruct its members working for other airlines either to observe picket lines, or to come out in a sympathy strike, because it felt that the government was imposing certain guidelines with regard to wages?

Mr. Mackasey: I think the point should be clarified, Mr. Speaker. The International Association of Machinists has not been negotiating with the government but rather with Air Canada, which happens to be a Crown corporation, but which, in my view, has been given no special preferential treatment any more than, say, Ogilvie Flour Mills Company or other companies which come under the Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act. I consider Air Canada to be completely free to negotiate with its employees and to establish wage rates as they see fit, and which they are capable of paying.

With regard to whether or not the International Association of Machinists have advanced that particular suggestion, the answer is no, because at no time have they dealt directly with the government, certainly not through the Minister of Labour; and I doubt if they negotiated or discussed their problem with the government through any other minister.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): I have a supplementary question, to clear up the point. There is no suggestion that the union has to