

Air Traffic Control Dispute

have learned from talking to civil servants in the past few years is this: the basis for their being so far behind in salaries is that the former government headed by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) failed to provide civil servants with salary increases, when they should have had them.

● (5:00 p.m.)

Mr. Woolliams: Is that your case?

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. members who were so anxious to hear from the government would allow me to speak on behalf of the government, I will continue to deal with this important matter.

The position with regard to the air traffic controllers is this: Their salaries were set, along with the salaries of a large group of other employees, effective July 1, 1965. They were granted an increase of 12 per cent at that time plus an additional three per cent effective July 1, 1966. This totals 15 per cent. The figure used by the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr) with reference to the implications of the increase recommended by Judge Robinson, including longevity payments, does not add up to 15 per cent; I am informed it adds up to 23 per cent. So, what we are concerned with here is an increase of almost 40 per cent for the air traffic controllers over two years. These are the facts. Look at the report.

Mr. Lewis: Is the minister suggesting that the implementation of Judge Robinson's report tomorrow would involve a 23 per cent increase tomorrow? Is he not aware that the proposal relates to supplementary payments for years of service over a number of years?

Mr. Benson: The hon. member does not appear to recognize that Judge Robinson believes service to date should be recognized, and most operational controllers are in the operational category, which is group five, with seven to ten years service, and would be entitled to longevity pay. The point to point increase over a two year period, if it were granted, including the 15 per cent already given, would add up to more than 40 per cent, I am told by my officials. Mr. Speaker, I can just see hon. members on the other side of the house howling if we granted people a 40 per cent increase over a two year period.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Benson: I am very pleased we now have the hon. member for Ontario on our side, saying the government should give people

great increases. He was complaining the other day about a 30 per cent increase for seaway workers over two years. Now, he says we should be giving a 40 per cent increase to civil servants.

Mr. Starr: I rise on a question of privilege. *Hansard* will record that I said nothing of the kind. The minister is trying to put forward a case based on false versions of what I have said.

Mr. Benson: I indicated that the figure of 15 per cent he used was absolutely wrong. The increase which was granted was made under a contract which expires on July 1, 1967 at which time negotiations will take place under collective bargaining arrangements which will govern salaries from that point onward.

Mr. Lewis: Are you sure you will not exclude them?

Mr. Benson: We hope no civil servants other than management will be excluded from collective bargaining.

Mr. Lewis: Is the minister assuring parliament that these air control people will not be excluded from bargaining until by the government?

Mr. Benson: I have answered that question. No one will be excluded from bargaining units except management personnel.

Mr. Byrne: Not even their lawyers.

Mr. Benson: To deal with Judge Robinson's report, we have not accepted that report although we have accepted the most important concept, in my opinion, which it contains.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Everything but the wage increase.

Mr. Benson: The Leader of the Opposition will have a further opportunity to speak provided he allows me to speak.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The minister has made a statement. I ask him what portions of the report are acceptable to the government.

Mr. Benson: If the Leader of the Opposition will give me the opportunity, I will deal with that point. I was about to say that one of the important recommendations in the report was that air traffic controllers should be compared with airline despatchers. We agree with this in principle—that their salaries should be comparable with those of airline despatchers.