

Air Traffic Control Dispute

think that it would be wise to discuss the matter during an emergency debate.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr) provides in his motion—and I congratulate him for having introduced it in English only; there was probably no French copy—

[English]

I move the adjournment of the house under standing order 26 to discuss an urgent matter of public importance, namely the threatened strike by the Canadian Air Traffic Control Association as a result of the refusal of the government to accept the recommendations of Judge John Robinson.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, does the government have to accept the proposals or suggestions of a conciliator?

It was mentioned quite correctly earlier that, in this case there was not a mediator entrusted with suggesting a solution that both parties must accept as soon as possible, but rather a conciliator, which is not the same thing at all.

Since the Minister of Transport tells us that representatives of the association and the government will meet tomorrow morning, I think we should await the results of that meeting before raising a matter of such importance and hold an emergency debate in this house.

[English]

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): There can be no doubt that the prospect of the strike which now faces us as a result of failure to reach agreement with the Canadian Air Traffic Control Association and its members is an extremely serious one for this country. It would be most unfortunate for a strike to take place at a time such as this. I do not doubt that the house has a certain responsibility in such a situation. It is beyond question that a heavy responsibility rests on the government.

I should like to make one point as to the urgency of this matter and the advisability of debating it at the present time. In my view the argument presented by the Minister of Transport, based on the fact that a strike vote is being taken, was not relevant; I doubt whether anything said here this afternoon will have any influence on that vote. Of greater importance is the fact that negotiations are going on this afternoon—

Mr. Starr: No, they are not.

Mr. Thompson: As long as there is any hope of negotiations leading to an agreement, it seems to me that any debate here which

[Mr. Caouette.]

might prejudice those negotiations would be unwise.

I agree that this might not be the case tomorrow. I agree, too, with those who think the government has neglected to take the action it should have taken. It is time we realized in this country that there are certain types of strike action which cannot be tolerated. This applies to areas where there is an important public interest and where a public service is being rendered. Though I do not minimize the importance of this issue in any way, it appears to me that a debate at this time would only prejudice the likelihood of concluding these negotiations in a satisfactory way—and settlement by negotiation is the only way in which this dispute can properly be settled.

I doubt whether the urgency of this matter concerns us directly at the moment. Remembering that the strike is not yet in effect, I am sure we would not wish to interfere with the normal process of negotiations, if there were any chance of a successful outcome.

Hon. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): In speaking briefly in support of the urgency of the debate and the admissibility of the motion, I wish to deal with the arguments which have been advanced against the motion on grounds of lack of urgency.

● (3:00 p.m.)

I believe it is agreed on all sides that this is an urgent matter. But, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport and the hon. member for Red Deer in advancing arguments against your putting the motion, have in fact, dealt, not with urgency, but have given, as a so-called reason for not entering upon a debate in the matter, a ground which does not go to the question of urgency at all and is therefore, strictly speaking, irrelevant. It is a ground which goes rather to the matter of judgment as to the advisability of discussing the situation at all at this time.

It is significant that in doing so, in putting forward that irrelevant answer to the argument of urgency, both the Minister of Transport and the hon. member for Red Deer have questioned one of the very bases of democratic and parliamentary government itself, namely the undoubted right of parliament to discuss matters of national concern, and especially the right of parliament to discuss matters of national concern which assume urgent characteristics.

What I say in support of the motion on the matter of urgency is that Your Honour should