

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

On October 28, 1965, in view of the contracts expiring on December 31, three negotiating committees were formed by the unions. In November the railway workers submitted their proposals to the companies. On December 31, 1965 the contracts expired, the companies making no counter proposals on monetary clauses because they said that the cost would be too high.

In mid-March of 1966 the three negotiating committees for the railwaymen asked for conciliation. While all this was going on, the former minister of labour, the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr), made suggestions in the house as to what should be done. There was no response.

On July 6 there were issued the two Munroe reports, that of the non-operatives and the associated shop workers, which were immediately rejected by the union leaders, who called for a strike vote with a recommendation by the leaders that a strike be approved.

On August 11 we had the Cameron report, and immediately the union leaders said a strike should be called in that connection. On August 15 the Little report on the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen was made public. In fact, there were two reports, one for C.N.R. employees and the other for C.P.R. employees. Both sets of employees took a stand against the respective reports and called for strike votes.

On August 17, at a press conference, the Prime Minister informed the nation that the cabinet had the situation well in hand—I ask, whose hand?—and that an ad hoc cabinet committee had been sitting for some time and was preparing plans for every eventuality.

● (9:40 p.m.)

On August 18 and 19 the strike committee sat. On Friday the 19th the Prime Minister's office said that the situation was well in hand, and that the committee has been asked to reconvene on Monday; that a cabinet meeting would be held, if necessary, on Tuesday. What a record of dilatoriness, failure to act, and pretence. Now he comes before parliament and says: "It is a frightful position we are in." And it is. I say again, through you, sir, to the Prime Minister and the members of his cabinet: You are the ones who made it so.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

In 1960 the Prime Minister said that he could not accept the bill that was presented. I quote from page 350 of *Hansard* of that year:

In passing, therefore, from collective bargaining, as we are doing in this bill, to the prevention of a strike by legislation by imposing a compulsory settlement—though perhaps it will be only a temporary one, it is a compulsory settlement—the government is asking parliament to take the responsibility for the scale of wages and the conditions of work of these workers.

Well, sir, there is the situation. I want to refer to the 1960 bill so that there will be no mistake as to its provisions. We pointed out at that time that it was not compulsory arbitration, and every one of the ministers who sits opposite today, who was in the house at that time, voted against it.

What a change in six years. We stopped the strike by our action. The present government has acted as though it did not mind if there was a strike or not. When I listened to the Prime Minister on his national broadcast, I could only conclude that he was trying to find someone to blame for the government's shortcomings. He blamed it on labour; he blamed it on everybody else: Physician, heal thyself.

Sir, the Prime Minister voted against the legislation in 1960; so did the Minister of Transport; so did several other ministers who are today in the house. What manner of consistency is this? Why did they take that stand?

We have been consistent throughout, in our views. In 1950, when 16 years ago today Prime Minister St. Laurent introduced the legislation, he described the national position as being a national emergency. We at that time took a strong stand against compulsory arbitration. We have not seen fit in the passing years to alter that stand.

An hon. Member: It was 15.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Sir, what do you expect will happen when employees find themselves caught in spiralling inflation. In the face of the galloping reduction of the buying power of the dollar where are the workers, those who have fixed incomes to find help?

That is why I said the other day, and I still say, that before we leave here the government must act. Does any one of the ministers sitting opposite realize that in every part of this nation people are aroused over the cost of living? Go down to the market. The farmer is not getting the additional amount. Who is getting that layer of fat, as prices go up, up and up?