

Emergency Powers Act

member for Broadview (Mr. Hees) asked the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) directly whether the government had accepted the offer of the four major labour bodies of Canada to sit down and discuss this matter, the Prime Minister said no. He made it very clear in the remarks he made later, as the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggan (Mr. Coldwell) pressed him on the point, that this was a decision to be made by the government. He said that if a time was reached when the government thought that price control would be an effective way to deal with this problem they would seek the co-operation of all sections of the Canadian community, and one of those sections was certainly labour, which they would call in. In other words, it is quite clear that labour is not the reason that price controls are not being gone ahead with, despite what was said by the Minister of Trade and Commerce.

Labour has made an offer to sit down with the government and management and discuss the question of wage stabilization, provided there is readiness on the part of the government to proceed with controls on prices and production. I emphasize "wage stabilization"—not wage freezing. The other evening the Minister of Trade and Commerce, while he did not say so to me, said to the hon. member for Broadview that he doubted whether he could substantiate the offer that he said—and that I said—was made by the four major labour bodies in this country. I have in my hand a copy of the pamphlet containing the submission on price controls to the government of Canada by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour, and the dominion joint legislative committee of the railway transportation brotherhoods, which was presented to the government on February 20 of this year.

This is a submission calling for price controls. It does not ask for a price freeze. It asks for control of prices and it musters a whole barrage of arguments as to why that course should be pursued immediately. However, since the question was asked as to what is the attitude of labour towards wage control I read to the Minister of Trade and Commerce the other night, and I am going to read it again, paragraph 23 of this submission. It is as follows:

The labour movement recognizes that wages could go up fast enough and far enough to break a price ceiling, though it sees no immediate danger of anything of the sort. It believes that the proper way to deal with this question is a government-labour-management conference to work out methods of wage stabilization. This offers a prospect of a wage policy which will do two things, both essential: (a) preserve the spirit, the principle, of collective bargaining, and (b) bring the experience of

[Mr. Knowles.]

labour and management into the defence effort. If our government institutes a general policy of price and production controls, labour is ready to take part in a joint government-labour-management conference to consider wage stabilization.

I said that the question was raised the other night as to whether members on the floor of the house could make that offer in firm terms. The result was that the exchange between the minister and myself, with others involved in it, reached the newspapers. In fact the *Ottawa Citizen* even went so far as to publish my picture with the story.

Mr. Fleming: Have they come to that?

Mr. Knowles: It seemed to me that a picture of the Minister of Trade and Commerce ought to have been there alongside mine.

Mr. Fleming: What has he done that is wrong?

Mr. Howe: The publisher is a friend of mine.

Mr. Knowles: The result is the authors of the brief are aware of the fact there was some discussion of the position they took. Therefore I decided today that I would get in touch with those of the authors of the brief whom I could reach by telephone. I talked to Mr. Percy Bengough, president of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. I asked him if he had noticed what had happened in the house and he said he had. I read to him the last sentence of paragraph 23, which I have just quoted, and I will quote it again, namely:

If our government institutes a general policy of price and production controls, labour is ready to take part in a joint government-labour-management conference to consider wage stabilization.

I said to Mr. Bengough in the clearest language I could: "Do you still stand by that offer?" His answer was one word—"Absolutely." I also talked to Mr. A. R. Mosher, president of the Canadian Congress of Labour and also president of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. In addition I talked to Mr. Pat Conroy, secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Congress of Labour. I asked both of them the same question. I referred to paragraph 23, and particularly to the last sentence. I asked them if their organization, as one of the four involved in this submission, still stood by that sentence. By a strange coincidence, though I talked to them at different times by telephone, both of them used precisely the same word as Mr. Bengough had used—"Absolutely."

I pressed them further. I said to Mr. Mosher and Mr. Conroy: "Can I quote you on the floor of parliament? Can I indicate that I have your authority to say that your