

Maintenance of Railway Operation Act

sir, and those associated with you are taking sides in this dispute, because you are implementing the minority report.

Then, again, you stated that you tried to bring about a settlement. I have no doubt that you did, and that those ministers who were associated with you did also. But the unfortunate part is that you did not try soon enough. You knew that this matter—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. member please address the Chair.

Mr. Chevrier: I beg your pardon, sir.

Mr. Pearson: He is a new member.

Mr. Chevrier: The Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, knew at least a year ago that this position was likely to develop, and if the minister of transport told him what I presume the president of the Canadian National Railways indicated to that minister in his weekly report to him, then he must have known the position in which the Canadian National Railways was at that time. He must have known the position in which the Canadian National Railways was when we had the hearings of the committee on railways and shipping in the House of Commons, and he must have known what the position was after that. Therefore, if there was inability to pay, surely some earlier attempt at meeting the position should have been made by those who sit on the other side of the house.

Then the Prime Minister said, "we shall not allow these rights to be lost in any way"—meaning the rights of the railway employees. But they are lost, since they are postponed from now until May 15. They are lost pending that date. And who knows if they will not be lost after that time if, as the Prime Minister indicated yesterday, following the application to the board of transport commissioners for an increase in freight rates we find ourselves with voluminous evidence in opposition to the application which is made. Delays, as I have said, might last as long as one year.

The hon. member for Essex East (Mr. Martin) dealt very effectively with the question of prejudice, the prejudice to which the Prime Minister referred yesterday, and again last evening, when he stated that the workers would not suffer in any way and would not be prejudiced in the slightest degree.

I shall not take up the time of the house in dealing with that matter, since my hon. friend, the hon. member for Essex East dealt with it so effectively. But I do want to refer to one aspect of this bill which is contained in clauses 3 and 8. In those two clauses are to be found the essence and the principle of the bill. That principle is to maintain the status quo; it is to maintain the existing

[Mr. Chevrier.]

agreements until May 15, 1961. We believe that principle is bad; we believe that principle is inequitable. We say that principle is inequitable because the terms of the bill are such that no consideration whatsoever is being given to the recommendations of the conciliation board.

There are some, both in this house and outside, who are saying, that since the beginning of this session we have not been saying very much on this side of the house, particularly having to do with the emergency legislation which was brought forward by the government in the last few days. They are saying that we are marking time and we are not pulling our full weight in not taking part in the debates as much as we have in the past.

On the other hand, there are those who are saying that we are trying to obstruct this legislation because we are taking part in this debate. We are taking part in this debate because we want to exercise our rights in so doing. Certainly I want to exercise my rights in criticizing what I consider to be not only the weakness but the futility of many of the clauses contained in this legislation.

I believe that this legislation is compulsion of the worst character. I believe that it is compulsion without the benefit of arbitration. I believe that it is compulsory implementation of the minority report, as I have indicated earlier. Furthermore, when the matter comes before the board of transport commissioners—as eventually it must—and they examine the evidence of the conciliation proceedings, this will then be, in effect, compulsory arbitration by the board of transport commissioners.

I say that the government legislation which is now under consideration is based on the assumption that a solution to this problem will have to be found by May 15, 1961, because clause 8 states that the bill will expire on that day. If, as the government contends, a strike is undesirable now, it will be equally as undesirable on May 15, the date of the expiry of this bill.

I want now to say that the government's position is more unrealistic because of this; that a satisfactory solution to this problem will not be found before May 15, and even for several months thereafter.

Mr. Macdonnell: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Chevrier: No. If you want to ask questions after I have completed my remarks, then I will consent; but not until then.

Until yesterday we did not know why the Prime Minister was always suggesting a direct relationship between the settlement of the dispute on the one hand and the report of the