

Bill (No. 142) respecting the Elgin and Havelock Railway Company.—Mr. Fowler.

Bill (No. 143) respecting the Canadian North-west Irrigation Company.—Mr. Oliver.

SETTLEMENT OF RAILWAY LABOUR DISPUTES.

House resumed debate on proposed motion of the Postmaster General (Hon. Sir William Mulock) for the second reading of Bill (No. 17) to aid in the settlement of railway labour disputes.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN (Halifax). With respect to the Bill which has been introduced by the hon. the Minister of Labour, I may say in the first place that, even if the Bill is only an experiment, still I believe we ought to be willing to accept any experiment that offers any promise of useful results. I am bound to say, after hearing the explanation of the Minister of Labour, and after an examination of this Bill, that I cannot see that it does promise to produce any results that are likely to be of any advantage in allaying disputes between capital and labour in this country. It is a somewhat curious coincidence that since the establishment of the Department of Labour by this government a few years ago, we have really had a greater number of strikes, some of them very important ones, than I think we ever had before in the same period of time in the history of Canada. I concede at once that this condition of affairs in the country is such as to justify some action on the part of the government. It is suggested sometimes on the other side of the House that this is a growing time. I may say to the Minister of Labour that since this department has been instituted, it has been a growing time for strikes as well as for everything else. Now the first criticism which I would like to make on this Bill is that, if it is to be of any advantage at all, I see no reason for restricting it to steam railways and street railways. My hon. friend the Minister of Labour suggested that on account of the monopolistic character of the railways and street railways they should alone be included in this Bill.

The POSTMASTER GENERAL. No, not on that account.

Mr. BORDEN (Halifax). Well, my hon. friend made the remark in that connection. I could understand the argument if there was any remedy to be given by the Bill by which the government, could, as he said, in one part of his speech, take over these railways and operate them, and relieve the country from a serious situation induced by a strike. If there was anything of that kind in the Bill, I could understand there would be some reason for restricting it. But, surely the Minister of Labour will agree with me that if there is to be any advantage derived from this Bill, it is an advantage which ought to be extended to any

other trade or business when affected by a strike. For example, if the provisions of this Bill are to be of any use, why should they not be extended to the condition of affairs that now unhappily prevails in the city of Montreal, where a strike is going on which is paralyzing a very important branch of business in that port. There is nothing in the provisions of the Bill which would not make it as much applicable to that condition of affairs as to any strike upon a railway or street railway.

Then there is another suggestion which I would like to make. Does this Bill accomplish anything that cannot be accomplished under existing legislation? If it does, I would like to know what it is. I would like my hon. friend to consider that: What is there that you can do under this Bill that you cannot do as well at present? My hon. friend may say that you cannot appoint a board of arbitration. What is the use of appointing a board of arbitration unless the parties in the first instance will agree to accept its award, or are bound by law to accept the award after it is made.

Mr. Speaker, I am not suggesting at the present time that we should pass a law providing for compulsory arbitration, but I am merely pointing out that a law of this character seems to me to be absolutely useless and may possibly be detrimental because it will result in nothing. The hon. Minister of Labour says that we may thereby have an inquiry. Is he not at the present time making an inquiry in British Columbia by means of a royal commission in regard to the labour situation there? Cannot he get every opportunity for making an inquiry from the legislation in existence that he could possibly get from this Bill? He may say that he cannot get a board of conciliation. He can get a board of conciliation under the Act passed two years ago, and I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Labour whether or not any action has ever been taken in the establishment of boards of conciliation under that Act, or whether any advantage in so far as establishing these boards of conciliation is concerned has ever resulted from the passing of that Act. Then, if he is not able to answer in the affirmative, it must be doubtful whether he can expect any advantage to result from the provisions which he is now proposing to this House? If he wants a board of conciliation, if he wants intervention between capital and labour, can he not have it under the Act passed two years ago, or can he not have it by the intervention of the Deputy Minister of Labour, who, I believe, from everything I have seen of his work, is a very capable and efficient officer? If he cannot accomplish that by the board of conciliation which he established two years ago what is he going to accomplish by this Bill? In the first place, under this Act, if a strike is threatened, or is in progress, he establishes a board of con-