

Air Traffic Control Dispute

many people are hoping to be home for Christmas. So that the matter of urgency is not in dispute.

However, the minister raises two other matters. He argues, first of all, that this question should not be discussed at the present time because the government is in possession of only a partial report from Mr. Justice John B. Robinson.

Mr. Pickersgill: Judge Robinson.

Mr. Douglas: This is information which we do not have in full detail, and this is why I think the hon. member for Ontario is justified in asking for a debate.

● (2:50 p.m.)

The information I have is that the report given to the minister by Judge Robinson is self-contained and complete, in so far as salaries are concerned, and that portion of the report can be acted on by the government without delay. If this is true, if the report deals with salaries completely and if it is self-contained so far as salaries are concerned, there is no reason for the government not to act on the report. I point out that if a private employer received a report from a judge making certain recommendations the government would insist that the employer give serious reasons for not accepting those recommendations. The house has a right to ask the government why, in the light of a report it has had for over one month from a judge it appointed, nothing has been done to accept those recommendations, and why no action has been taken to safeguard the Canadian people against the dire possibility of a strike at this season of the year.

The air traffic controllers are employees of the Minister of Transport. The minister must accept the responsibility, because of his dilly-dallying for over a month, with nothing being done, for these employees in sheer exasperation taking a strike vote to bring the matter to a head.

The second argument the minister put forth is that discussions are under way, and that therefore it is not opportune to discuss the matter at this time. I point out to the house that last week I questioned the President of the Treasury Board about the strike threatened by the air traffic control employees. The minister at that time pooh-poohed the suggestion that there was any strike threat; but now the government can no longer hide this fact. It is common knowledge that a vote is being taken and that a strike

deadline is being sought. How much longer is there to be delay. For how much longer will the government sweep this problem under the rug? I think parliament is justified in asking for a debate. The government ought to give us all the facts, and the minister ought to table a copy of the report of Judge Robinson so that we can see if there is justification for the lame excuses the government has given for not acting on this report, which it has said is not complete.

The information I have is that the other matters still to be reported on do not preclude the government's dealing with salaries immediately. I think the sooner this matter is debated the greater is the prospect that we may be able to avert a strike which would cripple this country irreparably.

Mr. Pickersgill: Would the hon. member permit me to ask him a question?

Mr. Speaker: The minister rises to ask a question of the hon. member who still has the floor?

Mr. Pickersgill: My question is this: Does the hon. gentleman think it is right for the house to presume, before the results of the strike vote are known, that the vote will be in favour of the strike?

Mr. Starr: Do you want to bet on the result? I know what this is about.

Mr. Douglas: It is not our responsibility to presume there will be a strike. I presumed last week that there would be a vote on the strike. That assumption, however, turned out to be correct. It is our responsibility to foresee the possibility of a strike and to know what action the government intends taking to avert it. Had the government faced its problems before they were overtaken by them we might have averted the serious strikes we have had within the last six months.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I feel that it would not be logical to enter into an emergency debate before all means have been exhausted by management and labour. It is true, as the member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas) pointed out, that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) is in fact the employer at Air Canada and we must recognize that Air Canada is a crown corporation, but as long as all the means have not been used to reach an agreement between both parties, I do not