

Air Traffic Control Dispute

In the latter part of the same paragraph, I read:

—I suggest the point was well taken by the Minister of Transport when he said this is not a fact but a hypothesis or a presumption.

Your Honour was referring at that time to the fact that a strike vote was in the process of being taken, and Your Honour pointed out that the strike vote might or might not result in a decision to withhold services. That point is now settled. There is no longer a presumption or an assumption. This morning the Air Traffic Controllers' Association notified the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) that the strike would begin next Tuesday morning at eight o'clock.

It seems to me there can be no argument now as to the question of urgency. The country is faced with a very serious crisis. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) argues as to the advisability of debate but he certainly has not argued against the urgency of debate. I point out to Your Honour that the minister says the government has provided, by its own motion, an opportunity for debate. But it only provided for an opportunity for the government to make a statement and for one member from each party to make a statement. This denied all other hon. members an opportunity to debate, and certainly denied us an opportunity to question the minister.

Mr. Pickersgill: I am sure the hon. gentleman would not want to misrepresent what I said. What I meant to say, and I probably phrased it badly, is that the notice which has been put on the order paper will provide an opportunity for full debate unless there is an accommodation reached.

Mr. Douglas: I understood the minister to say both, and I was coming to that as well. The minister also said that there will be ample opportunity for debate if legislation is necessary. It is precisely because we hope legislation can be avoided by having a discussion that we support the call for an adjournment debate. We want to know two things: One, why the government has refused to accept the recommendations of Judge Robinson. I tried three times yesterday to get a statement from the minister on that, but he was not prepared to give such a statement.

We need to know why the government is so adamant. It may have perfectly good reasons, but certainly when those reasons are held so strongly that they bring us to the verge of a national crisis, parliament and the country have a right to know what those reasons are.

[Mr. Douglas.]

Also, the people of this country have a right to know what is in Judge Robinson's report. It is not going to be good enough for us to have legislation suddenly thrown at us late Friday afternoon or Saturday morning, with no opportunity to study Judge Robinson's report, no opportunity to know why the government has refused to implement his recommendations. We will have this legislation tossed at us and be told, "You must pass this legislation in a few hours or all the airports in Canada will be closed."

Surely, that is not fair to parliament or the Canadian people. We ought to have an opportunity here on Wednesday afternoon, December 14, to know what is in that report and to know the reason the government has rejected it. Then, knowing this, if legislation is necessary, we will be better informed and better able to discuss it intelligently. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me there is a cast iron case for allowing debate, at which time the government can give us some of the information it has hidden from parliament up until now.

Mr. Raymond Langlois (Mégantic): Mr. Speaker, judging by what the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) has said, if he was speaking for the government and for the President of the Treasury Board, then the best axiom we can apply to the government is, "Why do today what we can put off until tomorrow?" That is not a good axiom and very early in life I was taught not to live by it.

With respect to urgency of debate and the motion presented by the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr), I point out that we are on the verge of a national crisis. If that crisis occurs it will be very awkward to have to start repairing all the damage then done which could possibly have been prevented prior to the crisis taking place.

I well remember the last occasion the house was called into session to discuss strike legislation. The strike in question was on at the time and I remember all the side-stepping, backtracking and tango dancing done by the government to revise its strike bill after the opposition pressed for something sensible in that legislation.

By allowing this debate today before strike legislation is introduced, parliament will be permitted to give its views. The opposition may present some sensible solutions that the government might wish to consider in drafting its legislation, rather than waiting until