

Air Traffic Control Dispute

fact is that as far as the regulations of Air Canada are concerned, the air despatcher can be appointed after two years. That is what the regulations are, if I read them correctly. The fact that they have not been for four, five or six years cannot affect the regulations which permit this to happen.

The fact is that the regulations of the Department of Transport do not permit an air traffic control man to be in group 5 until after five years' service. That is the fact. No doubt the air traffic control people would take the position that they have to go by the book and not by what someone thinks, deviating from the book. I have no doubt that is what Judge Robinson had in mind. If the government disagreed with that and argued that there was an error in fact, the report should have been referred back to Judge Robinson. This is what the government is arguing about. They accept the principle, but say there is an error in fact. They had the authority on November 8, 1966, five weeks ago, or on November 9 if they needed a day to study the report and reach Judge Robinson, to say: We think there is an error in fact here. Will you please reconvene the parties and discuss this error with them.

This man was the third party, the neutral. He is a man who, as the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr) has properly said, has had years of experience in labour disputes. I have appeared before him I suppose 100 times in my years of labour practice. I have appeared before him when he has been chairman of conciliation boards and one of the arbitrators. As a matter of fact, if I may say so without offending Judge Robinson, I have never found him to be a particularly generous person where wage awards have been concerned. He has always been pretty careful not to make any salary or wage awards which were not fully supported by the evidence before him. It does not take a representative of union or a labour spokesman to know that he is one of those judges who does not make determinations at all lightly. Indeed, if you look at his report even quickly you find that he has gone into this matter most carefully.

Judge Robinson analyzes the comparison between the air traffic control man and the air despatcher in Canada. He looks at the salaries of the air traffic control man in the United States as compared with those in Canada. He looks carefully at the duties of the air traffic control man. He quotes at length from articles which have appeared on the subject. Obviously, as is seen in the early section of the report, he had numerous meetings at which

both sides presented their case. He took great care. There are several appendices to his report. He went into the organization of air traffic control. No one who takes even a quick glance at this report could for one moment suggest that his conclusions were made lightly or without very careful consideration of every submission put before him.

In that situation, has the government the right, as the employer, to throw that out of the window? Let me tell the house, if I may, that I do not know any of the secrets that took place in the negotiations, but I do know that if the government had at any time in the last two weeks indicated to the air traffic control people what the Minister of National Revenue and President of the Treasury Board indicated to us today, there probably would not have been a strike vote. At no point, I am instructed, was the proposition that they accepted the principle of the comparison put to the air traffic control people until the very last few days. I do not know, of course, the details of the offer made by the government, but I know from the snort I heard from the people with whom I discussed this matter that the offer made was apparently so much below what Judge Robinson indicated in his report that the air traffic control people felt completely desperate and had to call the thing to an end.

This is an impression I obtained, not from labour representatives because everyone concerned is as honourable as I know the Minister of National Revenue to be, and when negotiations are in confidence they are not revealed to anyone. But you can get a pretty good idea of what took place from the tone and attitude of the people concerned. It is perfectly obvious to me, from those with whom I have discussed this matter, that the offer the government made was nowhere near what Judge Robinson recommended.

Mr. Douglas: It was not even a serious offer.

Mr. Lewis: It was such that the air traffic control people could not take it as a serious offer. The Minister of National Revenue said this morning that something happened which makes him hope that an accommodation will be found. I sincerely hope he is right. This is the major point I wanted to make.

While I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, may I take one more minute to say that I regret very much that a few members in this house take advantage of even this situation to start talking about all the strikes we have had and the need of legislation and action to prevent them.