

sought the intervention of the Minister of Labour in this connection. That hon. minister prides himself very much it is said; takes very much credit to himself, I know, for the fact that he has established a fair rate of wages in respect to contracts which are granted by the government. Why have not the services of that hon. gentleman been employed with the Minister of Railways? This government takes so much pains with contracts of this kind, that it publishes its announcements in respect to them in the 'Labour Gazette,' yet it is not able to deal effectively, according to my hon. friend from Cumberland, with a subject which has so much importance for a great many people in this country as that which he has brought to the attention of the House to-night. The principle of the resolution which my hon. friend (Mr. Logan) has moved is a commendable one. I do not know myself as to the exact figure, but I do believe that having regard to the increased cost of living in this country, it is only right and proper that the wages of these men should be taken into consideration and such an increase made as the existing conditions demand.

Mr. ALEX. JOINSTON (Cape Breton). I have a few observations to offer on the resolution introduced by my hon. friend from Cumberland (Mr. Logan). Let me say that it meets with my entire approval. In my constituency there are quite a number of men who are employed on the Intercolonial Railway, and my colleague (Mr. Kendall) and I have brought this matter to the attention of the Railway Department with a view of having their wages increased. The freight handlers and the trackmen particularly are in my judgment receiving insufficient pay. I endorse all that has been said to that effect. Let me say in reply to the leader of the opposition, that while the state of affairs at present on the Intercolonial Railway is not satisfactory to myself or to many hon. members of this House, yet the existing state of affairs on the Intercolonial Railway is very much better than that which prevailed when the Conservatives were managing that railway. I remember very well that when the Intercolonial Railway was being constructed in Cape Breton under the late government, the men were very glad to get 95 cents per day, and the then government never made any effort to secure for them an increase in that miserable rate of pay. While the pay these men receive at the present time is not sufficient to enable them to live as they ought to live, yet we have the consolation to know that it is better than the pay they received when the late government was in power. I shall not discuss to-night with the leader of the opposition the question of the deficits on the Intercolonial Railway. He need not be reminded; the House need not be reminded, and the country need not be reminded, that we had more deficits on the Intercolonial

Railway previous to 1896 than since that time. We have had fewer deficits since 1896 than we had before, notwithstanding the fact that wages on the Intercolonial Railway are now much higher than they were before. I rose simply for the purpose of giving my approval to the resolution of my hon. friend (Mr. Logan), which I hope the government will entertain.

The PRIME MINISTER (Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier). My hon. friend the leader of the opposition has alluded to the fact that the Minister of Railways and Canals and the Postmaster General are not present on this occasion. It is very much to be regretted, I agree with him; but my hon. friend will agree with me also that members of parliament are sometimes absent from parliament for other duties, or for other reasons, good or bad. If the Minister of Railways and Canals and the Postmaster General are not here, they cannot be accused of being absent from any neglect of their duties. They have not been dining or banqueting at other cities. It so happens that they are absent for very cogent reasons which we all deplore. It is well known that the Minister of Railways and Canals has not been in good health this session, and the Postmaster General is laid up with a severe attack which I am sorry to say may prevent his attendance at the House for some time to come. But I hope to relieve the apprehension of the leader of the opposition in regard to this matter. The Postmaster General did not expect that the subject of the wages paid to the packers and sorters would come up for discussion to-day, for the reason that he has a Bill on the Order paper on that very subject to which the amendment of my hon. friend from Jacques Cartier (Mr. Monk) would be more germane than it is to this motion. As to the salaries of the men who are the subject of the present motion, the trackmen on the Intercolonial Railway, I am happy to say to my hon. friend the leader of the opposition, and happy also to inform my hon. friend (Mr. Logan) who has moved the motion, that this very question is at this moment engaging the attention of the government. Less than ten days ago a delegation of the Association of Trackmen on the Intercolonial Railway had an interview with the government in which they asked not for such a substantial increase in their wages as the motion proposes, but that the government would hear them and discuss with them the question of an increase in their wages. They made a very fair suggestion, but upon it being represented to them that at this time the minister was too busy to give the matter the attention which it deserved, but that he would discuss it with them after the session, they have agreed to defer it until then, when an interview will take place between them and the Department of Railways and Canals