

Mr. BROWN. Can you describe the status of negotiations at the present? Are there any negotiations going on?

Secretary WIRTZ. No, there are not.

Mr. BROWN. How long has that been the case?

Secretary WIRTZ. The last meeting across the board was on April 25. On the weekend of April 29, 30, and May 1, there was a strong mediation effort by the mediators, which was not successful. There has been subsequent contact by the mediators with both parties which will, of course, continue. But there has been no further discussion between the parties.

Mr. BROWN. Is there any indication that any further discussion will be taken up in the near future or prior to June 19?

Secretary WIRTZ. There is no present indication of that. I do not mean by that to preclude that possibility, but there is nothing presently. There is nothing working at the moment.

Mr. BROWN. I have two questions a little off the track, Mr. Secretary. When the Secretary of the Department of Transportation was with us yesterday he testified to the fact that one of the problems in these negotiations is the compression in wages between the skilled and unskilled in this industry.

Isn't this compression also occurring in many other industries and to some extent hasn't this been an objective of some recent labor negotiations?

Secretary WIRTZ. It is a very widespread problem today. It results from the fact that over about a 20-year period most increases in wages were on a cents-per-hour basis rather than on a percentage basis, which narrowed over the years the gap which had previously existed between the high-wage people and the lower wage people.

This is a problem in a good many relationships today.

Mr. BROWN. And we find this apparently reversing, or at least some interest in reversing that procedure or that situation?

Secretary WIRTZ. That is correct.

Mr. BROWN. Is it fair to ask if this is also a Government objective, compression or reversal of compression?

Secretary WIRTZ. As far as Government rates are concerned?

Mr. BROWN. As far as the social objectives of the Federal Government.

Secretary WIRTZ. Yes, that is right.

Mr. BROWN. Yes, what?

Secretary WIRTZ. There is a recognition of the desirability of re-instituting to some extent the previous difference between the lower rate and the higher rate people. That is recognized by all parties in this case. It has been accepted as a matter of principle from the Emergency Board report on, through the mediation proposal, and accepted by both sides, that this matter requires attention.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. Secretary, would you consider this legislation, if passed, 559, a precedent for similar action in the future, in the instant case of this strike, or a similar strike?

Secretary WIRTZ. I have said to Mr. Adams that I think it is unquestionably true that any action of this kind does influence the future to the extent of expectation of a similar approach.