

Oral Questions

try, and to countless Canadian businesses. I wonder if the Prime Minister will tell the House of Commons what initiatives the government plans to take today or tomorrow to end this crippling postal strike.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, we had made it clear that we hoped the issue would be resolved at the bargaining table. I believe it is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition took away from the government any hope that that would happen by forcing Parliament to stay around—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: Do your job and govern the country.

Mr. Trudeau:—thus giving the union cause to believe that it does not have to settle because Parliament will settle the matter for it. I think that is contrary to the spirit of the law and contrary to the whole matter of industrial bargaining whereby the employer and the union try to negotiate an arrangement which is acceptable to both of them. If one party uses the strike route, as it is entitled to do under the law, then that route should be respected.

I repeat that the government is aware of the distress this is causing, or any strike causes. This strike is certainly one which is regrettable, but I find it unfortunate that the official opposition should have forced Parliament to continue sitting—

Mr. Beatty: Now answer the question.

Mr. Trudeau:—at a time when the parties were seeking some way of solving the dispute by bargaining, not by enforced return.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, we have all known for a long time that the Prime Minister would rather govern without Parliament and that he regards Parliament as a nuisance. We regard Parliament as an institution which has a duty to protect the interests of individual Canadians, and those interests are being deeply damaged today.

REPORTED OFFER TO SUBSIDIZE COMMERCIAL CLIENTS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister did not indicate what new initiatives he plans, except to let individual Canadians continue to suffer. But perhaps he will not let the rich and the powerful suffer. I wonder if the Prime Minister will confirm the report by the Canadian Press that the Post Office itself confirmed that before the workers went out on strike the Post Office contacted banks, insurance companies, and other rich clients of the Post Office, and offered to subsidize their courier services during a strike. Will the Prime Minister confirm that such an offer was made to the Post Office's commercial clients and that it was made several days before the strike began?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I have no knowledge of that. I imagine it is another canard peddled by the right hon. member, but I will inquire.

STATEMENTS MADE BY POST OFFICE SPOKESMEN

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, let me direct a question either to the Postmaster General or the President of the Treasury Board. Can he confirm the Canadian Press story today that the Post Office offered to arrange private courier service for its priority mail customers several days before the postal strike began? Post Office spokesmen confirmed that today. The report cites Post Office spokesmen.

An hon. Member: Who was that?

Mr. Clark: Will the Postmaster General tell this House now whether that is a correct report and whether there was an offer to subsidize the mail of the rich and the powerful during the postal strike, prior to that strike's occurring?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I am not aware of this. I doubt it very much. If the right hon. member were able to give a name, it would be very helpful. I will inquire, but this story surprises me very much.

Mr. Cousineau: It must have been in the *Sun*, Joe.

PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION ON BACK TO WORK LEGISLATION

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): Madam Speaker, I have a question which is supplementary to that of the Prime Minister, who has given us a very interesting reason for refusing to consider back to work legislation. Not very long ago he said he would not introduce such legislation because Mr. Parrot would not obey it. Now he says he will not introduce it because Mr. Parrot wants it. Will he come clean with this House as to what his reason is?

● (1420)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, when the process of collective bargaining ends in a strike it is generally because the union wants to make somebody suffer, the clients, the employer and so on. This is the process now. That is why unions declare a strike, because they know there will be economic pressure on the employer to settle.

We know, Madam Speaker, one way of getting the union off the hook would be to settle the strike by legislating them back. Mr. Parrot said if that happened he would not intend to obey the legislation. That is not a reason in itself for not legislating them back. The reason we did not want to legislate is because we believe that in a system where we have free collective bargaining the matter should be settled by the employer and employee bargaining together, rather than by having Parliament step in and solve the problem—in this case probably for