

Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987

had three Ministers responsible for Canada Post in this Conservative Government, Mr. Speaker.

So there was a mandate issued by one Minister. The second Minister received the mandate. And now we have a third Minister who implements part of those reports. Because this Conservative Government picked selectively in that Marchment Report, but then how often do we not have the Minister in charge of Canada Post Corporation falling back in this House on the Marchment Report.

I have learned that there is one cause, privatization, Mr. Speaker. If there is now a dispute, it is because of privatization, because definitely they are not on strike over a salary increase. Of course, Mr. Speaker, employees want job security, but Canada Post Corporation wants to abandon post offices in order to hand them over to the private sector. So they are fighting for their jobs. What grudge are you holding against workers having a job, or is it your philosophy to constantly fight against workers?

• (1350)

Who tried to reduce the pensions of Canadians? The Conservative Government. Who cut Unemployment Insurance benefits to pensioners? The Conservative Government. Would you like a full list of such actions? You are an anti-worker Government, that is what you are.

Mr. Charles Hamelin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, obviously it is never with much pleasure or enthusiasm that one takes part in a debate on a Bill which is meant to tell some people: "Listen, the party is over, now you go back to work". In this particular case, the Bill says to employees of the Canada Post Corporation: "Look, why don't you try to manage this company in the best interest of Canadians". This is never pleasant to do. However, if you are a responsible Government, you have to do it and do it fast, because the situation deteriorates and the risk of violence increases. I have to say to Hon. Members from the opposition that we would like this debate to end quickly, because there really might be useless violence and a protracted debate would only let such actions happen, whereas the Bill is precisely designed to tell everybody: "Now, go back to work, go back to managing" and, as the Minister said, it includes all the mechanisms necessary to try and come to an understanding.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask Canadian men and women what this postal dispute is all about. What is it all about, really? If you read the Foisy report, you realize that we have here 23,000 people, of which 19,000 full-time workers, who have decided to go on strike, albeit a legal strike, and to paralyze the Canadian postal service and give priority to their own rights and concerns over those of 25 million Canadians. We have 25 million Canadians on one side and 23,000 people on the other. Those workers simply do not care about other people's rights and think that their own rights are the most important thing in the world. But we should not forget people on welfare, pensioners, senior citizens waiting for their pension

cheque, unemployed workers who wait for their cheque or for a form they have to fill and return. They have rights too, but people on strike do not give a damn.

A few years ago, the New Democratic Party and its former leader used to call big companies, in a different context, corporate welfare bums because they were not good corporate citizens and did not pay any taxes, for example. In my opinion, some unionized workers are also corporate welfare bums. They think that their rights, which I do not deny, are above all legislation, above public interest, above everything. That is the case at Canada Post. There is a tradition of labour disputes with strikes and violence and what not.

An Hon. Member: Remember Lapalme.

Mr. Hamelin: And almost every time successive governments had to come up with special legislation. On the other hand, the Canadian postal system is essential to the country as a whole, to small businesses whose receivables are lost in the system, to the hundreds of men and women of Quebec and Canada who do not work and who depend on their pension cheques. And who are we dealing with? Who are we talking about? Whipped, beaten, brutalized people? No, Mr. Speaker. We are dealing with people whose basic and starting salary is \$16.43 an hour, with very decent working conditions. Do you know how much a unionized worker costs Canada Post? It costs \$24.89 or \$25 an hour to keep him working. That is how much it costs.

That is where the demagogic tactics begin. The world is supposed to come crumbling down if we fail to meet the bottom-line demands of that small group pitted against 25 million Canadians. I find that startling. What about us poor taxpayer devils? You remember the price of a stamp was upped from 17 to 24, 30, 32 and recently 34, then 37 cents, and we are told that it will rise to 38 cents in 1988. When disputes followed one another before 1980, the problem was said to come from the government nature of the service. It was nonsense, too many politicians were mixed up in it. The situation was absurd. The solution was to create a Crown corporation independent from politicians, those idiots who did not know anything about the business. They were no good. They interfered here and there. It did not make sense. Those statements drew the applause of everyone in opposition parties and the private sector. Canada Post Corporation was created on October 16, or thereabouts, 1981. It was bliss, everything would be coming up roses!

We came to power in 1984, following terrible conflicts in 1980: the union leader was sent to jail and it was a real mess, Mr. Speaker. Thus, when elected in 1984, we footed the bill because that independent corporation has only one shareholder: the government, that is, all Canadians. And the bill was a deficit of \$384 million. Since we had been mandated to manage public funds in a much more rational way, we said to the management of Canada Post Corporation: Listen, this makes no sense, the price of stamps is going up, the deficit is increasing and the service is rotten anyway. Therefore, we told