

Postal Service

tion at that time would be with an election campaign, and the possibility of achieving a resolution of a dispute of this kind would be considerably lessened.

Let me remind hon. members that no new principle is involved in the bill. A provision already exists in Part V of the Canada Labour Code. I refer to Section 181 of the Code, which provides that a strike or lockout that would adversely affect the national interest during an election could be deferred until after the return of the writs.

I would also recall for your consideration the references in the Finkelman report dealing with this question. The Finkelman report recommended that the Public Service Staff Relations Act should contain a provision of this character. In addition, the joint Senate-Commons committee which reviewed the Finkelman report endorsed the principle.

Finally, I have reviewed the debate in the House in 1972 when Part V of the Canada Labour Code was passed, and I cannot find any statements which would be opposed to the principle of this bill.

In other words, there was a similar provision in Part V of the Canada Labour Code when it was debated in this House and when it was examined in the standing committee, but there was no antagonistic reference by any of the parties to a provision of this kind including, I might add, the New Democratic Party. I think that indicates that it is not an unusual provision with respect to a deferral of the right to strike during an election campaign or during dissolution.

I should also like to emphasize that this only defers the right to strike and in no way impairs it.

I should also like to refer to a point drawn to my attention by the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), and I thank him for making the point. There has been some question about whether the existing collective agreement would continue to operate throughout the period during which the right to strike would be deferred. It was thought that this is covered in the bill, but there is some doubt. In order to ensure that there is no doubt and will be no doubt, I propose to move an amendment at the appropriate time that will make it clear the collective agreement does remain in force until the right to strike accrues, or until a new agreement is concluded.

● (1612)

In view of the fact the bill represents reasonable protection for the democratic rights of unfettered elections and only postpones the right to strike during election campaigns, I would urge all members to support this motion and give the bill speedy passage.

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on this bill I want to endorse some of what the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) has said, but certain comments must be made.

It is true, as the minister said, that under the Canada Labour Code there already exists provision to deal in advance with situations which might arise during an election period which could cripple the economy of the country, or parts of it.

[Mr. Munro (Hamilton East).]

Without this provision, parliament would find itself helpless to act because there is an election campaign proceeding.

The minister is right when he says that the principle is already in the other statute which governs those workers who come within the federal jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code. Having said that, there is a strange ironic inconsistency in the government coming to us a couple of days before an election call saying, "Hurry this bill through". We may be caught by the fact that we let months and years go by without addressing ourselves to this problem.

Once again my friend, the hon. Minister of Labour has been thrown into the breach at the last minute. Whatever he might have wanted to do, however he might have wanted to address himself to this problem, he had a cabinet which kept pushing it aside and saying, "Leave it alone, it doesn't have to be dealt with".

I remember that it was only a couple of months ago I was asking the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) when we would be getting the government's proposals now that the Finkelman Report and the joint House and Senate committee report had been submitted. The Prime Minister said that it was a priority and the government would get to it as soon as it could. There have been many years to do something about this problem. Now the Minister of Labour has come in at the last minute and said, "Please, we really think the public would be terribly inconvenienced if there were a postal strike during the election period."

Where was this government when the public was inconvenienced for nearly 50 days during a postal strike only two years ago? The Prime Minister said in November or December, when being asked about this, that he did not care whether the strike went on till Easter. He said in the House of Commons on November 19, 1975:

... we have to realize that a strike is a strike and it hurts people. That is the very nature of a strike.

The reason the minister is here today with his piece of legislation is simple. A strike in the postal service during this campaign will hurt one person a lot more than anyone else, and that is the Prime Minister. That is why the government has come here. Anybody who thinks this is being done now because there is concern for public suffering during a postal strike, just has to go back to the last postal strike two years ago. There was not one bit of sympathy then from this government for the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were put beyond inconvenience, and suffered social strife and economic loss.

Obviously, this government has postponed coming to grips with the problem of how to handle strikes in the Public Service, in essential services, and in those areas where, because of the ultimate effect of a strike, the House of Commons has to be assembled to do something about it. This government is ten years old and it is ten years tired. During all of those years, and right up until tonight, there has still been no meaningful legislation brought forward to deal with this problem.