

Canada Post Corporation Act

Mr. Orlikow: My colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) asks why the Treasury Board is so anti-people. Having been fortunate enough never to have been a cabinet minister, I cannot tell from personal experience. I can only pass some kind of judgment, based on common sense, on the results of letting the Treasury Board run anything.

I say to the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) that the Post Office can be run as it has been, as a department of government, or it can be run as a Crown corporation. It will not make much difference unless the people who deal with the workers concerned use some common sense and compassion. Since 1965 we have had a record of strikes and work stoppages, legal and illegal, every couple of years. What were those about? Most of the public think, because they do not know the details, that they were called because the workers are stupid, stubborn and unreasonable. The evidence does not show this. Were these disruptions caused because union leaders were so militant that they forced workers to go on strike? That is not indicated either. In fact, the exact reverse is true. Every study which has been done—studies carried out by people appointed by the government—has put the blame almost exclusively on the stubborn, unimaginative and uncaring attitude of the senior management in the Post Office.

Let me put on the record again some of the observations made by impartial observers who have had the opportunity to study what has been happening in the Post Office. Let us go back to 1966, a year after the first strike at the Post Office. Mr. Justice Montpetit was appointed to look into what was wrong with the Post Office. He made 262 recommendations dealing with all aspects of employment in the Post Office and, among other things, he said, and I quote:

A large number of the post office employees' grievances are first and foremost, human relations problems.

—The attitude of some supervisors and postmasters towards their employees leaves much to be desired. These people have only a vague notion of the importance of maintaining good relations with their staff.

The action of those in authority has and always will have a tremendous influence on the reactions of employees and on their productivity. Complaints arising from their behaviour can sometimes be difficult to explain.

That was in 1966. In 1969 there was another dispute between the postal workers and the Post Office Department. A well-known and respected expert in the field of labour-management relations, Mr. W. S. Martin of Winnipeg, was asked to adjudicate. He said, among other things, and I quote:

As assessment of employer attitudes in this matter shows that the employer position is characterized by arrogance and high-handedness. There is lacking a genuine desire to work in the atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Hostility, vindictiveness and possibly distrust appear to frustrate any opportunity for effective interrelationships. It would appear that the senior officials in the Post Office Department have not as yet reconciled themselves to operating the postal facilities within a progressive collective bargaining atmosphere.

Then in 1972 a vice-chairman of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, Owen Shime, looking into another dispute, said, and I quote:

In these negotiations one felt that each time the employer was required to reach a decision it was looking over its shoulder at the remaining government employees. That was an impediment to sound negotiations with respect to the needs and problems of the Post Office and its employees.

I could go on and on, but I think I have given enough illustrations of the kind of situation which has existed in the Post Office and which still exists. I remind the minister that at the time of strike a year or a year and a half ago, there were several tens of thousands of grievances outstanding. How did that happen? When there was a grievance, the union took it through the ordinary channels provided in the collective agreement. The union won at each stage. The government never accepted that the union was right. The government took a particular case to the Federal Court. When it lost in the Federal Court, it took the case to the Supreme Court. When it lost in the Supreme Court, instead of saying that the Supreme Court decision covered all the cases—hundreds of cases of a similar nature—the government said it covered only that particular case.

Is it any wonder the workers were angry? Is it any wonder they were militant? Is it any wonder they went on strike? What surprises me is that they did not strike more often.

While I am talking about that particular strike I want to digress for a moment to make an observation about what I consider to be a very strange situation. After the leader of the CUPW took his people out on strike, when he did not respond immediately to the law passed by Parliament and order his people back to work, it did not take very many days until he was charged, brought to court, tried, convicted and sentenced to serve time in jail. I make no comment about whether or not that was a good idea, but that is what happened. He appealed his case, he lost it, and he has long since served his sentence.

● (1530)

Some years ago, in the city of Hamilton an illegal agreement was made by a number of very important, influential and wealthy businessmen. They decided they would set a high price on their services for dredging the Hamilton harbour. It went on for many years and it cost the people of Canada millions of dollars. Eventually, the businessmen were charged. It took a long time and the trial took months. Finally, they were found guilty and convicted. I have not seen any sign of their having to serve their sentence. Of course, they are appealing their case, as they have the right to do. I merely wish to illustrate why so many ordinary citizens, so many workers and good people, believe, with a good deal of justification, that there is probably one law for the rich and another for the poor, that it depends on whom you know and what kind of lawyer you hire.

In my view, unless the new Crown corporation puts in charge of its relationships with its workers, both inside and outside, people who have an understanding of human relations, people who understand that in the 1980s workers, whether in the private or in the public sector, have a right to be treated with common sense, humaneness, dignity and fairness, changing the Post Office to a Crown corporation will not achieve anything.

I want to speak for a couple of minutes about the conception the public has of the reason the mail service has been so bad in recent years. The public believes that those who work in the Post Office do not try, loaf on the job, stay away, literally try