

Oral Questions

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Postmaster General): And that it has been used to, I might add, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated to the hon. gentleman in committee, when we were dealing with the estimates, the situation in Toronto is an aberration that is of short duration. It is one that was brought about as a result of the acceleration of the program of transferring from the manual sorting in terminal A to the three postal plants. As of Monday of this week, the backlog represented one shift in Toronto, and that was concentrated in the south central plant.

With reference to Mr. Ying Hope's experiment, I am not personally familiar with his experimentation or what the criteria were that he employed in conducting his test. All I know is that it is an old test, and surely he has received all the pieces of mail. The discrepancy in the usual service provided, which is the service he has been used to, was due to what I have just advanced to the hon. gentleman, namely, a temporary aberration and one that we are sure has now been removed. I am now asking all members if they have any specific instances of difficulty which they are encountering to make me personally aware of them so that I can check them all out.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is with regard to the same subject. I am sure the alderman agrees that "hope" springs eternal in these matters. Arising from the complaints of the Independent Businessmen's Association with regard to the fact that mail is so slow in the Toronto area and that the cancellation date on envelopes is no longer accepted as a payment date for outstanding accounts, would the Postmaster General also investigate this problem to see if he can resolve it as well?

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. gentleman knows, I am very interested in the opinions of small businessmen and of the federation as well. We depend on them as they depend on us. I am not aware of the substance of the representations of the hon. gentleman having been made by the Canadian Federation of Independent Businessmen. I will look at those representations and see what can be done.

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PUBLIC SERVICE**ALLEGED REFUSAL OF MONTREAL EMPLOYEES TO PROVIDE SERVICE IN ENGLISH—DATE OF REPORT ON BILINGUAL BONUS**

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the hon. President of the Treasury Board who is responsible for so many matters affecting the Public Service. My question is prompted by reports in the press this last day or so indicating that a language boycott has been organized by some 13,000 public servants in the Montreal area by refusing to provide services in the English language until certain conditions are met. I am wondering whether the minister can say what steps he and his government are taking to restore these services to the taxpayers of Montreal?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the situation could be described as being some-

what hypothetical because, other than the press reports, there have been no communications to us about this action. As of this moment, the best information I have—and I have checked with all departments—is that there are in fact no instances of refusal to serve in both official languages. Thus, it is more of a threat than concrete action at the moment.

Having said that, I want to clearly indicate those people in Quebec or anywhere else, who are incumbents of designated bilingual positions, clearly understand that their duties are to perform a service and to deliver information and services in both official languages to the populace as requested. That is the official policy of this government, and indeed it will be enforced. Dealing only with the press report, because there have been no other indications of this issue, compensation bonus is one of the issues which is subject to final determination when we complete the deep analysis of the implementation of the official languages policy which is now under way. We anticipate that completion within a few weeks.

The other issue is an apparent request to reduce the number of bilingual positions in Quebec, which is rather interesting to us because just a year or so ago the very same people, who are now complaining about it, were pressing for an increase in the number of bilingual positions in that area. Indeed, we might favour their newer proposal rather than their earlier one.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister has been able to clear this up. It is perhaps pressure tactics on the part of that group. I am wondering if the minister has any comment to make about the study undertaken, which started about two years ago, concerning the bonus, and whether in fact there is some date that can be looked forward to for the publication of this report and its implementation?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, there was an earlier statement by the government that such action would be effective. That would be, of course, retroactive to November 1, 1976. At that time it was clearly indicated—and I think the unions fully understand—that it was a very complex single issue. There was the question of methodology, the question of amounts and the question of criteria for making available such compensation. That complexity has been further exacerbated because it is totally related to the announced intention of the government to review its official languages implementation policy, not the least important of which would be the delineation of the number of designated bilingual positions which would carry access to such compensation when implemented. I also heard comments by union spokesmen that they fully recognized the first thing that should take place, which is the announcement of the new implementation policy of the Official Languages Act when that is available. As I indicated in my previous answer, that is likely to be forthcoming before the end of this session hopefully, but I would think within the next few weeks.