

Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987

co-operative and perhaps aggravated. It is no wonder, when someone is told their livelihood will be taken away and their ability to provide for their families destroyed, that people are provoked.

The letter carrier who comes to my door is one of the most positive, friendly working people I ever meet. When I mail a letter or parcel, I see fantastic employees who are always courteous and pleasant.

Does the Hon. Member believe that this legislation is provocative? Does he believe that it is provoking employees of the postal system and putting them into an impossible situation? Does he believe that they are being pushed up against the wall so that they will react and the Government can take action for political points and be seen to have done something good, at the expense of thousands of people who are dedicated to delivering our mail?

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague has hit the nail on the head. This piece of legislation will have the result of pushing post office workers against the wall, and obviously they will react.

Until now the strike at the Post Office has been a rotating one. It has been very well managed. There has not been the expected violence.

There have been those who have said that the Government had hoped there would be violence because it would have an excuse to bring in back-to-work legislation. There has not been violence until now. Part of the reason for that is that the union was taking a very responsible approach to the negotiations. Also, the union was very much aware that the Government was looking for an excuse to bring in back-to-work legislation.

With this back-to-work legislation and with the fact that the Government has been threatening it since the strike started, the management of the Post Office has been taken off the hook and been left without the necessity of negotiating. Of course workers at the Post Office will feel enormous frustrations, now that the strike has become general. Peoples' frustrations are starting to show as a result of the provocation of this back-to-work legislation. It means that these people have not had a chance to negotiate the conditions of their employment.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, this is a debate on the right to strike, this is a debate on when we should take it away, and this is a debate on something which is incorporated in the Bill as it applies to the circumstances of this strike. Basically it is a debate on some fundamental principles which have governed up until now our behaviour in Canada on the question of the relationship between workers and their employer.

• (1450)

What is making the debate more complicated is the fact that it takes place against the background of some serious disruptions caused by the practice of the employer using scab workers and against the political background of a statement

made only a few months ago by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). When he wrote to the President of the Canadian Labour Congress, he made the following statement:

Government intervention has not been the solution to labour disputes in the past and is unlikely to be the panacea of the future.

I suppose almost every Member in the House would endorse that statement. However, it is a contradictory statement and it virtually flies in the face of the measure introduced for debate by the Government yesterday and today.

Let us examine for a moment what we have carefully developed over past decades. At the beginning of the century Mackenzie King introduced the concept of bargaining on a collective basis, namely, a situation whereby the employer and the workers would work out an agreement to regulate their relationship over a period of time. I submit that collective bargaining in Canada is a success story over the decades. If we look at the statistics, we see that the vast majority of collective bargaining sessions were solved in an harmonious manner. However, what has been brought to Parliament for resolution has been the most difficult situations.

This raises the question: Is this the right time for Parliament to be asked to settle this strike? Obviously we must look at the situation and examine it carefully to decide whether we have a situation which warrants the intervention of Parliament.

First, we would want the intervention of Parliament when it is absolutely necessary. What does that mean? It means that the convenience of the Canadian public has been damaged, endangered, or put in an unacceptable situation. In the vast majority of cases the Parliament of Canada has historically intervened when it was felt that the Canadian public was inconvenienced in a serious manner. Therefore I must ask, Mr. Speaker, whether in your judgment the movement and delivery of mail is such that it has seriously inconvenienced the public.

Until now I do not know of anyone who has written a letter to our offices, both in our constituencies as well as here, to bring to our attention that the postal service is in a very bad situation. I should like to hear the views of other Hon. Members on whether they have received such correspondence. So far no one in the House, including those on the government side, have indicated in their speeches today that they have received complaints from their constituents about the effect of the strike. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that as it stands today the mail service to Canadians at large is functioning in a manner which is not causing discomfort to the public.

If that conclusion is a correct one, then the onus is upon the Government to demonstrate that this legislation is urgent and that this legislation is indispensable. I submit that in the speeches we have heard so far that case has not been made. What is the role of the Government? The role of the Government is one of making this difficult political decision. I admit that the role of the Minister of Labour (Mr. Cadieux) is a particularly difficult one, because he is the object of various pressures from various sectors of society. I do not deny that. In