

*Expedition of Public Services*

means test and meanwhile, those people entitled to unemployment insurance benefits suffer.

Mr. Speaker, the government thinks it can erase all its mistakes by distributing millions of dollars to organizations and taxpayers, so it will be able to tell them at the next election: Gentlemen, vote for us, because we gave you this and that grant.

• (1520)

Now, Mr. Speaker, and this I say firmly and forcibly, central state paternalism is today outmoded; the Canadian population no longer accepts it. This government will be judged according to the manner in which public funds have been spent. The distribution of grants is not well planned. The Local Initiatives Program offers ample evidence and this applies also to economic development and Opportunities for Youth programs. We shall soon receive a report to the effect that the latter was not well planned. It was ill-conceived because the ministers acted hastily and the government got panicky on account of its inability to give a strong and profitable impetus to its economic policy.

Mr. Speaker, there are also other subjects on which we want to draw the government's attention. One is mentioned in our motion and it obviously has to do with the postal service.

In 1968, when this government took office, they said: The Post Office Department will go to a great economist, the hon. member for Duvernay (Mr. Kierans), who started out by turning everything upside down; he believed that the department ought to pay its way; he forgot the human factor. In his economic dissertations, he stated positively that the Post Office Department must bring in profits. That was his first mistake.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that the Post Office is a public service that cannot bring in profits, it is impossible. It is a service which the public is entitled to because not only does the public pay taxes but it also pays for mailing letters and parcels. Therefore, it is a service to which the public is entitled.

Now, Mr. Speaker, after a few years under the direction of the hon. member for Duvernay, the Post Office fell into almost complete chaos. Grievances and requests kept pouring in from our constituents. They were asking us to intervene in the House in order to tell the minister to come back to common sense and to try for better planning. Then again, the former Postmaster General said: I will make a complete change. Mr. Speaker, this resulted in the closing of many local post offices which had served the taxpayers for years and represented for them essential services. All that was done, we were told, to save money.

In my constituency, some people have to walk four or five miles, morning and night, to get their mail. We told the minister about it. He replied: The post office has to be profitable! The postal rates were increased through legislation passed in the House.

And lately, Mr. Speaker, we have learned that another measure was being worked out by the Postmaster General (Mr. Côté).

My attention was drawn to the fact that notice has been given that the business hours of post offices located in

[Mr. Asselin.]

small localities would be reduced shortly. At the present time, it is said that business hours will be reduced to 20 per week and wicket service provided 16 hours per week. And this will happen shortly, since the taxpayers have received notices to that effect.

I have already received many representations from municipal councils and public bodies opposing reduction of business hours in post offices. Does the minister want to repeat the mistake made by the Minister of Labour—centralize post offices in large centers?

Mr. Speaker, government services should be available to the people and the people should not have to look for them. This is a service that should be made available by the state to the taxpayers and I say to the minister that if he intends to centralize post offices in large centers, he is falling into the same trap as the Minister of Labour and the Canadian people will again have to foot the bill.

I meant to deal with immigration and passport procedures but I will let other colleagues take care of that.

Of course I should like to deal briefly with strikes in public services. Under the present administration, Mr. Speaker, there has been a major deterioration of relations between employees and employers. The settlement of union conflicts has been dragging out and in many cases without taking account of the taxpayers' ability to pay.

In that field, the government, particularly the President of the Treasury Council (Mr. Drury), were in total confusion because they never clearly defined the government's wage policy. In that field as in many others, they tried to solve problems in a haphazard way, without planning, without a clear policy, thus increasing tensions between the employer, which is the state, and the public service.

The union leaders, Mr. Speaker, knew about the weakness of the government in that field. Several strikes in the public sector had dealt a heavy blow to the stabilization of our economy. I am not here to excuse union leaders, for I deplore the fact that in many cases they acted irresponsibly. This country witnessed more strikes that ever, strikes that could have been prevented had a negotiation system been established, through which employers' and employees' representatives could have been brought together in a permanent way around the same table. Of course I would digress for a moment to point out the chaotic situation now prevailing in Quebec where 210,000 civil servants, hospital employees and teachers are about to go on strike on March 17. It is time for governments to suggest to our citizens efficient and workable solutions to prevent strikes in the public service.

**Mr. Lachance:** What are your solutions?

**Mr. Asselin:** I am coming to that because we do have solutions.

The ministers are repeatedly asking the opposition whether it has solutions to the government's problems. Yes indeed, Mr. Speaker, we have solutions. Quite often, it can be seen in the House—three ministers are now present—that the ministers do not listen. If at least they would read *Hansard*. They do not seem to read it since after four years they have not yet found the workable solutions suggested by the opposition.