

obtained legally through legislation passed by Parliament. Furthermore, when Parliament realized afterwards that that right to strike had been abused, that an extended illegal strike was threatening the economy of the country, it decided to pass legislation to limit the dire economic consequences of an extended illegal strike.

This is not the case today. Today, we will be passing legislation almost immediately after a right to strike legally has been gained by a group of workers and that right has hardly been used yet. Even before they can use this right to call a legal strike, we pass a law to tell them: "No, you will not do it. The strike may be legal, but we are taking back the right that we had previously given to you by an act of Parliament."

I therefore wonder about the logic of the decision of Parliament as concerns the legal right to strike of public service employees. Of course, the government will say that we cannot delay passage of this legislation since an extended strike will have disastrous economic repercussions. On the other hand, we are, of course, responsible people and we are ready to cooperate to hasten as much as possible passage of this legislation.

However, we also want to use our right as the official opposition to tell the government that it is wrong to apply special legislation to people who have just started in the last few days to use their legal right to strike. I feel that we are provoking these employees and that our position will become more uncomfortable in a few days if these people decide not to obey the special legislation we are about to pass. It would not be surprising if another bill were introduced Friday to ask the employees on strike to obey the law passed today.

Honourable senators, I believe we must reflect seriously before giving the green light to this bill which, in my opinion, can in no way solve the present problem.

The sponsor of the bill said that the legislation provides for the appointment of a mediator-arbitrator who will be fully empowered to discuss and solve existing problems between postal employees and their employer, the federal government. However, this method has already been used without success by the government. If we read carefully the Moisan report on wages and automation problems, we may wonder what terms of reference the government can give to this mediator-arbitrator so that he may enjoy all the authority needed to discuss either the wage problems, the employment security problems or the automation problems of postal workers. I think that, at the present time, those are the major problems about which there is disagreement.

Honourable senators, I know that some of my colleagues want to discuss this important bill, but I believe that if the government really wanted to make an effort and show its goodwill—and I must repeat that those people have not had a collective agreement since June 1977—the government would try, as we have suggested, to find a satisfactory temporary formula to solve the problems which oppose it to the postal workers.

I do not believe that this mediator-arbitrator can be given all the authority needed to be able to bring both parties to an

agreement and to find satisfactory solutions to what I consider as the very serious problems now facing postal workers within the time limit set in this bill.

● (1140)

[English]

**Senator Molson:** Honourable senators, I wonder if I might ask the sponsor of the bill one question. Does he propose to refer the bill to a committee, or to deal with it in Committee of the Whole, if and when it receives second reading in this chamber?

**Senator McLraith:** In answer to the honourable senator, it is my intention to propose to the house that we deal with the bill in Committee of the Whole, and that we invite the Minister of Labour, under our rules, to come and answer such questions as honourable senators may wish to put to him.

**Senator Molson:** Thank you.

**Hon. Hazen Argue:** Honourable senators, I am pleased that the government has wasted no time in bringing this legislation before Parliament. In a previous strike the country had to wait weeks before action was taken. Therefore, I think we can commend the government for this kind of forthright action. However, I am wondering whether, if this bill is passed, we will be back in the future with these same employees in exactly the same situation unless something very fundamental is done about the Post Office.

● (1150)

It has been announced that the Post Office is going to be made into a crown corporation. I do not know what that will do, in a practical sense, to the operation of the Post Office, but I feel, unless something very fundamental is done, we will be back in exactly the same position in future years. What is required is a study of the possibility of making a fundamental change in the operation of the Post Office. It seems to me—and I say this with great sincerity—that the government should be studying the whole question of industrial democracy and a new approach to industrial relations, including those in the Post Office.

I can see that the Post Office could be operated more efficiently without strikes, and without the almost permanent threat of strikes, if it were broken down into units that could be handled rather independently of the whole system. If that were done, the postal employees should then be taken into the confidence of the postal organization, and the postal authorities should endeavour to have a contract, on a unit basis, for the operation of a particular unit of the Post Office. It could be divided, for example, into five or six regions, and the employees should be given a voice in its operation. This theory could be applied to many industries in this country.

If this kind of contract were entered into with employees of the Post Office in a particular area or a particular region, the employees would have an incentive for improved production and for increased efficiency. I can see a contract being made between the postal authorities and the employees in a given region to provide the employees with a certain payment, which