

Adjournment Debate

pile-up in the department. I think it has become the department for recycling cabinet ministers, because in the three years I have been here, there have been four different ministers in the Department of National Revenue. How long the present minister will be in his portfolio and how long he will be in cabinet I do not know.

Last Friday I asked the minister if he would take this problem seriously and deal with it so that it will be dealt with permanently. I got the following illuminating answer. He said, as reported at page 386 of *Hansard* of October 28:

● (1812)

I shall be pleased to consider the hon. member's representation, Mr. Speaker. I should like also to tell him that he does not need to come into the House to make representations because he can be in full communication with me on a daily basis. But I shall be glad to look into this matter and I shall be in contact with him further.

That is no solution to the problem. What I want is an answer. I have been bugging the department for years now on this.

Mr. Harquail: Is it you who put that bug in MacKay's office?

Mr. Friesen: I guess it is a dirty word, and I imagine there is enough fuss about that.

Mr. Harquail: Is it you who is bugging the department?

Mr. Friesen: Let me ask the parliamentary secretary, who is answering for all the ministers tonight, would he please use his own minutes? I want to use mine for myself.

Mr. Harquail: Go right ahead.

Mr. Friesen: I have in my hand a letter from a former minister of national revenue, dated March 15, 1976, a year and a half ago, in which he said the following:

Steps taken to alleviate the situation have included expanding our port facilities, decreasing the amount of our officers' clerical work, and hiring university students as casual officers during the summer months. Obviously the situation has not been resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

That is the understatement of the year because just ten days ago there was a line-up three miles long. I received a phone call last Sunday telling me again of a line-up three miles long. As I pointed out in my letter to the minister, people are staying in Washington overnight because they cannot get across the border in time. Is that a way to help our balance of payments?

I have here an answer to a question on the order paper of some months ago. It tells me that in 1966 there were 58 people working at that point, and in 1975, ten years later, there were 63 people, a net gain of only five people in ten years. Anybody who crosses that border point knows that the volume of traffic has doubled, but there is no appreciable hiring of staff to alleviate that pressure.

One of the former ministers told me that they were hiring extra casual help. I pointed out on February 8, as reported at page 2866 of *Hansard*, that it is no solution to hire help on a casual basis. What we have to do is to put it on a permanent

basis. I am not asking the department to spend any more money. Surely they can cry austerity all they want, but we are not asking them to hire more casual help and increase the load on the taxpayer. All I am asking is that there be more staff, and if there were more staff, there would be greater security and a larger revenue coming into the country. I know for a fact that if extra staff were hired for surveillance there, there would be more revenue to pay for that extra staff they would be hiring.

The minister tells me that one of the solutions they are proposing is a greater use of overtime and more part time help. Overtime is no solution. As I pointed out in the House before, the extended use of overtime is nothing but a health risk for those people who are already working there. After overtime is built up, it is not long before the people working there have to take time off to regain their health. Furthermore, when we have one million unemployed people all across Canada, our government says that its solution is to let those who are already working work overtime. Is that a solution to the problem?

I have it on good authority that a couple of years ago the government had a deliberate policy to encourage overtime because it felt it would be cheaper to let people work overtime rather than hire extra help, as it would not have to pay the ancillary benefits to all the people whom it otherwise would have to hire. That is a great solution to the problem! On the one hand we will pay extra rates for overtime in order to save money on ancillary benefits, and on the other hand we will pay unemployment insurance benefits to people looking for work who cannot find jobs because the government has a policy of letting people work overtime.

I come back to the point I made earlier. I am not asking for an extra burden on the taxpayer by enlarging the burden on the Department of National Revenue's payroll. All I am asking for is that additional staff be hired so that there can be a closer surveillance and therefore better collections at the border, sufficient so that they would pay for the kind of service that the people deserve.

● (1817)

Last week end 4,000 people crossed that border to go to a soccer match. There is a law of physics which says that what goes up must come down. All the department has to do is look at the traffic crossing the border. The department should know that in a day or two people who cross the border will come back. I am not blaming the staff at the local office at all because I know they are working against insuperable odds put up by the mandarins here in Ottawa who will not give them extra man-years to staff that office. If they had the man-years they deserve, they would be able to carry out the surveillance that would allow them to prepare for the staffing they will need in the days ahead.

Mr. Maurice Harquail (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member failed in his comments to refer to the strike in 1975 and to the