

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Yesterday he knew nothing about the letter with respect to Priority Post. Today he is an expert. In 1978, after one day, the Postmaster General brought in legislation mandating the CUPW back to work. This year he is talking about extending the strike for an indefinite period. Since he is applying a double standard—the Post Office is now in effect providing a service for the wealthy of this nation and not for the average citizen, the pensioner, the poor and the rural person—how long does the Postmaster General think the hardships, which the Prime Minister acknowledged yesterday were being endured by the average citizen in Canada, can be allowed to continue? Does he believe, as does the President of the Treasury Board, that this strike can continue all summer until Parliament reconvenes in the fall, or is it his opinion that some action will have to be taken within a reasonable period of time? He knows that if it was not for the action taken by our party, there would be no development in terms of mediation.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The only reason they are back is because of our side.

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate to the hon. member that, if he insists on talking about double standards, I will remind him that the government has taken every step to deliver the socioeconomics cheques free to all of the pensioners and the recipients. In this regard the Post Office has worked out an agreement with the letter carriers and with other unions of the Post Office to make sure that these cheques will be delivered. Therefore, indeed, we are doing this free of charge to our customers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: Who are your customers?

Mr. Ouellet: When we give information, the Conservative members of Parliament do not like that. The other service that the hon. member talks about is a service for which customers pay a much higher price than 17 cents. There is, indeed, a big difference between the two, and the government makes no apologies for having taken every step to make sure that the poor of this country will continue to receive their cheques through the services of postal employees.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ouellet: In relation to the second part of the question—

Madam Speaker: Order. There has to be some kind of limit to answers.

MINISTER'S VIEW ON LENGTH OF STRIKE

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, on the basis of the answer of the Postmaster General we now

know what he is, but we do not know what the price is. I want to ask the Postmaster General a supplementary question in terms of his statements in 1978, where he said the government staunchly believed that public interest must override personal interest, and it was a fundamental belief of the government that when an individual's right becomes a public wrong action has to be taken. I want to ask the Postmaster General, as the person who has responsibility for the Post Office, and in view of the Prime Minister's admission yesterday that there are widespread effects of this strike on the average citizen, how long does he anticipate that this strike will be able to proceed. Will he answer that simple question, or does he think that that matter is not of enough importance to the Postmaster General of this country? How long can we wait for a settlement?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, there is one thing that I could say in answering this: as long as the opposition is going to stay in Parliament, with the type of questions it is putting, there will be absolutely no settlement, because—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ouellet:—their attitude is fuelling the conflict and the confrontation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ouellet: I can predict, for the hon. member, that the minute that the union membership, and particularly the union leader, understand that there will be no way out for them via legislation to bring them back to work, they will then understand that the only course for them to follow is to go back to the table to negotiate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ouellet: We hope that this will become very clear in the coming hours, and that they will realize that there will be no legislation, and that they will then be able to go back to the table and negotiate with the Treasury Board nominees who are waiting for them 24 hours a day.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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NATIONAL REVENUE

COLLECTION OF TAXES FROM SMALL BUSINESSES—EFFECT OF POSTAL STRIKE

Mr. Jack Burghardt (London West): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. As the minister is well aware, because of the postal strike many small businesses are experiencing cash flow difficulties. Would the government be prepared to assist some of these businesses by relaxing the collection of federal funds such as sales tax, income tax deductions and the like from these affected businesses?