

I do not know what can be done in this regard, although I think the Postmaster General recognizes the problems, but how the previous administration could have proceeded against the leader of CUPW, a very brave union leader in this country, I cannot understand. The workers were given the right to remove their services, they were given the right to collective bargaining, but the minute they acted as a trade union, based on misinformation and miscalculation by Mr. Corkery, lo and behold, Parliament forced those workers back to work 24 hours after their strike began. That legal action by the previous administration has aggravated and created a festering sore for years to come. I urge the minister that if there is anything he can do to halt this whole process of Mr. Parrot going to jail to do so. I think it is unseemly that the power of Parliament was used to crush the leadership of 20,000 workers. All they were doing was acting in the manner which was consistent with good trade union leadership, and that was to represent their leader as vigorously as he was elected to be their leader.

● (1550)

I do not know what can be done from a legal standpoint. I ask the minister to look at the possibilities as to what can be done. I see the minister rising, so I will resume my seat. Hopefully, he will have something to say.

Mr. Fraser: I take it that the hon. member has—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Is the minister rising to participate in the debate or to answer a question? It is not the practice for a member who has the floor to direct a question to another member. The minister will have an opportunity when closing the debate to answer questions. Otherwise we will have confusion. Is the minister rising on a point of order?

Mr. Fraser: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Certain questions have quite clearly been put to me in the hon. member's closing remarks. I am prepared to meet some of those directly at this time if it is the wish of the House that I do so. I will not be long. If it is not the wish of the House and Your Honour is ruling that I rise at the close of debate, that is what I will do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister has the right to reply at the end of the debate. He has already spoken. If another member seeks the floor, there may be like questions from other members and the minister would be standing up regularly. It would be like Committee of the Whole and that is not the normal procedure when the Speaker is in the chair.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I will not keep the minister long from replying to the very pertinent questions put to him. However, there are a few comments I wish to make in this debate. What the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) said may in the course of my remarks provide a very useful prelude.

I first want to congratulate Your Honour for sitting where you do. The wisdom of that has been shown by the remarkable perception you just showed in your comments on the point of order.

Postal Rates

This is a rather traumatic experience for me. I will be compelled during the course of this debate to say something complimentary to the minister. After 16 years in opposition, that is rather hard to do. During the 16 years I sat in opposition, I tried desperately to find ways and means to compliment ministers then sitting on this side. Unfortunately, they gave me little opportunity to do so. I want to put on record that I am not going to make a practice of this, that even on this side ministers will have to earn the right before I say things which are satisfactory and complimentary.

In this bill the minister has been wise to repair an omission which took place during the aegis of the former administration. He has also been wise as a lawyer to take a decision to regularize attempts made by the previous administration to fix postal rates by regulation and order in council under section 13(b) of the Financial Administration Act.

The government won the first round in the court of first instance, the Federal Court. I read the judgment and the reasons for judgment. Over the two or three years this has been an issue, I have examined the statutes and regulations. In my opinion, the government would have lost and deserved to have lost on appeal in connection with this particular trial.

Let me put on record very briefly the circumstances leading up to this amendment. The Postmaster General (Mr. Fraser) has already done that, but I would like to elaborate to some extent. The fixing of postal rates has, over the years, been the prerogative of Parliament. It so intimately and in such detail affects the lives of ordinary people that, to all intents and purposes, it is akin to a form of taxation. If there is one principle which should abide in this House, it is that taxation of the public and the taking of money from the public in the form of fixing of postal rates should not be done until there is an opportunity to redress grievances.

That is the crowning feature in the process of legislation and taxation by legislation. I am not going to go into the details of the problems we have had with the Post Office. They are there. No doubt they will be discussed and debated for some time and new legislation will be brought forward. However, there is no doubt that over the past three or four years, if the government had seen fit, as it should have, to bring in legislation to fix postal rates, as has been the custom since confederation, it would have provided an opportunity for members of this House, the public, the unions and consuming public to have ventilated their grievances. There would have been a fair chance from 1974 or 1975 on for bills to be brought into this House to increase postal rates and for representations to be made during the course of debate and committee hearings.

I am not naive enough to believe that this House has the magic cure for all problems. I recognize its virtues as well as the fact that it has warts and defects, but it does provide a forum in a situation of this kind. I suggest to members of this House and the government that they not neglect in future any opportunity to provide to the members of this House, representing the public, the opportunity to debate and discuss at length and in detail problems which arise. I have every reason