

Thus, through this extensive program of new postal buildings, we want to be in a position to meet not only present but also future needs.

Mr. Speaker, it must be kept in mind, when we talk about this program, that regardless of the plans and the programs designed for mechanization on a very large scale, no full time postal worker will lose his job.

• (1450)

And so I must say to the hon. member for Brandon-Souris when he suggests that automation and the use of computers cause job insecurity, that there is no job insecurity in the Post Office Department, because in the collective agreement which we have just signed with our employees, we have guaranteed job security and income security to all our permanent employees. In my view, to state that in a motion, the hon. member is probably mistaken or misinformed.

All the decisions that we made at the Post Office Department concerning working conditions, salaries, social benefits, job descriptions and related matters, not only affect the Post Office Department as such, but also the whole public sector. With a work force of 50,000 employees, it is inevitable.

The work environment and the young people joining the labour market today are very different from what they were only a few years ago. Constant and rapid change is particular to our technological era in which the search for greater efficiency and improved production, results, of course, in a more and more sophisticated technology. So it is obvious, Mr. Speaker, that the young worker thinks that management tends to make jobs as meaningless, as non demanding and as dull as possible.

It is estimated today that roughly 50 per cent of workers are under 30. In other words, the wide gap between the average age of workers today and that of only a few years ago means that more than half the labour force in Canada belongs to a generation whose attitudes and style of living generally are quite different from those of the previous generation, the one which now holds the reins of politics and the economy.

That is a strength that will have to be reckoned with from now on. I think that leaders must be receptive to the needs and aspirations of the new worker and adjust their attitude to meet those new needs. Work must be revalored and better means of communication between management and labour must be found. Those are great challenges that the administration of the Department of the Postmaster General will have to take up and that the leaders of any modern business in the public or private sector will also have to take up. As an employer and as a government department the Post Office wants to—and I say so without hesitation—and will show leadership in this new context of staff relations.

Even if it is true that we have new duties to fulfil to satisfy the worker's needs, it is none the less true that we must also fulfil our duty towards the people of Canada. Canadians depend on the Post Office Department to get a quick, reliable and especially inexpensive service.

As far as I am concerned, I shall do my utmost to provide a regular postal service and promote just and fair

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labour relations within the Post Office Department. However, we must not forget that the department faces the same social problems as private enterprises as far as workers are concerned. It has the same problems to solve when it negotiates with the unions. It is thus unrealistic to expect that the Post Office Department will be able to give the unconditional assurance of an uninterrupted service; no other enterprise can give this guarantee either.

I think we can avoid labour conflicts and come to fair settlements if management and unions stick to the four following guidelines in their negotiations, namely: begin early, do not refuse dialogue, know what you want and what you are ready to give up, and finally, negotiate in earnest.

I did not hesitate, Mr. Speaker, immediately after my appointment as Postmaster General, to go across the country and visit thousands of employees on the spot. I always wanted to keep that kind of dialogue and my talks with the Post Office employees last December were extremely beneficial to me. I keep in touch with union representatives and it is always in a spirit of sincere cooperation that I talk with them. All hon. members surely know that we signed a new collective agreement at the beginning of the year with the Council of Postal Unions. It was, Mr. Speaker, the first time an agreement was signed without a national strike. That agreement will provide us with a climate of understanding during the next two years. I already said, and I wish to repeat it, that it is a profitable agreement. Now that this question has been settled, I am convinced that our employees will cooperate with our officials so as to give Canadians the quality service they are entitled to.

I should like to deny categorically the assertion made this morning by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris that the department's policy is intended to promote an increase in the number of casual employees. On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, we recognized that the casual employees' status must be changed and that far from increasing their number, we wish to reduce it to a strict minimum. Besides, I am happy to report to the House an agreement that was just signed:

[*English*]

Following a series of meetings with the Council of Postal Unions, we have now finalized consultation on our corporate policy on the usage of casual help in the postal operations group.

This policy is as follows:

The usage of casual help is to be reduced to a minimum. Accordingly, the usage of regular full-time and part-time staff is to be adjusted to a level which will maintain service standards for predictable volume and absence situations.

Bearing in mind the terms of the relevant collective agreements and consistent with the above, and in order to meet situations which are unforeseen or where there is not a continuing full-time or part-time requirement, casual help may be used, where this best meets service needs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, that means not only that we recognize the need to reduce the number of casual employees but that we are going to take the necessary steps to do so.

[*English*]

In closing, I should like to say that some of those people who consider that our deficit is too high should realize