

conditions which will be equal to those of most Canadian workers, or even better, as long as these are reasonable and allow us to meet our commitments towards the Canadian people.

[English]

The Post Office has 23 million shareholders. It is very nice to say that we should please the workers and give them extraordinary conditions, but we have a responsibility to the Canadian people who are paying the bills. We talk about the rights of management and the rights of workers, but there are no rights without responsibilities. Both management and the workers have responsibilities. I ask all our workers to put in an honest day's work and to strive to eliminate some of the current abuses of the rights contained in their collective agreement.

Two such abuses are absenteeism and multiplicity of grievances. The hon. member for Nickel Belt spoke about 42,000 grievances. I think that is proof that there must be abuses. The hon. member for Nickel Belt knows very well that it is easy to gather 1,000, 2,000 or even 5,000 grievances. I negotiated collective agreements in Quebec City for 12 years. We never lost an hour's work. We could at least talk to the people. We tried to communicate with our unions so that their rights could be protected. We collaborated, but it is very difficult to do that in this situation.

Asking what I just asked of our workers is not beyond reason. It is common sense, and the Canadian taxpayer has the right to an efficient postal service in return for the taxes he is paying. Despite all these difficulties I am still optimistic that we can come to an agreement and improve substantially the quality of our postal service. This has to be worked out between management and labour together. One cannot do it without the other. I am not being naive when I say that I have the firm belief that the majority of postal workers and ourselves desire an agreement instead of the other course which would be open to us all if we fail to reach an agreement.

● (1752)

When I say the majority of workers, I would like to see all CUPW workers vote at a certain point so that we may know whether or not they want to strike with the conditions we give them. I think that would be much more democratic than to have a vote of 1,000 workers out of 23,000. If we could find that out, maybe that would be a good move.

There were many other reports which did not come up with a solution to our present problem. There are no miracle solutions, and even the Ritchie report submitted by the opposition has not brought us any solutions or any cure for our present difficulties. Banning the right to strike is no cure. Can you believe such a ban in 1978? Banning the right to strike would not prevent slowdowns. It would be much better to try to make our unions understand their right to strike but, as I said before, not to strike for any reason but rather to strike for good reason. As to private enterprise, obviously private enterprise would take over the Post Office, or what is profitable in

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the Post Office; but as for the rest, Canadians would have to foot the bill.

With regard to converting the Post Office Department into a Crown corporation, we are studying that proposal at the moment. We are studying it intelligently. As I said when I took over this portfolio, let us be intelligent about it. Let us look at it first. This has been tried in the United States and after seven years it is a mess. Are we to copy them now? We are still open minded about it and we say let us study this and see what happens. I do not believe that even if we convert the Post Office into a Crown corporation we will settle all our problems. On that point I agree with the hon. member for Nickel Belt.

It has been suggested that we should pay salaries equal to those paid by private enterprise. I think that is the case already. We provide good conditions; our salaries are fair.

There has been mention of leadership with backbone. We are exercising leadership in many ways, but one has to be careful not to confuse leadership with dictatorship. It would be very easy to be a dictator and to be arrogant toward our workers or even with regard to management; but it is much more intelligent to be flexible as well as firm and at the same time to show leadership without being dictatorial.

Many people have suggested that I should take the hard line. When something is broken, it is easier to repair it than to take steps to prevent the break.

[Translation]

Until now we have been tolerant and understanding. We have tried to communicate and establish a relationship with the other party to find together the answer to our problems. We intend to continue in that direction. We must explore every approach and make sure that we did not ignore any possible solution before we decide to change our philosophy and adopt intransigent tactics, as everybody will suffer from it.

[English]

Let me come back, Mr. Speaker, to the Hay report. It remains a great mystery to me why hon. members of the opposition persist in demanding to have copies of the Hay report, which apparently they already have. If this document prescribed a cure-all for a number of labour relations problems which are now confronting the Post Office, I could understand their concern. The Hay report, which is an attitudinal survey of the Post Office management, does not do that. Not one document could possibly prescribe a simple solution to perfecting the movement of the mails in an organization staffed by over 60,000 employees in operations scattered over thousands of square miles.

Furthermore, what mystifies me is why the hon. member for Brandon-Souris should demand a copy of the report when obviously opposition members have it. The report is three years old. Having heard the hon. member for Nickel Belt quote some of the paragraphs from the report, I am convinced that it does not offer solutions to our problem. What kind of manoeuvre is this? Are they really dedicated to ferreting out informa-