

Oral Questions

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, first let me say that I know we all share concern about the impact the postal strike is having across Canada. I might also say that we have at all times been ready to sit down and negotiate—the team is there—without any preconditions whatsoever. I have of course encouraged Mr. Parrot to do just that.

I might say that I received a letter from Mr. Parrot yesterday which suggested we did not have negotiators with authority at the table. I intended to clarify that with Mr. Parrot, and I had the opportunity of doing so during a telephone conversation yesterday afternoon. I pointed out that no matter who is at the table, they would have the same authority, and our team has the authority to reach a settlement with CUPW. I hoped to satisfy him on that point. I then suggested that we should put representatives together to see how the parties could get back at the table, and I specifically named the most senior member of our department in charge of collective bargaining across the public service, Mr. George Orser, for that purpose. I went even further and said we would send Mr. Orser to the bargaining table.

Mr. Parrot called me last night to advise me that this would not be acceptable. I received a letter this morning. He does not make reference to those conversations, but he again indicates he would like to have Mr. Warren at the bargaining table. This puzzles me because Mr. Warren can add nothing to these negotiations and, as I think we all know, there are concerns on our part with respect to having Mr. Warren at the bargaining table. We expressed reservations. We have not yet closed that door, but we are interested in the long-term health of the Post Office and we do not think Mr. Warren's presence at the negotiating table is likely to help that come about.

● (1130)

POSITION TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the postal workers, as everyone who has been following the situation knows, made a major concession when they withdrew their insistence that the conciliation report recommendations be accepted before going back to the bargaining table. That was a major concession by the union involved.

Since Mr. Warren will, in fact, become the new head of the Post Office when it is re-established as a Crown corporation and the postal workers are simply saying have him there taking part in these negotiations, why is the government holding back? Surely we want the postal service restored in the country. The union wants a settlement, obviously, because it has withdrawn a certain precondition. Why is the government so reluctant to be reasonable?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I certainly take issue with that statement. Not only are we being as reasonable and as accommodating as possible in the circumstances—we want to negotiate—but the union wants to negotiate who the negotiator is going to be. Mr. Warren will be the chief executive officer of

the Crown corporation. Whether he will elect, at that time, as chief executive officer to go to the bargaining table with all the unions of the Post Office, which would be most unusual, that would be his decision as chief executive officer. The mandate that he would then have would be a mandate that would be established by Mr. Warren, presumably in consultation with his board of directors. But he can only enter these negotiations with the government mandate.

I might say to the Leader of the New Democratic Party that the decision not to send Mr. Warren to the negotiating table is not one I am taking personally as President of the Treasury Board. I have expressed the concerns of the government because the question has been addressed to me. I think it is clear that this is a matter of concern to the government with respect to future operations of the Post Office itself.

REQUEST FOR EARLY DECISION ON PARTICIPATION IN
NEGOTIATIONS BY PRESIDENT DESIGNATE OF NEW CROWN
CORPORATION

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, with that in mind I will put a question to the person who is directly responsible, namely, the Postmaster General. I will ask him a related question, because the President of the Treasury Board has once again chosen his words with care. He has not closed the door to Mr. Warren's participation. Considering that, considering the fact that the postal workers would like Mr. Warren in attendance, and considering there is an intended recess coming, we want the negotiations back on track before we all go off to do other things.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: We are not in favour of back to work legislation like some people in this House who preach the right to strike but oppose it once it is exercised.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: We want negotiations.

Mr. Beatty: You got your raise; now you want to go home.

Mr. Broadbent: Is the minister prepared to say that during the course of today the government will reach a final decision as to whether or not Mr. Warren can participate in these negotiations? Will the government make its final decision known before this day passes?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I think it is important, and all members will understand, that we want Mr. Warren to start out with the clearest and nicest possible situation. In my opinion, he ought to get off on the right foot and under the best possible conditions. I would remind hon. members that several unions in the Post Office, including mail carriers, superintendents and postmasters, saw it that way and did not ask for Mr. Warren's assistance at the bargaining table