

Government Orders

The reason why I ask that of the member is that there seems to be a sense across the floor over there that every time there are some difficulties with the collective bargaining process—and the collective bargaining process, as you know, in other industries and in other sectors works fairly efficiently—we have been putting in back-to-work legislation faster than I have time to read the bills. I am quite surprised that the government is proposing to do this on a regular basis because of its ramifications in the long term, the collective bargaining.

• (1350)

I ask the member those two questions: Does he believe in strikes and the process of collective bargaining, or that Canada Post should be an essential service; and second, does he feel that this whole process of back-to-work legislation is going to improve the situation at Canada Post?

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I guess to answer that question I can simply say no, I am not in favour of strikes in the Public Service and for very good reasons. As I mentioned before, we were attempting to put this country to work, get it working, and I do not think that anything that disrupts that process is healthy.

I think it does come down to a question of semantics in this whole scenario in regard to Canada Post and the disruption in service. Is it a disruption in service, is it a strike or is it a slowdown? Again, it comes down to a question of semantics. When does it become a strike? At what point does it paralyzed the ability of Canadians to do business?

I think we have obviously gone through many of these. I am not about to attempt to define a strike and when a disruption in service requires legislation. I guess that is up to the Canadian public to determine whether we are doing the right thing or not. But I believe we are doing the right thing because again it goes back to doing business in this country. When 80 per cent of the mail delivered in this country is for business purposes, I think it is incumbent on all members in this House to sit down and review that and at the end of the day make the right choice. On this side of the House the choice is that we prefer Canadians to have mail delivery and that businesses have mail delivery that they can depend on and trust.

I believe that we are doing the correct thing and that Canadians cannot afford a slowdown, a work stoppage or an out and out strike in the public sector, that being the post office.

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent): Mr. Speaker, today we are facing a very serious problem that does not have easy answers. As a matter of fact as we stop and consider the process that has gone on, our postal workers at this point, CUPW, have been without contract for two years. There have been many processes in that time. They have gone through discussions, mediation and negotiations to try to come up with some type of conciliation with a conciliation officer. Many tactics have been used in order to come to some type of agreement.

There is not one person in this House, nor one person in this country who wants to see a strike occur. We all know that. We know that, however, we are in a situation where if appropriate strong actions had been taken several years ago, we would not be in a situation today looking at back-to-work legislation. It is a little bit odd to stand here and talk about back-to-work legislation when, as several of my colleagues have pointed out, there is no one out on strike at this point.

However, this process is being put in place to make certain there is no disruption in mail delivery.

It is a piece of legislation that may be affecting the ability of the two parties to get together. One would question the wisdom of introducing the legislation while both parties are still sitting at the bargaining table, attempting to negotiate an issue and, from my understanding, working very hard at trying to iron out the last few issues that are there.

In many ways in this last week or two we have seen some progress occur. The progress with the mediator Alan Gold had come forward over the last month and had been very positive.

Mr. Gold left because he could not aid and abet the situation further, but the two parties did sit down and attempt at that point to try to resolve what was left of the outstanding issues. Over the weekend, we heard that they were seriously trying to resolve any final differences.