

Inquiries of the Ministry

[Translation]

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT**MONTREAL ROD SERVICE VIOLENCE IN
DELIVERY SERVICE**

Mr. Georges Valade (Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Postmaster General. In view of the violence which erupted yesterday in Montreal and in view of the fact that he will not be in the house Monday, I would like to ask the minister whether he could make a statement today regarding this situation?

Hon. Eric W. Kierans (Postmaster General): Yes, Mr. Speaker. The report will be a little longer than usual.

[English]

The situation in Montreal gives me cause for great concern. Public delivery has been disrupted. Much more seriously, men have been beaten up, tires have been slashed and windshields broken. This organized reign of terror is a culmination of a three year history of labour troubles and breakdowns in public service. We are seeking to resolve both the short term problem of violence and the long term problem of unsatisfactory service to the public.

On January 28, Rod Service announced it was laying off 110 drivers. Subsequently, because of labour problems, Rod Service informed us it wanted to withdraw entirely from its contract with us. For our part we are happy that it should do so. We did not seek this; it was imposed upon us. We are ready to absorb immediately Rod Service employees into the Post Office, including all but a maximum of 69 of the 110 to whom lay-off notices have been given. Of the 424 employees, 27 are already on our staff; another 254 have applied to join the department. As Post Office employees they would enjoy greater security and better fringe benefits.

The national union of Rod Service employees has insisted that the Post Office fulfil the union contract with Rod service which runs to March 30, 1970, and has demanded that we do this by creating a special Crown corporation or agency. This would mean that one year from now we would be back exactly where we started.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I hesitate to interrupt the minister when he is speaking on such an important matter. I wonder whether, if his statement is to be of some length, he would not prefer to revert to motions. Does he have the agreement of the house to complete his statement now?

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Mr. Kierans: I have only another few sentences, Mr. Speaker. We are ready immediately, if the union agrees, to absorb all the employees we can into the public service. Alternatively, we are negotiating with another company to take over postal delivery in Montreal. Unhappily, no agreements have been reached. But pending such an agreement, I state flatly that we will not be intimidated, nor will we condone violence.

[Translation]

Mr. Valade: Mr. Speaker, could the Postmaster General tell us what seniority rights he is prepared to grant to the employees he wishes to reinstate?

Mr. Kierans: Mr. Speaker, this will be a matter of negotiations between the postal union, the carriers union, the department and the employees themselves.

[English]

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The minister must be familiar with the recent statement of the Letter Carriers' Union contradicting statements that he has made in the house and asserting that the minister has not been properly informed. However I should like to ask him whether there is any foundation for the assertion that the Post Office representatives have told the union that the statements made by the minister in the house are in no way binding upon the minister?

Mr. Kierans: I would like to know the name of the man who made the statement.

An hon. Member: There goes another unemployed.

Mr. Stanfield: I suggest that the minister had better read the recent communication by the union. Would the Postmaster General say whether during the discussions with the postal unions his department has been asked to institute mediation or arbitration proceedings, as distinct from adjudication proceedings?

Mr. Kierans: The two major unions have contracts with the Treasury Board and these contracts outline all the procedures that they may take if there are complaints and dissatisfactions, important enough to warrant filing a grievance. So far as I know, there has been no demand for mediation in these particular complaints. On the four major differences involving the single mail processing system in particular, the union and the Post Office have