

Montreal Postal Strike

this kind of activity than in the postal service of this country, and no better time to adopt a change in attitude than during this current crisis in Montreal.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, again we are faced with a Post Office problem. It is a pity, in a world where communications are increasingly important, that the department concerned is continually having this problem which, in fact, has never been thoroughly dealt with.

The department's policy is greatly to blame for the situation. All the solutions brought forward by the present Postmaster General and Minister of Communications (Mr. Kierans) have been superficial and short-term ones. The department is incapable of preparing a long-term policy. There is no dialogue, no regular contact with employees, no true spirit of conciliation and consultation. The minister's attitudes are always those of a dictator, designed to enforce his decisions. Such an attitude is ridiculous, when we remember the minister's assertion that increased postal rates would bring about an improved postal service. There is the record of this administration. It costs us more to get less service.

● (8:40 p.m.)

The minister pleads his case by saying that the conflict is illegal. Having said that, he stays put, he does not do anything, he does not try to meet—except at the very last minute—the union leaders.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the whole thing is a failure and that the dispute may reach the national level.

In the report issued by the firm of Kates, Peat and Marwich, the judgments were harsh. The minister remembers that. Indeed, as far as the public needs are concerned, as well as postal rates, manpower management, labour relations, working conditions, equipment, executive training, the report of this firm was particularly severe.

Unfortunately, this department has always developed a short-term policy. The Postmaster General, believe it or not, is the eighth minister in office since 1962. Thus, it is not surprising to note that, from one minister to the next, the policy is always a superficial and short-term one.

The least that we can ask from the Postmaster General is to prove that the recent rate increases are justified, due to the present situation. People are tired to bear the cost of strikes, even though they have no choice.

[Mr. Broadbent.]

When the communication phenomenon as a whole is affected, the situation goes much beyond the innocuous economic and administrative purpose.

We know that the Postmaster General and Minister of Communications has always been known for his letters. As this is precisely the question under discussion tonight I should like to refer you to the official report of the House for February 17, 1970. It contains a famous letter which will make him go down in history for his spirit of conciliation and dialogue. In fact, the minister in this letter describes his approach, that is that he has none.

This letter is dated February 17, 1970 and is addressed to Mr. Raymond Parent, Secretary-General of the Confederation of National Trade Unions. It reads as follows, and I quote:

Dear Mr. Parent:

Since the mail transportation situation in Montreal has become intolerable, I wish to state clearly the position of the Post Office Department and the Government.

Mr. Speaker, when the minister wrote those words, the dispute had already lasted for over 16 days, but that is not important. The minister finally made up his mind to speak, and you will note the conciliatory tone he uses, his ability in collective bargaining with regard to labour problems.

I quote further:

The resulting disruption, violence and intimidation have hampered enormously the competitive capacity of industry and commerce in Montreal.

Later on we find the following, and I quote:

I will not list the incidents of violence, sabotage, and destruction of government property which have occurred during the last two weeks. You are as aware of them as I am. I will simply say that the mail is not being delivered.

Mr. Speaker, it will thus have taken 16 days for the minister to discover that the mail is not delivered, that violence occurs, and so on.

If you are looking for some indication of the employer's offer in the letter, you will not find any. Supposing that the employer, as such, recognizes that it is not the responsibility of the Postmaster General and Minister of Communications to settle the dispute, but of the contractor, one could wonder about the position taken by the Post Office and Communications Departments concerning the conflict.