

Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987

When the employees went on strike the Government acted on behalf of the Corporation by forcing the employees back to work, with some of the most negative legislation this House has seen. The Liberal Party, when it was in government, played that game with postal workers.

The Hon. Member gave an interesting exposé on the Canada Labour Code. Previous Liberal Governments played this game the Conservatives are playing today, in which they destroyed the opportunity to bargain collectively and obtain a decent contract. They were responsible for poisoning labour relations in the Post Office to the point where it was virtually impossible to obtain an agreement. When the employees were forced back to work, all the cards were in the hands of the Corporation. It was the Liberals who began the process of franchising and it was they who refused to deal with the critical question of job loss as a result of automation in the Post Office.

Will the Hon. Member come directly to the point and deal with the record of past Liberal Governments, which compares almost exactly with the present Conservative attempt to crush the postal unions and violate the rights of workers in the Post Office?

Mr. Caccia: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member has it all wrong. He is really manufacturing issues.

He wants to create the impression from his own vivid imagination that the Liberal Party was out to destroy unions. If that were so, why have we, beginning with Mackenzie King, introduced a system of collective bargaining that has over the decades managed to resolve almost 99 per cent of the disputes in federal jurisdiction? Laws that were introduced by subsequent Liberal Governments have placed a high value on the important role that labour has to play in society and on the legitimate power labour must have in order to negotiate with the employer. Liberal Governments have developed a body of legislation and a system of resolving disputes which is probably one of the best in the world.

Perhaps the Hon. Member suffers from selective memory. Even those aspects he has put forward are incorrect. We did not shy away from protecting workers from automation. As I stated earlier, we did not shy away from reinforcing labour through labour educational programs to the tune of some \$1.5 million a year between 1982 and 1984, in order to allow labour to develop its research and educational programs to perform an effective role in society.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, my remarks will be very brief. I simply want to urge opposition Parties to expedite passage of this Bill because failure to do so on the part of this Parliament would be very irresponsible and could lead to consequences that I do not believe anyone in the House wants to see.

Much of the debate about this Bill has dealt with the question of whether the Post Office is operating reasonably and properly in the circumstances. I suggest that those who

review the contemporary history of the Post Office and come to the conclusion that what is happening now is improper, unfair or unreasonable is engaging in selective review.

I commend to the House a recently published book entitled, *Post mortem*, written by David Stewart Patterson, who is a reporter with *The Globe and Mail*. In his book, he reviews the contemporary history of the Post Office and talks about the various attempts by the Post Office to deal with its labour-management problems over the years.

Various Postmasters General and Ministers responsible for the Post Office have tried every technique known. The New Democratic Party approach would be to give the unions what they want. That is what the Hon. Member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet) and Bryce Mackasey did when they were Postmasters General.

Today, there is a situation in the Post Office in which independent third-party adjudicators have found that the wage costs with the Post Office are 20 per cent above national norms and productivity is 20 per cent below national norms. The total excess labour cost because of these two factors is between \$460 million and \$800 million a year in taxpayers' money. This is money that could be spent on day care, economic development or on job creation.

This situation exists not because the workers are lazy but because of acquiescence to militant union demands. The present work rules are impossible.

One of the salutary effects of having replacement workers there now is that management has been made aware that an inexperienced replacement worker, when management is not saddled with these horrible work rules, is much more productive. More mail is being processed by inexperienced replacement workers who are not saddled by these work rules. Something has to be done by a Parliament which feels in some way or other responsible to the taxpayers.

● (1140)

What were the other approaches? The previous speaker, the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), has left the Chamber but forgets that in 1978 the Liberal Government brought in legislation to end a strike before it began. He was a supporter of that Government yet he stands here and sanctimoniously criticizes us. The approach that that Government took did not work. It did not help to cure the problems of the Post Office, nor did it help labour relations.

In 1981 the Liberal Government used another approach. It said that it would let the workers go on strike. For 42 days the Post Office was shut down and the cost to the small business sector in Canada was \$3 billion. The Opposition is saying that the Post Office should not bring in replacement workers and the Government should not legislate an end to the strike. But what are the alternatives? I suggest they are, one, give the union everything it wants; two, shut down the Post Office.