

Post Office

the country making even more difficult the negotiations currently going on between Treasury Board and CUPW.

I trust the Postmaster General will act on the positive suggestions we have put forward. The Conservatives have welcomed the recommendations of the Ritchie report with a big fanfare. They got this man from Imperial Oil, he was parachuted into Algoma—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

● (1742)

Hon. J.-Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to both the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) and the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), but I would like at the beginning of my speech to put things in their places and to try to explain the problem at the Post Office.

We are very much aware that the Post Office is an essential service to all Canadians. I agree with the hon. member for Nickel Belt that the main purpose of the Post Office is not to make a profit but to provide service. I do not agree with every suggestion the hon. member has made to solve the problems of the Post Office because the hon. member does not seem to understand them.

This is the third time I have been asked to answer questions about the Hay report. I also spoke on May 4, and my speech can be found at page 5164 of *Hansard*. Before I deal with the Hay report, I would like to ask hon. members to be serious, more constructive and positive. Let us stop this attitude of gloom and doom about the Post Office. Let us stop looking backward and conducting a post mortem. Let us stop thinking about what happened weeks, months and years ago.

Mr. Dinsdale: What about yesterday and today?

Mr. Lamontagne: Let us stop crying over spilt milk, as we say in English. Let us not live the Conservative way. Let us deal realistically with the problems we have. It is true we are facing a challenge at the Post Office, but it is unrealistic and irresponsible to ask people to believe that we could have the same Post Office service we had 50 years ago. Perhaps the opposition would like us to pull out a report relating to 1925.

The Hay report is three years old. Many things have happened since then. It is a challenge to make the Post Office operate more efficiently and more consistently and to give Canadians the service they deserve. With the revolution in technology that we have seen in the Post Office, many problems have arisen. We have a budget of \$1.4 billion. There are 63,000 workers, six unions and some associations. We operate the largest fleet of trucks in Canada; we have 3,734 trucks. We use 4.5 million gallons of fuel and have close to 9,000 postal bureaux across Canada. There are millions of miles to cover in order to get six billion pieces of mail to our 23 million people. That is the magnitude of our postal service, and the recommendations in the Hay report will not solve the problems we have.

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

[*Translation*]

A few years ago, a program was implemented to meet more effectively the increasing volume of mail in many regions of the country and the problems at certain of our installations which had become outdated. New installations were therefore proposed and a new operational technology was designed. This is why we are now facing an extraordinary evolution. We are now going through a completely new experience thanks to the most sophisticated technology.

[*English*]

The Hay report will not cure that.

[*Translation*]

It would be much easier to solve the problems that have come up and to provide Canadians with the best performance possible if we could count on the full co-operation of all the members of our unions and especially the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

The problem of labour relations that I would like to touch on briefly is well known, but since we are now involved in a conciliation process with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and are also negotiating on a friendly term with the Letter Carriers' Union of Canada, I shall not go into details. However, I would like to clarify certain recent statements. It is wrong to suggest that the Canadian Union of Postal Workers does not have a collective agreement. Even though the expiry date of last June is now passed, the previous collective agreement remains in effect and its clauses must be respected, as they are. This is an excellent collective agreement, and if the hon. members think that the postal workers are not well treated, I would suggest that they read their own collective agreement and compare it with that of the CUPW.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Nickel Belt is well aware of working conditions in the Post Office and, like me, is devoted to the workers. I would like him to look into the collective agreement with CUPW to see if he knows of any other collective agreement which provides the same rights or conditions. I would be surprised if this collective agreement is not the best collective agreement compared with many others. When we say we do not want to renegotiate, that does not mean we are not ready to discuss some items. The existing collective agreement is very good, but we want to clarify its language. That has been the source of the problem since 1975. If we could clarify the language and the interpretation of some clauses, I think we would find the solution to many of our problems.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, of course, we are still ready to negotiate through the conciliation process. However, we have believed it essential—and this is what I said in French—to clarify the legal interpretation and the meaning of certain expressions used in the agreement. I repeat that we are willing to do everything in our power to prevent a strike and to provide at the same time for our workers fair and humane working