

in weather forecasting have resulted in proposals to centralize certain of them, to relocate in the case of certain other facilities. However, if the honourable senator has information which should be brought to the attention of the minister, I would be pleased to assist in conveying that information to the minister.

Senator Argue: I would be very delighted to do that; and I think the information I have brought this morning is accurate.

Senator Perrault: I may say that in recent weeks members of the loyal opposition have spoken, both in the other place and in various parts of Canada, in terms of the alleged illusory nature of government cut-backs. I think we have had a great deal of evidence in recent days that these cut-backs are far from being illusory: they are very tangible and very real.

Senator Argue: I am not debating that point.

Senator Flynn: It is a high priority.

POSTAL SERVICES CONTINUATION BILL

SECOND READING

Hon. George J. McIlraith moved the second reading of Bill C-8, to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services.

He said: Honourable senators—

Senator Flynn: You have a good audience today.

Senator McIlraith: I hope a well rested one.

Senator Grosart: Representative.

Senator McIlraith: Honourable senators, Canada's industrial relations system reflects our belief that it works well and can be protected and promoted through free collective bargaining as the means for settling labour-management disputes.

Our laws have established the framework of rights and responsibilities in which management and labour are to conduct their relations, and it places the responsibility for resolving labour-management disputes clearly on the parties to the collective bargaining. That is the basis of our system as I see it.

Unfortunately, there are times when the necessary spirit of compromise and the demonstration of good faith that are required are found wanting, for whatever reason. As a result, the government, which clearly has the responsibility to the community at large to protect the public interest, must act. This is the case in the situation before us today, and this is why we are bringing forward the bill dealing with the dispute between the Post Office and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

It is, I think, the view of most senators that Parliament must legislate to prevent the continuation of this stoppage of postal services.

It is clear from a review of developments leading up to the present impasse between the inside postal workers and management that there has been a complete lack of meaningful communication and dialogue between the parties, and almost

no real bargaining; that is, the necessary compromises and counterproposals on which a viable collective agreement and bargaining relationship can be based have been absent.

The previous collective agreement between the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Treasury Board expired on June 30, 1977. In the early months of 1977 several pre-negotiation meetings took place between the parties, without any progress being made. On May 4, 1977, the union served formal notice to bargain, with Treasury Board replying on May 6, 1977. The first formal meeting, which took place on May 19, 1977, lasted one hour and was the only one for several months.

Following a number of unsuccessful attempts by the Post Office to resume talks, negotiations were finally held again in October and November. However, little progress was made.

On November 30, 1977, the employer filed an application with the Public Service Staff Relations Board for the appointment of a Conciliation Board. Mr. Roy Heenan, on behalf of management, Mr. Irving Gaul, on behalf of the union, were named to the Conciliation Board on December 17, 1977. Mr. Louis Courtemanche was appointed chairman of the board on February 2, 1978.

There were many public conciliation hearings from April through July, 1978. Closed conciliation sessions involving both parties began on July 18, 1978, and continued through to the end of the month. During these extensive Conciliation Board proceedings, the parties were able to agree to only a few minor clauses.

The employer met separately with the Conciliation Board on July 27 and 31, 1978, and on five occasions in August. On August 16, 1978, the union gave notice that it wished the conciliation process to terminate and asked the board to prepare its report.

The Conciliation Board handed down three separate reports which were released to the parties on October 6, 1978. The lack of agreement by the three members of the Conciliation Board are an indication of the intense feelings of the parties and the wide differences between them on a very large number of complex contract items. Notwithstanding the very exhaustive efforts of the Conciliation Board from April to August, 1978, little was achieved in bringing the parties closer to agreement, and since the handing down of the three separate board reports, it is apparent that very wide gaps between the parties still exist.

Honourable senators, you will have learned that on Monday the Acting Minister of Labour and senior officials from the Department of Labour made what is called "a last ditch effort" to resolve this dispute in a spirit of conciliation and compromise when they met extensively throughout the day and late into the evening with representatives of the union along with a representative of the Canadian Labour Congress in order to explore all possible avenues leading to a settlement.

Following many hours of exploratory talks, the minister proposed two possible means of resolving the dispute, and