

Government Organization

Mr. Kierans: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman. This is misinformation. I have never said they do not have the right to eat in the post office. They do have the right to eat in the post office. But they now have the option of doing something else. They can eat in a restaurant or anywhere else they choose. But they may still go back to the post office if they wish. Nothing has been taken away from them.

Mr. Orlikow: Of course, they can eat at the post office. The only difficulty is that if they work the eight hours for which they are paid, and still eat at the post office, they will finish an hour later every day. It is true they can go back to the post office on their own time and eat there. That is the way the letter carriers interpret this change, and I am sure they are correct. I would be glad to hear the Postmaster General demonstrate to me that what I have said is not true. Much more important, let him demonstrate to the letter carriers that it is not true.

I agree with the minister that the letter carriers still have the right to go back to the post office to eat their lunch, which would take an hour of their own time. And I realize that they will have the right to eat in a restaurant and pay commercial rates for their lunch, or else eat cold sandwiches. I invite the minister to join the letter carriers in Winnipeg in January or February of any year, in doing so.

The minister told us during the question period today that he expected the walk-outs which have taken place in the last couple of days would taper off, and I hope he is right. I wish to say this to the minister, however: if he persists in the hearings which his department has initiated before the public service staff relations board, if he persists in trying to get that board to give him permission to prosecute those employees who walked off the job in the last couple of days, or if he proceeds to initiate prosecutions, he will find a work stoppage on his hands which will make past work stoppages look like tea parties. I have fairly good connections with the employees and I believe I know what they are thinking.

I hope the minister will pay attention to this suggestion of mine and not proceed with what I consider to be a most retrograde step, a step such as no private industry has taken to my knowledge.

• (8:10 p.m.)

Mr. Francis: Mr. Chairman, I wonder whether the hon. member would permit a question. The hon. member said that if the government did not do something we would have a strike on our hands the like of which we had never seen before. Is he threatening the government? On what authority does he put it in those terms?

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Chairman, I am not a letter carrier or a member of that union and I have no say in the decisions that they make any more than the hon. member for Ottawa West, who asked the question at the suggestion of the minister. What I am saying is obvious, that if the government goes ahead with its provocation, as my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre called it, and declares its intention of prosecuting, it will bedevil the issue of good relations between the employees and the employer, in this case the government.

I suggest to the minister that he take a look at a recent labour case in his own province, the strike at Domtar by members of the C.N.T.U. The settlement of that strike was held up for several weeks because the company insisted on proceeding with prosecutions that had been initiated during the strike. It was not until the company withdrew from its tough position that the employees agreed to go back to work. This is all I am suggesting here. If the hon. member for Ottawa West takes that as a threat, then he is even more stupid and foolish than I thought he was before today.

I want to turn for a few moments to what I consider to be a very important matter in connection with which the minister made a mistake in policy that he insists on perpetuating. It is a subject that I know the minister resents our talking about and considers we are wasting time; nevertheless, it is a matter that has been universally condemned. I am referring to the very sharp, indeed astronomical increase in postal rates that the minister and his department have imposed on publications, newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals.

I am not holding any brief today for the commercial press and for magazines, but this country has always had to contend with pressures from our large neighbour to the south. Every day we are inundated with television and radio programs emanating from the United States, as well as newspapers and magazines. I do not have to go into this subject.