

to deal with a fundamental issue like this. This issue affects every person in Canada because the mail comes to every doorstep almost every day. This will be heard loud and clear when we are finally allowed to get out on the hustings.

Getting to the legality of the situation, every postmaster general has agreed that they are operating illegally when they increase rates other than by amending the Post Office Act. I could read Section 10, but I am not going to waste my time reading sections of the act. When the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) was Postmaster General, he agreed that in order to increase postal rates you must amend the act. This was agreed by every Postmaster General right down to the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) when he was Postmaster General.

That opinion has been strongly supported in two successive reports of the Joint Committee of both Houses on Statutory Instruments and Regulations, condemning the government for operating outside its legal rights and, in particular, for avoiding its responsibility to parliament. Just the other day there was unanimous concurrence with this viewpoint from the House of Commons when the fourth report of the standing committee was concurred in unanimously in this House.

More significant from the standpoint of the government's tendency toward paranoia is the view expressed in this House the other day by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford). That is recorded in *Hansard* for April 21. He stated that the present and past Postmasters General have acted on the advice of the Department of Justice and that the use of Section 13 of the Financial Administration Act is a proper and valid use of that section. In other words, the Minister of Justice advised successive Postmasters General, and there have been six in seven years, to break the law as it is laid down in Section 10 of the Post Office Act.

I can understand why the Minister of Justice has decided to leave politics. If this became an issue in his constituency in the city of Vancouver, B.C., he would not have a hope of re-election. The Minister of Justice advised Postmasters General to break the law so that a parliamentary discussion on post office affairs could be avoided. He deliberately circumvented the rights and responsibilities of members of parliament on all sides of this House.

This was underlined recently by the attitude of the Postmaster General (Mr. Lamontagne). He came into the position quite unexpectedly early in the new year because of the vacancy that had occurred in the Solicitor General's portfolio. When the Solicitor General was Postmaster General, he indicated in a parliamentary committee that he would be moving to bring in amendments to the Post Office Act to legalize what had been done illegally. The present Postmaster General, who was only elected last fall, does not agree that what is being done is illegal. He was specifically asked in this House on April 18 by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) whether he accepts the viewpoint of the committee on statutory instruments that what he is doing is illegal. The minister replied as follows:

### *Post Office*

Mr. Speaker, I must say that the postal rates have been increased legally, as I have already indicated to the House, and we have no intention of changing our present way of doing things.

Obviously he is adamant. It will be up to the people of Canada to change the present way of doing things, and this I am sure they are going to do as soon as the Prime Minister can screw up his courage to dissolve and call the long overdue election.

There has been a deathbed repentance on the part of the government in recent days, all geared to the exigencies of the election call. They introduced, and it was approved by this House, Bill C-45 which outlaws the right to strike in the Post Office during an election. That goes back on the right that was established by a Liberal government in 1967.

An announcement was made outside the House that the Post Office Department was at long last going to accept a recommendation that had repeatedly been made in the House by the opposition. If action had been taken earlier we might have come to grips with some of the problems that have caused such a tragic state of affairs in the Post Office. Outside the House, the Postmaster General and the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) announced there would be a study on the advisability of transforming the Post Office Department into a Crown corporation and that the report must be in by July 15. Obviously that was political expediency of the deepest kind to coincide with what was anticipated then would be the call of an early summer election. However, we are still shrouded in secrecy. For this reason the hon. member for Peace River has been calling for a freedom of information act that would open the secret operations of the government to parliamentary and public scrutiny.

● (1722)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired. He may continue, however, by unanimous consent.

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Dinsdale:** I am just about to conclude. I had this nicely timed. Post Office customers, and this is the strangest anomaly of all, have been alienated. Because of the recent action of the Postmaster General in increasing rates illegally, major users of the service such as the periodical publishers have taken the department to court. The Supreme Court of Ontario will be ruling on the matter in due course. But I would think that in the light of events just around the corner the real verdict will be expressed by the people of Canada through the ballot boxes, and I am optimistic about what the result will be.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to express strong support for this motion. I do so as one who is consistent, because I have supported motions similar to this in years gone by. That leads me to a bit of history which I should like to relate to the House in a minute or two.

The motion calls for the tabling of an opinion of the Department of Justice which was apparently given to the Post