

Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987

The employer has a major responsibility to show good faith in this very difficult situation.

The Bill has one positive aspect although it need not be brought in through this legislation. Clause 5 extends the term of the collective agreement to September, 1988, or September, 1989. That extension of the agreement could pave the way for the resumption of negotiations rather than the introduction of this type of legislation which is only adding to the discontent, tension and violence we are witnessing these days.

The Government could announce its intention to extend the collective agreement. A mediator could be appointed. Instead of proceeding with this Bill the employer and the union could return to the table to find a solution without direction from the Government through Parliament on the direction which should be taken.

The Government now has an opportunity to demonstrate that it means what it says, that Canada Post is an independent agency. As this debate is taking place there is a lot of unhappiness across the country. This matter ought to be resolved at the negotiating table and not by the imposition of a decision of Parliament on the collective bargaining system which has served this country and its workers very well.

Mr. Skelly: Madam Speaker, I would like to make a comment and would appreciate a response to it. It astounds me to hear representatives of the Liberal Party who sat in the last Government berate the present Government on this issue. It was the previous Government which poisoned the climate in labour relations in the Post Office so badly that we have the situation which exists today—spying on employees, harassment and intimidation. The operation which the postal corporation has worked into a fine art was started by the Liberal Party when it was in power. It started contracting out and franchising. All of the evils which we see today were started by the Liberal Party. It refused to deal with fair questions of automation raised by the employees. It was unwilling to deal with important job loss issues in a fair manner. Under the Liberal Government we lost delivery of home mail. The whole litany of poor service to the public started under that Government.

How many times did the previous Liberal Government force workers back to work in extremely negative contract situations which I believe were designed to break CUPW and remove the rights of people working in the Post Office? I know that the previous speaker was not guilty of those offences. He often cried out as a lone voice in that Cabinet. However, considering the dirty hands which his administration had, I would like to hear him justify the Liberal Party's criticism of the present Government.

Mr. Caccia: Madam Speaker, it is easy for the NDP to express synthetic indignation on matters like this, having never been in Government and never having had an opportunity to carry the responsibility of governing. That is a typical stance of the NDP.

There is a provision in the Labour Code on automation, introduced by the Liberal Government, to protect workers from dislocation due to the adoption of new technologies in the work place. That measure was hotly contested in the 1970s by employers. Finally, despite the opposition, the measure found its way into the Canada Labour Code. It was put there to protect workers under federal jurisdiction when their job security is at stake.

That is one of a number of measures included in the Labour Code which, I remind the Hon. Member, is not an invention of the New Democratic Party. Canada enjoys a federal labour code which covers a variety of situations because over the years the governing Liberal Party developed a substantial body of measures which are the envy of observers of the labour scene in other parts of the world.

• (1130)

It is true that we have occasionally passed back-to-work legislation through the House. I remember a number of occasions when the service that affected the public came to a complete standstill. This is not the case now with the Post Office. I must say that it is regrettable that mail service today is possible because of scab labour, but until last weekend mail was being delivered because there were rotating strikes and the public was not being inconvenienced.

When we passed legislation in previous years, we did so when it was more than evident that the public was being put at an enormous inconvenience, either because the trains had come to a stop or the harbours were not functioning. Those were real emergency situations which demanded the intervention of Parliament at a certain point.

However, I submit to the Member that we are not facing that situation yet. Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate and consistent for a Liberal to object to this type of legislation and to urge the Government to remove the scabs, give a signal on the part of management that there is goodwill to resume the negotiations and to sit down and find ways of developing a common ground.

I admit that the situation is deteriorating, not because of an attitude by one side but mainly because the Government is introducing Draconian legislation that is fueling the fire rather than taking initiatives that could have a positive effect. I hope that answers the Hon. Member's question. If he wants to ask another question I will be glad to attempt to reply.

Mr. Skelly: Madam Speaker, I think the Hon. Member side-stepped the question. Perhaps he could deal with the specifics.

The legislation before us today is Draconian. Certainly, the Government, with the postal corporation, created a situation in which the employees could not win. The Corporation has poisoned labour relations with the encouragement of the Government.