

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know how long or short a time. I am rather accustomed to the hon. member's theatrical appearances here when he puts a question that I think he could put more seriously. The fact of the matter is that we have taken several actions in this particular area. We have indicated that we sought the help—we did not seek to hide this—of the Auditor General in this particular program. He was kind enough to give it. He was prepared to put personnel to work on 1,000 files that we have, spending something like 4½ hours on each file, whereas I have indicated that we spent something like 20 minutes.

We are prepared to go before the public accounts committee when the Auditor General's report comes out. In so far as the collections are concerned, we did embark on an advertising program indicating we were going to take that particular action. We thought it was appropriate to let people know we were going to tighten up. We moved the prosecutions up from 2,000 to 7,000. The administrative penalties have increased by something like 100,000 in the course of a year. So we are taking action. But that is not the answer to the overpayments, Mr. Speaker. The answer to that is to find some control mechanism that will make this as close to perfection as we can.

**Mr. Alexander:** Mr. Speaker, now we are talking about control mechanism. I can recall when the minister downplayed the fraud squad. Can he advise this House and the people of Canada what steps he has taken to bring about a more effective fraud squad, or is he still prepared to let this go by the way and at the expense of the Canadian taxpayer? Can we have some information about the fraud squad, which I understand was quite effective?

**Mr. McGrath:** So effective they had to disband it.

**Mr. Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, rather than decreasing the impact of the so-called fraud squad, we thought that rather than zero in on particular areas or regions of the country we should do this detection across the country. When we moved from the post-fraud squad era, we moved from 2,000 to 7,000 prosecutions; we moved from detecting 327,000 to detecting 447,000 violations of the act. So that to zoom in and suggest that the fraud squad is doing a job that would embarrass the government is just not in accordance with the facts.

**Mr. Alexander:** You said it, not me.

**Mr. Cullen:** I never said that, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is misquoting me again.

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● (1427)

**POST OFFICE****ADDITIONAL PERSONS TO ASSIST MEDIATOR-ARBITRATOR IN  
SETTLING LABOUR DISPUTE**

**Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Acting Minister of Labour. Will the  
[Mr. Alexander.]

minister confirm that, following discussions which have taken place during the past 24 hours, the government has agreed to add two further persons to the mediator-arbitrator working on the postal dispute, one to be appointed by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and one to be appointed by the Post Office?

**Hon. André Ouellet (Acting Minister of Labour):** Mr. Speaker, I have taken note of the very constructive suggestion that has been made by the Canadian Labour Congress. I discussed this suggestion with the mediator-arbitrator, who thinks it has great merit. Therefore, I am ready to appoint two assessors if the union representing the employees, and the employer, both want it, one to be recommended by each party, to assist the mediator-arbitrator in carrying out his duty.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Broadbent:** Mr. Speaker, I will direct my supplementary question to the Postmaster General. Will the Postmaster General confirm whether the government has agreed that, in dealing with a number of complex clauses in the agreement between the Post Office and CUPW as interpreted by Judge Tremblay and the two additional persons, it will give its unequivocal commitment that no existing benefits will be withdrawn from the union?

[Translation]

**Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General):** Mr. Speaker, first I should like to inform the House that our entire work force was back to work this morning and I hope that the mail will be delivered in the shortest possible time. In reply to the question put by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby, I can say that he should rely on my co-operation for the appointment of an individual to assist the mediator-arbitrator appointed by the Department of Labour. Mr. Speaker, the Post Office Department does not usually withdraw acquired rights when negotiating with its employees. I can assure the House that if, for example, there are 56,000 grievances outstanding at present it is merely due to the fact that the terms of the collective agreement should be clarified and their meaning made more accurate. I think that the suggested appointment of two qualified persons to assist the mediator-arbitrator help clarify and specify the terms of the collective agreement is good.

[English]

**Mr. Broadbent:** I would like to get the answer a little more clearly from the Postmaster General. In addition to suggesting that two people be added, one from CUPW and one from the Post Office, I also had in mind the fact that union members currently believe—reasonably so, in terms of the law that was passed—that existing rights might be taken away. Will the minister state unequivocally that this will not be the case?

I repeat the question: is the minister in agreement that Judge Tremblay and the two persons who will be interpreting the complex clauses will have, as a mandate from the government, the insistence that whatever decision they reach in such