

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 17, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

STATEMENT BY MINISTER ON FIVE DAY DELIVERY

Hon. Eric W. Kierans (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make on motions a short statement on a subject in which a great many members have expressed an interest. As of today the five day post office delivery week and the new method of sortation and delivery known as single mail processing go into effect.

As hon. members know, there have been in recent weeks continuous discussions between the unions and departmental officials over these steps. Differences between the two sides have been essentially resolved. According to the latest information available to me there will be no strike, no work stoppage, and no work to rule organized by the unions.

[Translation]

The new system will make it possible to save \$13 million. It will also result in the abolition of 2,084 jobs. In spite of that, there will be no lay-offs. All those concerned will be kept in the service either by eliminating supernumerary or temporary employment, or by transfers, or by filling vacancies already existing.

There is in that conflict a point about which I am still concerned. A number of the grievances come not only from a disagreement but from more or less wilful misunderstandings. Although it has been asserted that postmen would have to eat cold meals along their route, the department has always intended, and that has now been accepted, to provide postmen, according to their choice, with free transportation home, to the post-office or to another place along their route. Moreover, we have abolished the old rule stipulating that postmen cannot be assigned to an itinerary in the neighbourhood where they live. That measure will therefore enable postmen who wish it to have lunch at home.

● (2:10 p.m.)

[English]

As a result of such misunderstanding it has become apparent that, given the department's

size—there are some 48,000 post office employees spread coast to coast among about 8,000 localities—a comprehensive and accurate system of internal information between employees and management is urgently needed. This problem, I can assure hon. members, is being given serious and urgent study.

In conclusion I would like to say a word of praise to both the officials of the department and to the employees, in particular to the employees who have displayed a sense of pride in public service. I believe this represents a significant step forward in the improvement of labour-management relations from the low point described by Mr. Justice Montpetit in his report of two years ago, and continues the improvement described by Judge Montpetit in his review published last week.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): I should like to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am appreciative of the courtesy shown by the minister in making available to me the text of the remarks he has just made. I cannot in all candour say I am blinded by the brilliance or overcome by the novelty of the statement which has been made. I would look upon it as a hopeful expression of things to come; and a hope that certain other things will not come.

For many weeks I have had the feeling that this so-called single mail processing and the partial five day week were not sufficiently prepared by the minister; otherwise, there would not have been the threats, anxiety and disquiet which have pervaded the Canadian public as a result of statements made by the representatives of some of the workers. We are somewhat disturbed by the fact that the country has been divided into a state where some are on six deliveries and some on five. It will be quite a process to sort out, and provide equitable, fair and efficient postal service to all Canadians.

I note the minister's reference to savings of \$13 million, and his reiteration that there will be no reduction in the number of jobs. This is a point on which certain very interested people disagree with him. If he can accomplish a saving of \$13 million, keep the mail moving as rapidly as before the five day service was introduced, and avoid any lay-offs, it will be one of the greatest examples of eating one's cake and having it, too, that mankind has seen for very many years.