

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. The parliamentary secretary has been made familiar with the rather rigid rules of the adjournment motion.

Mr. Knowles: No money and she ran out of time.

● (2210)

POST OFFICE—SERVICE PROVIDED BY RURAL OFFICES DURING POSTAL STRIKE. (A) TREATMENT OF EMPLOYEES WHO REMAIN ON DUTY

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, on July 7, as recorded at 11,266 of *Hansard* I asked two questions of the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) regarding the present strike. Just to put the questions into context, in my part of the country, eastern Manitoba, there is no post office that is closed and there is no postal worker who is on strike. What we are receiving in that area is local mail delivery. For example, a letter posted at a local post office will find its way into the post office box of the individual post box holder.

The postal workers in the region—and I conveyed this in a question—asked me whether the government would be willing to set up a route system whereby letters posted in one post office destined for another town could be taken in bulk by the Post Office to the post office in question and there distributed to the mail boxes. That has been done before.

I had a meeting with my postal workers on Saturday last. They repeated that request and pointed out the manner in which the system could work. What would happen obviously is that within that trading region in a regional area, we would be able to continue our postal service.

I want to say publicly that I commend those postal workers for continuing to have those post office open and giving us postal service. I personally feel that a negotiated settlement is best. However, I suggest that consideration might be given to a cooling-off period during which the postal workers would come back to work. Negotiations would continue during that time.

First, I am asking the parliamentary secretary whether the government will consider this inter-postal distribution system in order that within a trading area that work could continue. The question I ask is whether the government would guarantee these postal workers the right to continue working and that they not be locked out, as they were in 1978, or dismissed from service and after a while having to go on unemployment insurance.

Those workers felt the union was putting pressure on them and would discipline them. In the Friday, July 10 issue of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, there was an article entitled "CUPW spokesman 'disowns' non-strikers". I quote from that article as follows:

Pat Miller said that at the conclusion of the strike, the 15 to 20 members of CUPW's Winnipeg local in Altona, Morden, Winkler and Steinbach will have an opportunity to show cause before the local's three-member disciplinary committee why they should not be thrown out of the union.

In rural areas I hear this time and time again. The union workers say there is really no point in voting because the vote has already been taken. No matter how they vote, the strike

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will be called. A strike situation in a rural community is quite different from a strike situation in a larger centre. These are neighbours and friends. Frankly, these people feel that a negotiated settlement would be much better.

In my second question I ask the parliamentary secretary what guarantee the federal government would give to these postal workers who have chosen to stay on the job and give us local postal service and who, if the public press is to be believed, could be facing disciplinary action. What guarantee will the government give these people to continue working even though the mail supply might dwindle and these people may be locked out? I recommend that they not be locked out but be commended for the service they are giving.

Those are the two questions I would like to have the parliamentary secretary answer. As I say, I believe that a negotiated settlement is preferable. I suggest that instead of legislating a settlement here on the floor of the House of Commons, what should be considered is a deal whereby we could have a cooling-off period. Work could then resume in the Post Office, mail services would be reinstated and negotiations undertaken. I understand from both sides that should they come to the table, the postal strike could be settled in a matter of hours. I hope that is the course to which the government will direct its attention.

● (2215)

Mr. Norman Kelly (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, if I may reply to the first question raised by the hon. gentleman, I would like to suggest very strongly that not only would it be impossible to transport, sort, forward and distribute large volumes of mail through these tiny rural offices, but an effort to move national mail through these centres could be interpreted as encouraging strike-breaking on the part of another bargaining unit, and that, of course, is something the government does not want to do.

As far as the second question is concerned, I can reassure the hon. gentleman that the minister is very much in sympathy with the hardships caused in rural communities by the postal strike, and we will attempt to continue to provide as much local mail service as possible through our rural offices to reduce these burdens. We will continue to monitor the situation on a daily basis to ensure that our responses are the most appropriate for that particular time.

Unfortunately, when legal work stoppages occur by one of the postal groups, the end result is often insufficient mail volumes to justify continued employment of all other postal employees. Thus, with the current strike of inside postal workers, the letter carriers as well as others have had to be placed on off-duty status. The minister sincerely hopes that the parties can resume negotiations in the near future and settle this postal disruption before the burden of the strike affects any additional Canadians.