

Montreal Postal Strike

If the minister is aware of what he is saying, he will come and prove it to us but until then, may I tell him that under the contract binding the employees, 20 of them can stay away on union business without infringing their labour contract.

Mr. Speaker, we all deplore the vandalistic acts and the breaches of property which may have happened during this troubled period. Sometimes, we do understand the workers; we do not excuse them nor do we encourage them; we simply ask them to keep a cool head in spite of the minister's indifference. Still, Mr. Speaker, this conflict is a cause of friction, of anxiety and concern for those who only ask to make a decent living. The Postmaster General denies them this right, this inalienable right, the right to work which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) even wanted to enshrine in the preamble of a new constitution.

I conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, since my time is running out. Before resuming my seat, however, I want to be clear and practical. To get down to brass tacks, because we have to, I believe we still have a choice of six solutions.

First of all, the government could assume temporarily the responsibility for distributing the mail.

Secondly, the government could review the contracts now being negotiated so that the future employers will recognize the bargaining unit.

Thirdly, it could assure present workers that they will not lose their job at the end of March.

Fourthly, it could avoid unnecessary threats and provocations in official statements.

Fifthly, the minister could show a greater sense of justice and defend the right to work for everybody, as proclaimed by the Prime Minister when he talks about the establishment of a just society.

Sixthly, the minister should ask immediately his colleague, the Minister of Labour, to intervene in this conflict. In my opinion, the best solution is that the Postmaster General should simply resign, to every body's satisfaction.

[*English*]

Mr. J. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I shall be brief. I shall begin my comments with a couple of observations about the factual situation before I become involved in some areas of controversy. As I see it, the following are the facts.

[*Mr. Valade.*]

There are now 459 drivers in the city of Montreal, employees of G. Lapalme Inc. and members of the CNTU, who are about to lose their jobs. In some cases these men have worked for up to 20 years in this employment. But as of March 31 they will be on the street.

How did this come about? It happened that the postal department decided for some reason, perhaps a good one, to split the region of Montreal into five new sectors in terms of the particular service these drivers were performing. As a result, instead of there being one contract for the work being done, tenders were sent out for five. It so happened that the firm for which these men worked did not submit a tender. The result, of course, is that there is no way these men can keep their jobs and 459 men, plus their wives and children, will suffer. I believe this fact should be kept very closely in mind.

The second fact is that the destruction of a trade union local is taking place. When we consider what the trade union movement has meant to the workers in this country and what it will mean to the future on our workers, we appreciate the significance of this fact. Perhaps the number is small in respect of the workers directly involved: it is only one trade union local; it is not a national trade union that is being squashed. However, in terms of the potential national consequences, I believe the significance of these facts transcends in importance the attitude of this government toward the working people.

It seems to me there are some very important questions which need to be answered by the minister. Why did not the postal authorities, for example, ensure that the jobs of these workers—these people who have worked for up to 20 years and who have been workers in good standing—would be preserved even if a particular employer changed? Job preservation could have been made a condition of the calling of tenders; some effort could have been made to ensure it. But no report I have read has suggested, nor has any person to whom I have spoken about this matter, that any effort was made by the postal authorities to have these workers transferred to other firms if other firms were to end up doing the job.

Similarly, as was suggested by the hon. member who preceded me, why was an effort not made to ensure that the CNTU would still be recognized as the bargaining agent for these workers? This again, as has been indicated, could have been done by making