

Oral Questions

[English]

POST OFFICE

REQUEST NEGOTIATIONS WITH LETTER CARRIERS BE
CONCLUDED WITHOUT STRIKE

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Postmaster General. I trust that he is in a genial mood following his turkey dinner this weekend.

Now that the contract negotiations between the letter carriers' union and the Post Office Department have arrived at a stage of negotiation based on the conciliation board report, can the minister assure us that these negotiations will be consummated without resort to the strike route?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I wish I could, but it would be very presumptuous on my part to say what role or what future action the union may want to take. They are certainly in a position to resort to strike if they wish to do so. On the positive side, and more important, the letter carriers' union and the negotiating team made up of representatives of the Post Office and the Treasury Board are scheduled to meet later today.

● (1420)

REASON POSTAL SORTERS NOT GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO
WORK OVERTIME BEFORE CASUAL WORKERS EMPLOYED

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In light of continuing sensitivity in the negotiations with the post office workers, would the minister explain to the House why postal sorters and clerks were not given an opportunity to opt for overtime work to alleviate the backlog of mail in Montreal before casual workers were employed?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, might I take a few seconds longer and perhaps avoid other questions. On Saturday there was a blanket invitation to all regular postal workers to work overtime Saturday. Of the 2,000 regular workers, over 600 accepted the invitation and were at work. In addition to that there were 300 regular and part-time workers who normally work on Saturday. It was then, and only then, that casual workers numbering 150 were hired. There could have been up to 2,000 regular workers working overtime on Saturday if they wished to take advantage of the occasion to earn extra supplementary income at time and a half. There are over 10 million pieces of mail lying in post offices in Montreal belonging to the public of Canada, and I intend to see that the public gets that mail with or without the co-operation of a handful of people who are intent on contravening regulations.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dinsdale: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In light of the Postmaster General's remarks, I take it he is intending to work toward a negotiated settlement of contract disputes with the postal union, rather than incite mail sorters and clerks to strike in anticipation of a legal walkout by the letter carriers? The president of

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

the union has charged that the minister is attempting to do the latter.

Mr. Mackasey: I thank the hon. gentleman for his question. Under the collective agreement there is no obligation on the part of the Postmaster General to consult with the unions in the event of need for casuals. I felt, however, that it would be appropriate and only logical to consult with the unions. For the last several weeks there has been a series of meetings and consultations with the unions about the problem of reducing the backlog of mail. At midnight on Thursday we informed the union, since we still had not arrived at a satisfactory solution to the problem, that we would be obliged to use casuals this particular Saturday, but that we intended to continue to consult in order to obtain a solution that was satisfactory to the union.

Despite this, the casual workers were evicted forcibly from the premises, and as a result of that the people who felt that this was the proper way of acting in a democracy were all suspended, including 11 who have been suspended indefinitely, which I hope is proper terminology for being fired.

REQUEST FOR RESUMPTION OF DISCUSSIONS ON PROBLEM OF
CASUAL WORKERS

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I address a supplementary question to the Postmaster General with regard to the difficulty in Montreal with the inside workers. In view of the fact that officials of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers have declared that they want to continue to discuss and consult over the question of the casual workers, would the Postmaster General arrange for renewed discussions so that this issue can be resolved on that kind of a basis?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I did better than that. Consultations were resumed yesterday, the effect of which, however, was that I have had to suspend more people again today. I wonder just where is the good faith of the union.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of his reference to good faith, may I ask the Postmaster General whether he regards it as conducive to good labour relations for employees of the Post Office to have their doors knocked on at three o'clock in the morning and to be told of their dismissal.

Mr. Mackasey: No, Mr. Speaker. I will look into that matter and will see that a proper apology goes out to those people who no longer work for the Post Office. I suppose I am guilty of believing that the role of the employer is to run the Post Office according to the collective agreement that was agreed to by the unions under proper negotiations two years ago.

POSSIBILITY OF MEASURES TO IMPROVE DELIVERY OF
WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, may I address my question to the Postmaster General.