

Government Organization

offensive that letter carriers should now have a choice where to eat at noon? We are not telling them that they must come back to the post office. They can eat at home if they want to do so, they can eat at a restaurant on their route, or they can come back to the post office if that is what they prefer. Is it offensive that they should be required to punch a time clock only once a day, in the morning, instead of four times a day as some of their leaders have suggested?

The hon. member for Calgary North brought up the question of a Crown corporation. I should like to say that no decision has been taken on this matter. Obviously there would have to be a full-scale debate on such a question if it were to come before the house. I feel that the Post Office could perhaps operate more economically under that kind of structure, but that is for parliament to decide. In the meantime, we are using such a structure as a model and we are comparing ancient ways of doing things in the Post Office with the more modern ways which that structure would suggest.

The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra put forward a suggestion that the title of the department should be Communications and Postal Services. I appreciate the reasons he had in mind, but we consider the Post Office to be part of the over-all Department of Communications. The terms "Postmaster General" and "Post Office" will be retained and will of course continue to be used in telephone books and in international dealings with foreign post offices.

We have no intention of taking over the operation of airports, marine navigation and so on any more than we have of operating the telecommunication services of the Department of National Defence or of the R.C.M.P. We are not an operating department in this sense. We are a functional department.

The department will devote itself largely to research and development in the whole field of telecommunications in order that Canada may remain in the forefront. As an operating department, for example, we shall have only such specialized areas as our own research laboratories. But even our satellites will not be operated by the department; they will be operated, after we have promoted and developed them, by the new communications satellite authority, whatever it may be called.

There is little more I can say. Allusion has been made to the philosophy of the Freedman Report and the need to implement this

[Mr. Kierans.]

philosophy. The Minister of Labour has my support when he brings forth recommendations based on those observations and on the report of the Woods task force. But in no case have the changes being made in the Post Office given rise to the kind of problems which faced Mr. Justice Freedman when he examined the situation on the railways in connection with dieselization and run-throughs. In the case of the postal employees, no technological changes are being introduced; there is no automation leading to fewer jobs or making certain jobs redundant. In all the organizational changes we are putting through, the object in mind is to improve service. We are not placing the job of a single person in jeopardy.

We have some 2,084 surplus employees. Their working conditions will be improved because already they have the opportunity to complete their daily task more quickly. Not one of them will risk losing his job. There has been a change in the working patterns of postal employees and some of them have taken exception to this change, but under the Public Service Staff Relations Act a method has been provided by which disagreements of this sort may be resolved. The workers and their unions are free to use this method and I was delighted to be able to say in the house today that we are now well on this road. We in the Post Office will, of course, abide by whatever decisions are taken.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Chairman, it is interesting to hear the minister say that he approves the principles of the Freedman commission report. Of course he does. He did so yesterday. He approves of them as long as they do not affect his own department. Obviously the basic principle of that report was that where substantial changes are made in the working conditions of employees the employees have a right to be consulted.

The minister can scoff, but the fact is that until now, rightly or wrongly, letter carriers were permitted to take a lunch break, to return from their postal walk to the post office to eat lunch and to go back. I know that in many cases this meant spending an hour on a public transport system but that time was paid for by the Post Office Department.

The Deputy Chairman: Order. In order that the house may proceed with the consideration of private members' business I do now leave the chair.