

Postal Service

do serious damage to labour relations in this country, particularly labour relations in the Public Service.

The bill has an innocuous title, an act to provide for the continuation of regular postal service operations. I suggest to the minister that the accurate title of this bill should be: an act to guarantee a postal strike during the federal general election.

The minister said that the bill does not interfere with negotiations and that it does not place any barrier in the way of the parties reaching an agreement. But surely it is clear that it holds over the heads of the members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers a very clear threat, namely, if they exercise their right to strike, which is in the Public Service Staff Relations Act, that right will be interfered with. The Minister said that it will only be delayed. I point out that the very terms of the bill make it clear that the purpose would be to delay that strike long enough for a new parliament to be assembled, so that the new parliament could do as parliament has done in the case of so many of these labour stoppages.

I have been here quite a while, long enough to realize that there can be a lot of fine talk about human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the liberties people should enjoy. What counts is to stand by those concepts when the minority is concerned or when unpopular people are affected. It is very nice to talk about the human rights of the majority, whether we are talking about language, race, culture or what have you; but what really counts in human rights is to protect the freedoms of the smallest minority.

I remember my respected colleague of many years ago, Angus MacInnis, standing in just about this seat during the middle of World War II. At that time, because we were at war with Japan, Japanese Canadians were looked upon with suspicion, to the extent that very drastic action was taken against them, even many who were born in this country. It was an unpopular stand that Angus MacInnis, M. J. Coldwell and some of the rest of us took at that time; but I was proud to be a member of a party which was prepared to defend the rights of unpopular people. That is the only way to defend rights. Also one remembers the struggles of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Quebec, one remembers the Duplessis padlock law. One remembers some of those incidents. Now we look back with some pride and approval with respect to those who defended unpopular people like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

This is what we have before us today. We are concerning ourselves about a union which is not the most popular organization in Canada. If one wanted to take a poll about organizations and their popularity, I suppose CUPW would be at the top of the list or the bottom of the list, whichever way the question was set up.

Mrs. Campagnolo: Even within the ranks of the CLC.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): If I heard the hon. minister opposite correctly, she said even within the ranks of the CLC, CUPW is not the most popular union. That sets out exactly what I am talking about. If rights are rights, they should be protected, even for those whom the country as a whole may not like. If the Public Service Staff Relations Act

accords to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers the right to choose the strike route, rather than the arbitration route; and if it accords to that union, having chosen the strike route, when it finds itself dissatisfied with proposals made, the right to go through with that proposal, I suggest to change the rules in the middle of the game, and to indicate to that union that it cannot do so, is to deny all the fine protestations we make about being defenders of human rights, freedoms, and in particular, defenders of the rights which come under collective bargaining.

The Minister of Labour attempted to make a point out of the fact that there is something like this contained in the Canada Labour Code. Even though I do not like it being contained in the Canada Labour Code, I point out to him that what is there is a general proposition applying in advance to any union which might get itself into that kind of situation. The unions under the Canada Labour Code know that that provision is there, but at the moment such a provision is not contained in the Public Service Staff Relations Act.

● (1632)

The negotiations in which CUPW and the Treasury Board have been engaged have been on the basis of the Public Service Staff Relations Act. The government now plans to change the rule in the middle of these negotiations. Not only is this being unfair and undemocratic, not only is it a denial of all the things we profess that we stand for, but it is exploiting the fact that CUPW enjoys a certain amount of unpopularity in Canada. Because of this, whatever I may think about CUPW or about the inconvenience likely to be caused if postal service were interrupted during a general election should a strike come in May or June, I think we have to stand for the rights of people like the members of CUPW when those rights have been given them by legislation passed by parliament. Since that is the situation, we certainly intend to vote against this bill.

The Minister of Labour made reference, of course, to the Canada Labour Code. I think it is a piece of irony that for many years the postal workers under unions of various names have proposed that the Post Office be made into a Crown corporation. I remember on one occasion when representatives of CUPW appeared before a committee and this question of the Post Office being turned into a Crown corporation came up. I put the point to them in these terms: do you want to be a Crown corporation for its own sake or do you want to be a Crown corporation so that you will come under the Canada Labour Code instead of under the Public Service Staff Relations Act? The answer was that their main concern was to come under the Canada Labour Code.

I go back to 1967 when the Public Service Staff Relations legislation was before us in committee. The postal workers, represented by their various unions, appeared before us, and the same issue arose. They talked about wanting a Crown corporation, but when we put the question to them we found they wanted the kind of labour relations available under the Canada Labour Code rather than under the Public Service