

Oral Questions

Peace, order and good government is not enough. Is it because the government realizes that if it placed those words in the bill it would cover all the provinces in Canada and no province would be able to set up a board of its own?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, when this bill was being drafted the government had the advice of the law officers of the Crown who advised us that it could be defended under the peace, order and good government provisions of the British North America Act and perhaps under other provisions as well. A decision was made to draft it in this form on the best advice the government could receive.

Mr. Diefenbaker: It is a complete hoax.

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THE MINISTRY

DATE OF ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Acting Prime Minister. Has the Prime Minister yet decided whom he intends to appoint to the vacant position of minister of communications? If so, when will the name of the new minister be announced, and has the government decided to reserve its new policy of going outside of parliament for its new ministers and decided to take a chance on one of its own backbenchers?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister has a name in mind, he has not yet conveyed it to his colleagues. He may do so shortly. I can assure the hon. member that the new minister, if he is from one of these backbenches, will be a most competent one.

An hon. Member: Why did he not think of that before?

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POST OFFICE

GOVERNMENT POSITION ON LEGISLATING EMPLOYEES BACK TO WORK

Hon. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, in view of the serious cost to the country of a prolonged postal strike, is the government prepared to consider a 90 day back to work order during which time the Postmaster General could pursue some settlement with the union membership, or has the government decided that it will not act but rather let the strike run its course even if it lasts for many months?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, part of this is a hypothetical question which I will not attempt to answer, but the government has no intention at present to propose to parliament an order to

return these men to work. That may be necessary, I really do not know; but our hope is that there will be an agreement entered into voluntarily. That is the purpose of the negotiations that we are ready to resume at any time on the basis of the letter carriers' wage settlement. I hope that my hon. friend is not recommending that we should go beyond that.

● (1430)

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, in view of the Prime Minister's comment yesterday that it could be a long strike, in view of the comment of the Postmaster General that he is prepared to shut the Post Office down for three months or until Easter and in view of public concern as to what the position of the government really is in this regard—whether it will allow the strike to go on indefinitely—can the Acting Prime Minister advise the House whether it is government policy to ride this strike out no matter how long it takes, or is the government prepared to consider back to work legislation after a period of time?

Mr. Sharp: The government is not contemplating any legislation at the present time to return the Post Office workers to work.

GOVERNMENT POSITION ON WHETHER SERVICE IS ESSENTIAL

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I have two short supplementaries in order to clear the fuzziness resulting from the answers of the Acting Prime Minister. Has the government reached a conclusion as to whether postal service is essential? May we have the answer?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we certainly think it is important. We would like to see it resumed as quickly as possible; however, I am sure that my hon. friend is enough of a supporter of the principles of collective bargaining that he would not want to interfere with that process just whenever it suits the convenience of some members of the public.

Mr. Hees: Is it essential or not?

Mr. Alexander: Will the Acting Prime Minister answer my question? Has the government reached a conclusion as to whether postal service is essential? That is just a repetition of the first question, so I still have my second supplementary to come.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!