

[English]

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

PAYMENT UNDER CONTRACTS FOR PERIOD OF STRIKE

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Norman Cafik (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Postmaster General. During the time of the postal strike a number of rural mail carriers in my riding who are under contract with the Post Office Department were available for work but did not receive payment. I wonder whether the minister intends to make certain that these people are paid. If not, why not?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Eric W. Kierans (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, obviously any strike affects not only those who go on strike but all those whose operations are affected thereby. An automobile strike affects parts manufacturers, and so on. It is true that those letter carriers, both rural and in city service, who contract to deliver mail were not paid during the time of the strike because there was nothing for them to do. No letters were mailed and no such services were needed.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kierans: Prior to the strike the department advised all those with whom it had contracts that their services would be suspended for the duration of that strike. One good example is the Rod Service strike. The strikers rebelled against the company and the company itself made an *ex gratia* payment. The government will not lose thereby.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington): A supplementary question to the Postmaster General. When the government drew up these contracts with the rural mail carriers was there any provision in them to take care of such a situation?

Mr. Kierans: In the contract there is a clause which says that the Post Office Department can change routes, lengthen them, diminish them or reduce services partially. In these cases there would obviously be a change in the rates of payment.

Mr. Robert Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is the Postmaster General not aware that many of these rural mail carriers were told to stand by? Some of them had to be on call every day. This prevented them from taking

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other employment. Would the minister also please reply to the letter I sent him some weeks ago on this subject?

Mr. Kierans: We advised all field directors and postmasters to advise those with whom they had contracts that the services they perform would not be needed. In one case in particular the postmaster of an area interpreted the contract badly and we have stood by our responsibilities and undertaken to pay that contractor who was told to be on standby, although we shall do so only when the proof is made available to us.

[Translation]

Mr. Gerald Laniel (Beauharnois): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Postmaster General a supplementary question.

Is he aware of a clause in the contracts providing that the Postmaster General will have to give a 50 per cent compensation for breach of contract in case of failure to give three months notice? Consequently, I daresay this clause might allow the department to grant a 50 per cent compensation to the contractors.

Mr. Kierans: That clause does not apply in the case of a strike or in the case of services rendered by contractors, where rural and urban services are concerned. That particular clause applies only when it is decided to cancel the contract.

Mr. Laniel: Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a supplementary question.

In my opinion, the notice which was sent by the Post Office Department to the contractors for a discontinuance of service, represents all the same a temporary breach of contract.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This has developed into an argument, a debate.

AGRICULTURE

REQUEST FOR PRIORITY FOR SHIPMENTS OF EASTERN FEED GRAINS

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Bernard Dumont (Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, I wish to put a question to the Minister of Agriculture.

In view of the feed grain harvest in eastern Canada, has the minister agreed to grant priority to the transportation of livestock feed grain to eastern Canada?