

Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987

The Government cannot and will not allow the economy and the citizens of this country to be subjected to a second prolonged postal strike within less than four months. Such disruptions impact adversely on those dependent on government transfer payments such as the elderly, the handicapped and the poor, as well as on the small business sector.

• (1540)

A work stoppage of major duration in the postal service could result in serious loss of business or even bankruptcy for many small firms that are dependent on Canada Post. Suspended postal operations could result in disruption of collection and cash flow, loss of employment, increased cost through the use of couriers, long-distance charges, increased bank charges and interest payments on receivables.

To summarize, Madam Speaker, Canadians have lost patience with both management and labour at Canada Post Corporation. What Canadians want and what they deserve is an efficient and reliable postal system that is not subjected to labour disruptions at every turn. I urge all Hon. Members to give swift passage to the Bill before us, and I urge the parties to the labour dispute to take full advantage of the opportunity provided by the legislation to determine their own destiny.

This Government continues to be a firm believer in the free collective bargaining process, but we will not hesitate to take decisive action in cases where the parties to a labour dispute abdicate their responsibilities and place the economic or physical well-being of Canadians in serious jeopardy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Are there any questions or comments? If not we shall resume debate. The Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez).

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Madam Speaker, I was rather amazed to hear the previous speaker representing the government side saying that the Government believes in the collective bargaining process. What a bucket of horse manure.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodriguez: I have to say to that Member, "You hold the lantern while I shovel". I have seen Governments bring back-to-work legislation to this House, previous Liberal Governments, the short six-months hiatus of the Clark regime, and now this Government. This is the War Measures Act of collective bargaining, Madam Speaker. I have never seen back-to-work legislation couched in clauses, language and specific directions as I have seen in Bill C-86.

Eight days into this strike by CUPW's inside workers against Canada Post we have a Bill to put the workers back to work.

Mr. Witer: Decisive action.

Mr. Rodriguez: The Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park (Mr. Witer) says "decisive action".

Mr. Allmand: It was not even a full strike.

Mr. Rodriguez: CUPW members were on a rotating strike. The right to strike was given to the inside workers and it was given to the letter carriers. The letter carriers had a previous dispute with Canada Post and they exercised the right to strike. It was a rotating strike.

Mr. Fulton: Perfectly legal.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yes, perfectly legal in this country. The strike went on for 19 days and then they got a settlement. With CUPW we have had an eight day strike—and considering the fact that we do not deliver mail on Saturdays and Sundays, we are talking about five days.

Mr. Fulton: Four days.

Mr. Rodriguez: Four days.

The right to strike which these workers have been taken away by this Government in Bill C-86. It has not only taken away that right, but it has done other things. The punishment sections may very well run counter to the whole nature of the Charter of Rights. When you start saying to stewards on the shop floor and to the membership that they will be told which president they can elect, and when you remove the right of the workers to select their executive, which is a basic democratic right of any collective, it is very serious. I can tell you that I have been here since 1972, with a little hiatus of four years—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodriguez: —and how things have changed around here! In all that time I have never witnessed any legislation brought in this House to put capital back to work. We have consistently in this country seen capital going on strike. If they do not like the environment laws in a province, the way a municipality deals with them or the federal tax laws, they close their doors. That is capital on strike. I have never seen legislation brought to the floor of the House of Commons that forced capital back to work. But consistently we see legislation forcing workers back to work.

What we had was a dispute between CUPW and Canada Post. You can pass all the laws you want with your big majority, Mr. Minister. You can stomp on the rights of workers, but I say to you that you can take a horse to drink but you cannot make him water.

Some Hon. Members: oh, oh!

Mr. Rodriguez: What is the matter? Is that not the way it goes? Is it the other way?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Rodriguez: That is a fact, Madam Speaker. I have seen previous legislation brought to this House putting postal workers back to work. But legislation never deals with the underlying problems within the Post Office.