

**Mr. Nesbitt:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry if the Acting Prime Minister is incapable of understanding simple English. Would he answer the question, and not do what his former colleague, Mr. Gardiner, used to do? When he was asked about milk, he would answer about cheese.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

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#### POST OFFICE

##### ALLEGED DECENTRALIZATION OF OPERATIONS—SUGGESTED MEETING OF MINISTER AND UNION OFFICIALS—ADJUDICATION OF DISPUTES

**Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Postmaster General which arises out of statements by the officials of the Letter Carriers Union indicating the possibility of wildcat strikes across the country. In view of the complaint of the union that there has been decentralization in the Post Office without the union being consulted, resulting in actions being taken regarding hours of work, load limits and transportation in violation of the collective agreement, may I ask the minister whether he has had any consultations with the national executive of the Letter Carriers Union? If not, will he undertake to meet with them in order to prevent a repetition of the rotating strikes we experienced last year?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Côté (Minister without Portfolio):** Mr. Speaker, may I say first that I read the statement which was issued yesterday by the Letter Carriers Union. On the second page I see that they say they do not want repetition of what happened in the May to August, 1970, period. So I think that some newspapers have misinterpreted what the union said.

There have been consultations, Mr. Speaker, on most or all of the items involved, and the department admits that the decentralization of the Post Office administration creates certain problems. Many problems will have to be solved at the local level. I was told that all the decisions that will have a national implication will be discussed or have been discussed at the national level. I therefore feel very sorry that such a statement has been issued, especially when we are trying to bring back confidence in the Post Office and when we are trying to improve service.

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** Mr. Speaker, although the minister may feel sorry that the statement has been issued, the fact is that it has been issued and it indicates a very serious situation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I suggest to the hon. member that he is entitled under the rules to ask a supplementary question and he should do so without commenting on the minister's reply.

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** In view of the very serious charge that has been levelled by the union against the minister's department, may I repeat my request. Will the minister himself undertake to meet with the officials of the union in an endeavour to straighten out the difficulties, which he says he regrets, in order to

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prevent a repetition of the type of strikes we experienced last year?

**Mr. Côté (Longueuil):** Mr. Speaker, I have already had many meetings with Union officials, and especially with Mr. Decarie last month. I was surprised that an official communiqué was issued, because we had long meetings. While this communiqué was being issued the president of the association was meeting with the director of personnel. He met with him twice last week, once on Monday and Tuesday of this week. This morning he was in the Deputy Minister's office at 8.30. I have said repeatedly that they are welcome to speak to me any time they wish. There have been certain accusations that the contract between the union and the department has been broken. I am having those accusations reviewed. We will certainly look at them and might have to make corrections. Right now I am asking my officials to give me all available information regarding the matter.

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question either to the Acting Prime Minister or to the President of the Treasury Board. In view of the situation which has arisen in the Post Office and can arise from time to time with respect to alleged violations of existing agreements, does the government propose to set up any machinery to adjudicate on alleged violations of agreements which exist between various departments of government and the employees concerned in order to prevent repetitions of the type of situation which has existed in the Post Office and now threatens to arise again?

**Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board):** Mr. Speaker, I think the House is very well aware of the most satisfactory services provided by the Public Service Staff Relations Board in this respect. Its task is to adjudicate on matters in dispute between the employees and the employer in the government service.

**Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings):** Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the minister. Since he pledged, when he took over his new duties, that he would do everything in his power to improve employer-employee relations within the Post Office Department and since members of the union's national executive are now reported to be saying that employer-employee relations are considerably worse than they were under his predecessor, will he look into this matter and get it straightened out so that we will not experience serious rotating strikes such as we had last spring and summer?

**Mr. Côté (Longueuil):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that this matter will be straightened out. I can say that there have never before been so many consultations between department and union officials at the national level and at the local level.

**Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron):** Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the President of the Treasury Board. I wonder if it is not possible for the minister to do something about those people who are marching on Parliament Hill every day? Not only is it extremely cold outside but surely we do not have to have people marching on Parliament Hill every day of the year.