

Postal Service

The government says over and over again, "Oh, we are not interfering with the right to strike. Heaven forbid, we do not want it on the record that we will ever do that." But it just continues to do it. What ministers will not do is have the common sense to recognize that there are times when there must be mechanisms used on a selective basis to decide whether the public interest is so badly and so seriously affected that some other ordinary rights must be put aside at least on a temporary basis under certain conditions.

There has been an absolute absence on the part of the government to be honest about this. They played the game of trying to say to labour all the time, "Why, we would never take away the right to strike". How many times have they done it since I have been elected to the House of Commons in 1972? There has been a rail strike, a grain strike, the river ports, the traffic controllers—

An hon. Member: How many times did you vote for it?

Mr. Fraser: One of my hon. friends on the other side has asked how many times did I vote for it. Mr. Speaker, the point is that every time I advocated that something should be done, it took the government weeks and weeks to do anything about it. In Vancouver, during the grain strike, there were 85 ships in the Vancouver harbour. Members from the prairies and from my province got up in the House day in and day out and said to this government, "Why will you not do something? When are you going to face up to your responsibilities?"

The government was asked how long it would play this silly game of putting the country and everybody else through endless torment, trouble, and difficulty, when everybody on both sides of the bargaining table knew that sooner or later parliament would be called to step in. The question was asked, which way did I vote? I ask, where was the responsibility on the government side in coming to grips with this matter of putting legislation on the floor of this House to give parliament, government, people, labour and management some reasonable mechanism to solve these problems under the unusual and difficult circumstances that often prevail when they occur?

I want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that we will support this legislation because we do not think there should be a strike in the postal service during the campaign. But I want to make it equally clear through you, Mr. Speaker—and the minister has said this, if anyone was listening—that nobody should be under the illusion that this represents a change in attitude on the part of the government. This does not represent any sort of repentance or any changed position. This does not represent the start of a search for some mechanism to solve strikes in essential services that affect the public interest to the point where parliament has to be called to act. This is a piece of "ad hocery". The problem which must be solved on the eve of an election should have been addressed months and years ago. It could have been, if this government had had the courage and common sense to address it.

An hon. Member: Where is the Woods committee report of ten years ago?

Mr. Fraser: As my hon. friend from St. John's East says, in the Woods committee report ten years ago—

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): No solution.

Mr. Fraser: My friend, the Minister of Labour says there was no solution in the Woods report for this sort of a problem. There was no solution so far as the government had eyes to see or ears to hear. The establishment of a public interests dispute commission has been the policy of this party.

● (1622)

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): It does not ban the right to strike in the essential services.

Mr. Fraser: Certainly it does not, but it provides a mechanism for those strikes, which are intolerable and which everyone knows will be interfered with by the House of Commons, to be dealt with in advance in a fairer, more proper and more appropriate way than continued ad hocery.

Several years ago the right hon. Prime Minister indicated that if anything is going to be done about strikes in the Public Service, in essential services, or where a strike is so severe that it has to be dealt with by the House of Commons, then the right to strike in the Public Service has to be eliminated entirely. That is the kind of baloney which the Prime Minister has uttered on other issues. Either he should know that is not correct, or else he is doing it mischievously or maliciously with intent.

The entire function of that commission is to avoid taking away the right to strike across the board, and to give the flexibility and the mechanism to deal with those strikes which cannot be tolerated under some conditions and at some times. Sooner or later the issue must be faced. It is not being faced by this piece of legislation.

The hon. minister is correct when he said the provision he seeks tonight is in the Canada Labour Code. In principle, I concede to the hon. minister that it is not an unreasonable provision to be requested, but it is a pathetic plea to come before us a few days before the government wishes to call an election. It is pathetic for the government to say, "Despite the fact that we have been in power for ten years, that we have had two majorities and lots of time to do something about this, would you please help us out now, because it would be an awful shame if some of the Liberal propaganda did not get through the mails in time for election day?"

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to say to the government in connection with Bill C-45 is that this is no time to push the panic button. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) can stand up and say that what he has introduced is a very simple bill because it consists of only one page; but it is a bill which can