

*Adjournment Debate*

## POST OFFICE—PLANS TO PREVENT INCIDENTS LEADING TO WORKERS BEING SENT HOME

**Mr. F. A. Philbrook (Halton):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I am very pleased to see the Postmaster General (Mr. Lamontagne) here to meet the concern that we have talked about. Yesterday I posed a question to him during question period about an incident that occurred last week, May 11, in Ottawa at the main postal terminal. It was an incident where some inside postal workers, through the use of such things as badges and T-shirts, instigated a rather silly, insulting and obscene gesture which was uncalled for toward management.

My question to the minister was, essentially, what can we do to prevent this kind of incident which could easily in the future, as it has in the past, develop into a much wider incident resulting in a wider disruption of postal service. The minister answered that he and his deputy minister, who it turns out is an excellent man from my constituency, and one of our colleagues, the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), went there and spoke to the workers. They delivered a firm ultimatum that they either remove those objects that were insulting to management or be sent home from their shift. Apparently there was a mixed reaction. Some did, and some did not. That was fine as far as it went.

I appreciated that answer. However, it really did not entirely answer my question. I was asking what we could do to prevent this from happening in the future and not just deal with it when it does happen.

This is another in a series of events involving inside postal workers in various parts of the country. It has caused the Canadian people to become intolerant of this kind of action by this particular group. If my constituency is any example, I would say the Canadian people have just about had enough. They are fed up with this kind of irresponsible behaviour.

This probably represents for inside postal workers the worst industrial relations we have in the country. I do not want entirely to incriminate the post office management, although we recognize there are troubles on that side. But there certainly is great concern about these postal workers. It is peculiar because they tend to blame the post office management for all of their troubles. However, it is not all the postal workers who behave in this way.

We do not have any trouble with the letter carriers, the outside workers. In fact, I believe one reason the letter carriers split off and developed their own union was because they felt they could no longer be associated with the inside workers.

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There is a book on the subject, an excellent book from the Post Office on its industrial relations, particularly with the inside postal workers and a certain group of them which is causing all this trouble. It is quite an experience to read. I have certain excerpts of it in my hand but I do not think I have time to read them. It would be worthwhile covering outstanding instances of what has happened during relations with these people on another occasion, perhaps on an opposition day when this subject is debated.

[Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey).]

People in my riding—I think they are fairly representative of business; they are business people by and large who rely on the mail—are puzzled about all this, as, I think, the rest of us are. They are frustrated because we do not seem to have an answer. After all, we have been at this for several years. They are angry and demanding some kind of action, a resolution of this problem and, of course, they look to the federal government for answers.

Why are we running into all this trouble? Industrial relations is a wide field. There are conflicts all the time between management and labour whether in the public or the private sector. But this type of behaviour by postal workers appears to be unmatched, unprecedented. Government and management tend to be blamed. The jobs are considered to be boring. Many jobs are very boring, Mr. Speaker. But these jobs are also very well paid.

Sometimes automation is blamed and at other times autocratic management. But surely these difficulties could be resolved peacefully. In other situations, they are. Workers blame the government, the cabinet and the various postmasters general over the years for lack of co-operation. Even the civil servants in the department are blamed. The workers, in turn, are accused of being deliberate troublemakers, in some cases of being communists, anarchists, separatists and so on. This does not seem to solve the problem. They propose certain solutions of their own—establishment of a private enterprise, a Crown corporation and so on.

The question now is: Can we get co-operation by agreement or shall we have to resort to tough measures? I believe Canadians are a reasonable people. They want to treat everyone well, including these inside postal workers. But they want these issues resolved soon. After all, this department is not a toy factory even though there are a lot of games being played. It is an essential service and the public wants some answers.

**Hon. J.-Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much the speech just made by my hon. friend from Halton (Mr. Philbrook). I think he has said aloud what many people are thinking.

On May 15 the hon. member asked me whether the Post Office Department had any plans to prevent such incidents as the one which occurred at the main Ottawa terminal on May 11. On that day, some workers who were wearing an offending slogan were told by the supervisors either to remove the offending words or go home. Some stayed at work and others went home.

It just happened that on this same night my colleague from Ottawa West (Mr. Francis), the deputy postmaster general and myself went to the Alta Vista plant to see for ourselves how the plant was functioning and were informed of the situation. I agree entirely with the hon. member for Halton about the silliness and provocative behaviour of some inside postal workers toward management at the main Ottawa terminal, and I also support the positive action taken by the management on that occasion.