

The first reason is that, in view of current developments in the dispute and the fact that the parties have failed to resolve their differences since their last agreement expired more than a year ago, the Government has little alternative but to restore full postal operations through legislative means. The second reason as to why I feel that the legislation should be supported lies in the merits of the method of dispute settlement provided for in the Bill now before us. The selection of mediation-arbitration as the dispute settlement mechanism is well suited to this particular dispute and I believe that it deserves the endorsement of all Hon. Members.

I think that it would be appropriate to review the background to the current dispute if only to provide some insight into the extensive third-party efforts which have been made over a lengthy period of time in an attempt to bring about a peaceful conclusion. The collective agreement between Canada Post Corporation and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers expired September 30, 1986, and conciliation efforts began one month later with the appointment of conciliation officer André Drouin of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service of Labour Canada. Mr. Drouin held meetings with union and management negotiators over a three-month period but there was little progress made in resolving any of the issues in dispute.

● (1300)

Mr. Claude Foisy was subsequently appointed as conciliation commissioner in the dispute on February 23, 1987, and numerous meetings were held between the commissioner and the parties over the period from March 2nd through August 12th. As we heard the Minister of Labour say earlier in this debate, Mr. Foisy is an experienced labour relations practitioner and a former Vice-Chairman of the Canada Labour Relations Board. Unfortunately, the parties saw fit not to draw on the knowledge and abilities of the commissioner in achieving a settlement but rather to bury him in position papers and briefing notes. Discussions for the most part were limited to exchanges on principles and rarely came to grips with the specifics relating to the operative sections of the contract. Mr. Foisy went so far as to suggest that if the parties are not happy with the proposed wording of certain recommendations, then "they have only themselves to blame, having had over five months to give me their comments".

One can appreciate the frustration which the conciliation commissioner must have felt in attempting to elicit meaningful dialogue from the parties and instead being faced with two sides more intent on avoiding their responsibilities to make use of the collective bargaining process. The commissioner's report, a comprehensive document comprising some 82 pages, was released to the parties on September 22. Post-conciliation meetings were held between the parties, but again they involved more public posturing than actual bargaining. On

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September 29th, the Minister of Labour asked his Associate Deputy Minister, Bill Kelly, to meet with the parties to assess the chances of a negotiated settlement, either in direct negotiations or with the assistance of a mediator. By all accounts, this assessment was quite negative as to the prospects for a negotiated settlement short of a protracted work stoppage. In a telegram dated October 6, 1987, the Minister gave the parties one further opportunity to settle their differences. He warned them that whether a Bill would be introduced or not depended on their will and capacity to achieve resolution through the collective bargaining process. However, despite all of these opportunities, the differences between the positions of the parties on several major issues have made any hope of a near term settlement next to impossible.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members are only too well aware of the serious consequences which a work stoppage of this nature can have on Canadian businesses which are dependent upon the postal service for their economic survival. The citizens of Canada do not deserve to be subjected to a second disruption of their mail service. With no hope of a negotiated settlement in sight, this Government has taken its responsibility to the Canadian people to restore full postal service, with provision for the settlement of the issues in dispute through mediation or arbitration.

Mr. Speaker, the *Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987*, provides for the immediate termination of the current work stoppage and a resumption of full postal operations. The legislation also extends the collective agreement for a period to be determined through arbitration of not less than two and not more than three years. Perhaps, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that this legislation provides for the settlement of the parties' differences through the process of mediation-arbitration or "med-arb" as it is more commonly referred to in labour relations terminology.

I think that it is important that Hon. Members appreciate the rationale which the Minister of Labour has used in providing for the appointment of a mediator-arbitrator to deal with the resolution of the issues in dispute between Canada Post Corporation and CUPW. Basically, Mr. Speaker, what this piece of legislation provides is a last opportunity for the two sides to roll up their sleeves and get down to serious bargaining or face the prospect of having a third party make binding decisions which will dictate the details of any new collective agreement. I am sure that Hon. Members would agree that legislative solutions cannot possibly address all of the problems and frustrations which need to be worked out at the bargaining table. This is why it is imperative that the parties seize this opportunity to work with the mediator to arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement.