

*Postal Service*

operating we must start from a premise. We have to get to the truth.

I do not believe a bill like this helps us to get to the truth. A bill like this does not necessarily improve relationships, and over the long run we have to get to the truth. That is why we have said from time to time when the occasion arose in this House that perhaps it was not such a bad idea to have some form of commission of inquiry to deal with this matter and go into the issue of technological change and all the other issues that affect relationships between employer and employees in the postal department. We must get at the truth and find out what has really happened, and have some premise from which we can start. Perhaps from that we can move to a new form of industrial democracy. I do not know whether it will work in Canada or not but in the present atmosphere we will not be able to try.

The management-labour committee mentioned by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris, which is working well in Germany and in the United States, has been able to bring labour, management and postal users together in a new way. These things may be conducive to sound relationships within the postal service.

As the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) said, the public interest dispute commission is not by itself a dispute resolving body; but it is one of the vehicles that can help understanding, develop trust and ease the way toward settlement. Surely we ought not to say it is ineffective. It is very important that we find vehicles by which the relationship can be effective and meaningful.

That is not the case in this country now. We have had ten years of disruption, then years in which, while there has been considerable difficulty from the point of view of the union and examples of bad leadership, there has been equally bad leadership by the government.

I think we have come to the point where most Canadians are saying, with respect to the post office and a whole host of other things, that this government is incapable of sustaining the leadership that is necessary. With respect to the economy and the post office, its time has come. It is despondent, dispirited, denuded of its best people and denuded of imagination and ideas. That is why we are facing an election in this country, Mr. Speaker. Leadership has gone. That is why we will be going to the country in a few days. I recall last year during the air controllers' strike—the minister will recall it as well—editorial writers, columnists and opinion leaders from coast to coast were shouting that strikes in the public service must end. The right to strike must be taken away from public servants and others who are qualifying their statements by saying that there should be no strikes in "essential services"—an easy thing to say when there is no necessity to define what those essential services are—or that we should not have strikes which "damage the national interests". That is the kind of rhetoric that was heard. Even the cabinet at that time was split wide open, if you recollect. I would suspect that it is still split wide open today if one lifts the corner of that sticky plaster.

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

● (2042)

You will recall the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang), who was smiling in his benign and friendly way—a smile for which he has become famous across this country,—said that all strikes, public and private, that would damage the nation "have to be outlawed", were his words. The Minister of Labour, on the other hand, who until today has been known as "Mr. Free Collective Bargaining" in Canada, said that the Minister of Transport did not really know what he was saying. There is Mr. Speaker, confusion in the government as to its position, so can you imagine the confusion in the minds of the public with respect to the whole process of collective bargaining in the Public Service of Canada.

We must look this situation over very carefully. We are dealing with postal matters tonight. What is important for postal unions is also important for public servants and public service unions. What is the reality in Canada? What can happen? What can we do to improve this situation? What can be done to eliminate the great inconvenience of strikes in the public service, or if not eliminate them, at least minimize them to some tolerable degree so that we can rely generally on efficiency and continuance in this branch of the public service and public enterprise. I always felt that the ability to communicate readily day by day was the foundation of an ordinary society.

There have been a lot of misconceptions about the position in the public service. Geoffrey Stevens, in a column published last summer in the *Globe and Mail*, gave us some statistics which a lot of people did not believe at the time. I think these statistics are quite important. There had been 405 collective agreements in the public service up to that time since the right to strike was instituted. In that time only 12 of them had been preceded by legal strikes. That is not a bad record. I think that record is perhaps better, at least in terms of numbers, than the record in the private sector which ranks somewhere close to that of Italy. I am not happy with those figures. No one is because when a strike takes place it means that the system has broken down.

There are certain other things which the public generally does not know about public service disputes. There are two routes which can be taken by public service unions. The route chosen is the option of the public service bargaining agent. The first route is the conciliation/strike route. That is the route which postal unions opted for, and certain others, and the reasons for their choice will become clear in a moment. The other route available is the arbitration route. Under this option the dispute is sent to a tribunal where it is resolved. It becomes binding on the public service union, the membership and on the government as well.

Given the existence of the choice of the bargaining agent, it is interesting to look at some statistics. In 1970, 81 per cent of the public servants chose arbitration at the end of their collective bargaining process and only 19 per cent chose the conciliation/strike route. In 1975, Mr. Speaker, five years later, the picture was almost completely reversed: only 36 per