

Post Office

try. I, like the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. Stackhouse), would like to compliment the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) on his speech and also on the way in which his department has tried to provide service to Members of Parliament. I do not believe that any member of parliament who serves a rural area such as my own can help but have a great deal of contact with regional post offices, and I would like to say how helpful I have found them to be in my constituency, especially the one located at North Bay. The officials there are very conscientious and deserving of praise for the manner in which they handle the problems of northern Ontario.

The motion before the House suggests that there is a drastic deterioration in the postal service. After reading the motion on the order paper this morning I glanced down at the letters which had just been put on my desk and decided to do my own survey of how long it had taken those letters to come from the various locations. I saw that I had a letter from North Bay dated June 7—the date was on the letter, not stamped on the envelope—and it arrived here today. Likewise, a letter from Gore Bay dated June 6 arrived here today, two days later. A letter from Sheguiandah, a small outlying post office in my constituency, dated June 6, arrived today. One from Desbarats, Ontario, dated June 7, arrived here on June 8. Likewise, a letter from Ottawa, dated June 7, arrived in my office today.

I suppose it is rather significant when letters coming a distance of 500 miles arrive within 24 hours. Also, I had a letter from Sault Ste. Marie, dated June 6, which arrived at my office today. Another one from Bruce Mines in my constituency was dated June 5 and arrived in my office yesterday. It travelled a distance of 470 miles. I think it is especially valuable when we see that letters come from small outlying areas to the nation's capital within one to two days. To say that the whole system does not work is an unfair and unreasonable criticism, especially of people in the postal service who work so hard.

The hon. member's motion goes on to cover many other aspects of our postal service. He mentions the reduction of the urban service from six days to five days. In my constituency, which is rural, we have the full six-day delivery rather than the five-day delivery.

I was interested especially in the comments of the hon. member for Scarborough East. He referred to a statement made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on April 4 and suggested that the Prime Minister was making at that time a serious statement that everyone knows the mail in this country is slow. So I looked back at *Hansard* for that day and noted that the Prime Minister on that occasion was jousting with the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) and, as he often does, came out none the worse for wear.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dinsdale: That is a matter of opinion.

Mr. Foster: The right hon. gentleman, I believe, was trying to determine at that time if there was any plan for an election in June because election equipment had been sent out in April in time to prepare for a June election. The right hon. member for Prince Albert was obviously trying to get information from the Prime Minister, and the

[Mr. Foster.]

Prime Minister in reply made this offhand remark more in jest than seriously.

I think the point is well made in the article from which the hon. member for Scarborough East quoted. The article points out how well the mail service operates. The hon. member mentioned that it contains an excellent pictorial outline of a letter being mailed in Pouch Cove, Newfoundland, and being delivered to Vancouver. The total distance is 3,244.9 miles, and it was covered in 34 hours and 10 minutes at an average speed of 95 miles per hour. This article points out the vast number of people who have to handle a single letter. It mentions the person in the post office where the letter is mailed, the person who has the stage service and who takes the letter from Pouch Cove to St. John's, the sorting that goes on there to other parts of the country, the journey by air to Vancouver and the sorting that takes place in a large post office in Vancouver. It mentions that 31 people have to handle a single letter. I think it is significant that the headline reads: "What 31 people will do for a lousy 8 cents".

I think it is very easy for us to criticize the mail service; it is almost a way of life even though only two or three letters out of 100, or 2 per cent or 3 per cent, are not delivered exactly on time, as my straw poll of the letters that came to my office this morning indicated. The vast majority of the mail arrives on time, but it is always good sport to talk about the letter that does not arrive. Certainly members of parliament can be forgiven for being very critical of the mail service because the only letters they hear about are the ones that do not arrive on time. With a vast complex of at least 100,000 people, with the change-over to a mechanized system and considering the vast distances involved, distances with which those of us who represent large rural ridings are familiar, it is not surprising that the occasional letter does go astray.

● (1520)

The one point of the motion before us today with which many members like myself are sympathetic is that dealing with the closure of post offices in large numbers—I believe 2,000 rural post offices—in 1969 and 1970. As I say, we who represent rural constituencies know the concern this caused people living in small communities. At one time the typical, small community had a church, a school and a store. Within recent years the school and the church were closed down so that on one hand larger central schools could be built and on the other hand so that declining church congregations could be amalgamated. Then often the post office was lost to the small community, resulting in the general store having to close because it depended to a large degree on the general business attracted to it by virtue of the fact that it housed the post office.

I, along with many other hon. members, fought long and hard to preserve many rural post offices, acting as true representatives of our constituencies and trying to assist all groups within them. But on occasion the loss of the rural post office actually meant an improvement in service with the establishment of a rural delivery route reaching from a larger community a few miles down the road. As a result, people had their mail delivered to the door and did not have to drive four or five miles to pick it up.