

### *Post Office Act*

The Findlay post office closed Friday, September 25th, 1970, and the postmistress, Mrs. Georgina Atchison, will also close the general store. The mail will be delivered from Pipestone to group boxes.

The pertinent phrase is that the closing of the post office meant the closing of the general store, and the closing of the general store meant the end of another rural community in western Manitoba. It is a fundamental fact of life in these small communities that the general store has marginal economic existence. In most instances the post office is located in the general store. Once the postal service is removed, that is usually the straw which breaks the camel's back, to use a figure of speech, and the general store is closed with the result that the whole community disappears. A general store has a commercial aspect in community life and it also has a strong sociological impact.

Let me make it abundantly clear that if the government pursues this foolish procedure of closing community post offices which it has been following now for more than two years, the responsibility for the disappearance of these rural communities must be placed on the doorstep of the minister responsible. This policy was initiated during the time of the former Postmaster General.

There is another aspect of this matter which I should underline. We are in the process of rural rail line abandonment in western Canada. We are losing these services right, left and centre as a result of concentration upon urbanization which is part of the basic social pattern in Canada. Rural rail line abandonment is in a state of suspended animation but the freeze will be off one of these days. What will happen to postal services in smaller communities as a result of continuation of the rail line abandonment policy? That is something we want spelled out specifically. Where does the responsibility lie for the decision to close rural post offices?

I would mention one final point. In addition to hundreds of rural post offices being closed, the department is substituting rural mail deliveries. This is similar to the stoppage in cities of door to door delivery. When the post office is located in the general store, post boxes are available. For some inexplicable reason, when the mail is not delivered to the front door of the recipient a service charge is made in the form of a post office box rental fee.

● (8:20 p.m.)

There was no rational explanation for this procedure other than that it has always been done. The only logical explanation I have ever heard on this matter is that it makes it possible for a person to have access to his mail over a 24-hour period. However, it is much easier to distribute the mail through a post office than by providing door to door delivery or rural mail delivery service.

In the 1968 amendments postal rates were increased. They were opposed but still went through. As an addendum to the subject matter of the amendment I am proposing at this time, I trust the Postmaster General will review once again this anomalous situation and

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

make available to rural folk, those who receive their mail through post boxes in a local post office, the same service without additional cost that is made available in the cities through door to door delivery or in other areas through rural mail delivery service.

**Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni):** Mr. Speaker, I think most members would agree, as I understand the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) does, that the general purpose of the clause to which the hon. member has referred in his amendment is one with which we can agree. I believe the idea of some decentralization of the administrative functions of the Post Office is good because many decisions can best be made on the ground, as it were, by those who are responsible in the various regions of the country.

I think we must recognize that certain decisions are by their very nature really political decisions. For this reason I feel the hon. member for Brandon-Souris has a very sound point in his amendment which would continue to give direct responsibility to the Postmaster General in the closing of post offices. When I say "political" I am not using this expression in the partisan sense but, rather, in the sense of the function that is involved—I think the Postmaster General probably would agree with me—in the closing of a post office where not only the Postmaster General is involved but also the member for the constituency in which the post office is located. Willy-nilly a Member of Parliament becomes involved in the matter.

I would call to the attention of the Postmaster General a rather recent example of this in my own constituency, where because of changes in the system of delivering the mail it was proposed that a post office be closed. Whether it was my own desire or not, I found myself very rapidly involved in the question. As the sitting member for the constituency I was asked to attend a meeting of citizens of the community, where I underwent the kind of scrutiny which politicians quite properly should undergo from constituents concerning the ways and means, whys and wherefores, ifs and buts of the whole question. I am happy to report to the House that as a result of discussion with the Postmaster General and his agreement to undertake a review of the situation, the matter resolved itself to everyone's satisfaction as I indicated to the minister only yesterday in private conversation.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member for Brandon-Souris has a good point because it recognizes one of the facts of life in Canada, certainly one of the facts of life in the more rural areas of the country. It probably does not create very much excitement in a large urban area when a decision is made to move an urban postal station from one place to another within that metropolitan area, because the system is diffused and even if one post office or postal station were to close it would not be very far to another one.

I am sure the hon. member for Brandon-Souris is correct when he suggests that in a small community the