

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

minister except by repute until I met him recently in this building. When I learned of his appointment to this particular post, I expected there would be some acceleration in a cohesive manner of the modernization of the postal services of this country. Instead of this, the minister seems bent and determined that we are going to return to a 19th century level of Post Office services. The situation I am describing is a prime example of what I mean.

● (4:10 p.m.)

I have always understood that one of the first principles of a democracy is that there should be equality of treatment of citizens before the law. But I do not think since I first came to this house I have seen a worse example of direct discrimination against a particular body or group of citizens in this country than this refusal to inaugurate postal service by letter carrier in the city of Courtenay. It is heightened by the fact that the neighbouring community of Campbell River, which is almost the same size, qualified for this service. The two communities were almost neck and neck but Campbell River happened to get under the wire and now has delivery service.

The community of Courtenay not only does not have this service but its lock-box post office is bursting at the seams and its citizens are now paying double the rate for a less fair and less adequate service than that enjoyed by their neighbouring community. It seems to me unthinkable that this sort of meat axe technique, this blind lashing out in some mysterious economy drive or whatever rationale the minister may be prepared to put on it, should take place in this day and age when the government of Canada has available to it the advice and the knowledge of economists and technologists almost without number.

I had expected that we would be moving forward so that our postal service would be keeping pace with other forms of communications that are developing as technology advances. It seems to me there is no possible answer that the minister can give in equity, justice or common sense than to get up and say this letter carrier delivery service will be inaugurated.

Hon. Eric W. Kierans (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his good wishes and his implied compliments, in which he repeated some of the sentiments expressed last night by my good friend from Annapolis Valley. I am

sorry to have disappointed the high expectations of these people but I can assure them that all of us in the Post Office are doing the very best we can to provide the best possible service under the circumstances.

We have reached a threshold where the increasing volume of mail can no longer be handled with the manual methods that have been the traditional policy of governments during the last several generations. It is in the process of making the change to accommodate ourselves to the needs of our times that we are having our present difficulties, by the way difficulties which are much exaggerated by the hon. members opposite.

With respect to the city of Courtenay itself, as I explained to the hon. member although I did not give him the precise date, on March 1 of 1968, a well known economy drive was launched by the government of the day, and a freeze was instituted in virtually all of the departments in an attempt to limit spending and to reduce the burden of the taxpayers who, incidentally, are the electors of hon. members opposite as well as of members on this side of the house.

As a result of this, Courtenay is one of 24 communities where a letter carrier service is justified under our criteria, but where for lack of funds we cannot introduce it until such time as this freeze is lifted. Until that is done we will simply have to provide the traditional service to which these communities have been accustomed, and it is our intention to continue to do so.

The cost of introducing a letter carrier service is approximately \$50,000 per community, and so we are really contributing to reducing the burden on the general funds of government by the amount of \$1,200,000. I suppose I could appeal to my colleagues in the cabinet to reduce expenditures by a similar amount in the fields of medicare, old age pensions and welfare, but this I am not prepared to do. I feel that if it were explained to the people of Courtenay that as soon as this freeze is lifted and the funds are available we intend to proceed to implement our program of instituting letter carrier service in that town, they will accept this with their usual good will.

[*Translation*]

THE GUARANTEED INCOME OF FARMERS OF SAGUENAY-LAC ST-JEAN

Mr. C. A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, further to the question I put to the hon. minister on May 1, I must say that I am very