

Supply—Post Office

There are many other things that could be taken up with the minister, but as the hour is late and we are all anxious to see the session close I conclude by asking the Postmaster General and his officials to take notice of what I have said in regard to our post office. They must not forget that we just want back the right we obtained under the agreement of 1873 when we joined the Dominion of Canada. We did not join as a bloc of land; we went into the dominion as a self-governing colony. We had a good government, too. The only mistake we made was to go into union without having a better contract. The contract we entered into has never been fully lived up to. Let us go back to first principles and treat Prince Edward Island as a postal unit as it was before this division occurred.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a few words on behalf of the rural mail carriers of Canada whom I believe are the most poorly paid of any people in the government service. These contracts are let by tender, usually for three years, and these people must travel every working day in the year with the exception of statutory holidays. They do not get three weeks holidays with pay as do others in the service. As the previous hon. member said, if they want to take a day off they must get someone else to take their place.

Quite often these men can do no other work. The nature of the rural carrier's work is not such that he starts at seven in the morning and finishes at noon; he generally starts in the forenoon and finishes some time in the afternoon. There is not enough time left in the day to permit him to engage in any other work and the result is that this is his only income. I would appreciate if the minister would give this matter his full consideration.

Mr. Coldwell: Mr. Chairman, I want to join with others in the pleas that have been made on behalf of the rural mail carriers. Those of us who live on the prairies and have seen the rural mail carriers driving week in and week out along prairie roads, whether it be hot or whether it be sub-zero weather, realize that the inadequacy of their remuneration constitutes a scandal as far as parliament is concerned.

This is my 21st session of parliament; and back over the years, with the exception of special sessions, hon. members have joined together from all sides of the house to make a plea on behalf of the rural mail carriers. Yet so far nothing satisfactory has been done

for them. As the hon. member for Queens said a few moments ago, the contract system sets one man against another. They underbid, particularly when times are bad. When times are good it is quite often difficult to get people to do this job at all.

There are two kinds of mail carriers. There are those who drive through the country to deliver mail at the boxes along the way, or who convey mail from depots to points not served by mail. Then there are those who take the mail from the depot to the post office. In my travels I have run across cases of postmasters who receive pitiful pay and commissions but who in turn provide premises for the post office. Sometimes they are quite unable to make ends meet. Then someone else would be given the contract to carry the mail from the post office to the station. They are also unable to exist on the amount of pay for that service, whereas if the postmaster in some of these places also carried the mail from the station to the post office and received the remuneration for that as well he would at least be getting a little more than he is receiving now. I am not suggesting that men who have been carrying the mail from the trains to the post offices should suddenly be removed from these positions, but I do say that as opportunities arise the Post Office Department should consider consolidating these two services, which might well be a single service performed by one individual, and paying more adequately therefor.

I want to join, as I have joined on numerous occasions in the past, with those on all sides of the house in expressing the hope that if a committee is established and the matter is gone into thoroughly it may be possible to devise a plan. I know it is a very difficult problem because distances, conditions and so on differ, but I think we can devise something better than cutthroat competition under the tender system which often means that the person who gets the contract performs the service for very inadequate remuneration.

I join with others in making a plea for better conditions for the rural mail carriers, and may I also say for those who carry the mail in the cities. I know that in the cities the hours are sometimes long. The men go on duty early in the morning to sort the mail for the various districts and their own areas, and sometimes it is well on toward evening before their work is done. I think we should try as far as possible to work out satisfactory conditions for those who are employed in carrying the mail, whether it is in rural or urban areas.