

Supply

Canadians want to tolerate, and that is the sort of thing we are calling the Government to account for, and about which we are putting it on notice.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, if that is the Tory vision for the future, I want no part of it, nor I am sure the majority of Canadians.

Let us look at other "bright" ideas put forward concerning rural mail—the elimination of home delivery, that is delivery to roadside boxes, and its replacement by superboxes at major intersections.

[English]

Our farmers are already in deep trouble. A way of life in our rural communities is being threatened by the crisis in agriculture. Yet the Government now proposes to make it more difficult by forcing them to drive 10 or 15 miles a day, every day, just to see whether they have any mail. What about the closing down of rural post offices? We could see as many as 5,000 rural post offices being replaced over the next five years. These are social centres in many rural communities.

In *The Ottawa Citizen* this morning I noticed a letter from a former parliamentarian, in fact one of the greatest parliamentarians in my day in the House of Commons, the Hon. J. W. Pickersgill. His letter dealt with this very subject. He pointed out another aspect of closing down rural mail and I quote him:

But it is not as great a hardship as Canada Post is perpetrating in rural areas, by closing post offices in small settlements and by eliminating rural mail delivery. Closing public post offices and substituting wickets in stores or private houses will be deeply resented because of the loss of privacy by the users. Canada Post should not have the authority to do that.

We agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Pickersgill.

The issue before you and the House is very simple, Mr. Speaker. Canadians want the mail delivered. They want it delivered daily. They want it delivered door-to-door. That is the issue and we put it before this House. When Canadians mail a letter they want it delivered, they want it delivered personally, and to the person to whom they sent it.

It is not complicated, yet what do we see? We see rates going up and service going down. We have one of the most expensive postal services in the world and we are not getting value for money. The reason is that the Government does not seem to understand that the Post Office cannot cut its mandate to deliver the mail.

What good does it do to balance the books by eliminating services? That is the easiest strategy in the world and it is also the stupidest. It does not take any planning at all—just cut the service. We suggested and the unions have suggested to the Government that the way to balance the Post Office's books is to improve the service, make it more imaginative, modern and competitive. That is the way to balance the books, not cut service to Canadians from one end of the country to the other.

The Government, through the Post Office, cuts the mail service. Who cares if a few million Canadians are short-changed? Who cares if a few million Canadians are turned

into second-class citizens because they are not getting the same standard of service? Who cares if the elderly or handicapped cannot get to those supermailboxes? Who cares if in the process the Post Office loses its credibility? Who cares, the Government says, if other competitive services arise because people simply stop using the Post Office? Who cares? Obviously the Government does not care, but I believe most Canadians do care, and deeply. They feel this is fundamental. They pay taxes and, once more, they pay for stamps and they want equal service right to their door.

We believe that door-to-door mail service is an essential service, a basic service, that should be available to all Canadians in every part of Canada. We intend to see that basic service restored and that is a clear, full, and unequivocal commitment to Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. McKenzie: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be utter confusion in the House today and I think we better get the record straight. It was the Liberal Government which stopped expansion of home delivery in 1974. We had cold winters in 1974. It was a Liberal Government that started the supermailbox program in 1982. The Liberal Government gave full authorization for that. The Liberal Government allowed Canada Post to develop and build these supermailboxes at a cost of millions of dollars. They were first installed in 1983 under a Liberal Government. I checked with Canada Post and not one letter or any other objection whatsoever came from any Liberal about the supermailboxes.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McKenzie: I think it is facetious of the Liberal Party to condemn the supermailboxes when they are the very people who authorized them to be designed, built and installed.

I read the letter of Mr. Pickersgill today. He was here 30 years ago when they started to install green mailboxes. I did not hear him object to that. The green boxes were first used by the Post Office over 30 years ago. The corporation under the previous Liberal Government used green boxes in both rural settings and to service urban growth. There is nothing new about these boxes other than the fact we have made improvements to them.

Another issue I did not hear the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) talk about was the cost. Where is the money for door-to-door delivery going to come from? I did not hear one word about that. It is going to cost something like \$500 million to \$1 billion to provide door-to-door service. I would like to see it back, but we also have to talk about where the money is coming from.

● (1140)

The Leader of the Opposition also mentioned that there are no improvements in the Post Office. That is not correct. There