

Mail Contracts

found that these men simply believed that they would like to deliver mail, that it was an easy job, and they tendered so low that they took the business away from some other man who was doing a good job. I have also brought these situations to the attention of the Postmaster General and they have been remedied. In his department there are many old practices which through usage have become almost indispensable to the officials. I recommend to him that he inject a little of his fairness and farsightedness into the other members of his department. If he does that there will be very little to be desired from his particular department. I must say that.

Mr. Herridge: I want to add a few brief words. I listened with a great deal of interest to the statement of the Postmaster General because I was interested in the figures on awards supplemental to contracts, and the figures given with regard to the cost of contracts issued during the same period. If I heard him correctly, it appeared to me that the officials who were responsible for making the final decision on the awards supplemental to contracts in force must have used very sound judgment. If I heard him correctly, supplemental awards were some five to six per cent less in cost than contracts given during the same period.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Seven per cent.

Mr. Herridge: I think that indicates very sound judgment on the part of the officials concerned. I was interested in that aspect of it, because I remember when this legislation was up in the first instance hon. members to my right stressed very strongly that this was more or less a method of handing out political plums, and so on. The record as given by the minister indicates that this criticism has not proved to be correct.

At one time, Mr. Chairman, I thought this whole system of contracts was somewhat unsound, and had the idea that rural mail carriers should be under the civil service, or at least should be on a salary or wage basis. But the more I learn about the situation, the more I realize the difficulties with which the department has to deal, the more I appreciate the problems of climate, different road conditions, winter and summer conditions and all the rest of it, the more I believe that on the whole the rural mail system is handled very efficiently in this country.

Before resuming my seat I want to support the proposal put forward by the hon. member for Peel in regard to having this matter brought before a committee. It is not that such a committee would solve all the questions involved or that any great changes

would be made, but if this question were referred to a committee I believe hon. members would be much better informed as to the difficulties that must be faced in connection with rural mail delivery throughout Canada, and out of the discussion might come some recommendations, perhaps on a regional basis, which would do something toward standardizing the cost of rural mail delivery in this country.

Just before concluding I want to refer to the fact that some previous speaker mentioned that mail was delivered every two days on some routes in the maritimes. As a matter of fact at the present time the Post Office Department is calling for bids on a rural mail delivery in my constituency that takes place once every two weeks, and when the minister's estimates are up I am going to have more to say on that matter.

Mr. Fulton: I want to bring a case to the attention of the committee and the minister because I cannot help feeling that it has not had adequate consideration. I have taken it up with the minister previously by correspondence, but it seems to me that it cannot have been brought to his attention by his officials, or he cannot have realized from the correspondence just what was happening. I shall be very brief, because I know it is not customary to bring forward individual cases at this stage; but this does involve some matters to which some other hon. members have referred.

This is the case of a route on which delivery was being increased from once a week to twice a week, as the result of extended negotiations with the department. The contractor who had the service on a once a week basis was a veteran who at considerable expense, and as a matter of fact only by means of loans, had built up his equipment to be able to carry out the once a week delivery. When it was increased to twice weekly, bids were called and his was not the lowest tender. There are certain features of the award of the new contract which I shall mention in a factual manner. When I asked who was the successful tenderer, I was given the name on February 9, in confidence. On February 10 the name of the successful tenderer was published in the local newspaper out at Williams Lake, British Columbia. It appears to me that someone somewhere in the department gave the information in such a way that it could be repeated in the press—and I have seen the article—while at the same time it was given to me only in confidence, as a member interested, because the contract had not then been executed.