

disposed of separately. These motions are in the name of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale). It is also proposed that motions Nos. 3 and 4, having the same purport, be combined for the purpose of debate and that the vote on motion No. 3 will also dispose of motion No. 4.

The hon. member for Brandon-Souris moves motion No. 1 as follows:

That Bill C-240, an act to amend the Post Office Act, be amended by deleting the word "Department" from clause 1, in line 28 at page 2, and substituting therefor the following:

"Department, saving and excepting the power set out in paragraph (a) to close post offices."

**Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris):** Mr. Speaker, when the amendments to the Post Office Act were under discussion during the committee stage we considered this particular amendment and on questioning the Postmaster General (Mr. Côté) we were informed that its intent was to decentralize the operations of the Post Office Department in the interest of greater efficiency and the more expeditious handling of the mail. We agree generally with this principle. I am sure we are all aware that one of the main causes of the decline in postal efficiency during the past two or three years has been the tendency to increase bureaucratic red tape. Those of us who take a special interest in post office matters also know, through consultation with officials at the local level, that many of the problems within the department could be sorted out more quickly and readily if there were a decentralization of authority as envisaged in the amendment.

There is one particular aspect, however, which we feel should be excluded from the effect of the amendment. Our concern arises following the unhappy experience which has been the lot of Members of Parliament representing rural constituencies in which the department set out on a deliberate campaign to close as many rural post offices as possible. I say the department, but perhaps I should say the former Postmaster General because he was the one who defended this campaign vehemently in the House of Commons. The pretext was that great sums of money would be saved by the Post Office and by the people of Canada as a result of this great economy measure.

According to one figure which was placed before members of the House, the saving was expected to amount to something like \$200,000 or \$300,000; and this was at the expense of the closure of several hundred rural post offices. Because of this unhappy experience we have decided to propose an amendment to clause 1 of the bill before us in the words you have read, Mr. Speaker. Subclause 3 on page 2 says:

● (8:10 p.m.)

The Postmaster General may delegate any of all of the powers, duties and functions set out in paragraphs—

### Post Office Act

The clause then refers to a number of paragraphs. If we look at the act we will find in the related section that paragraph (a) provides:

establish, manage, operate, maintain and close post offices, postal stations, postal agencies, sub-post offices and postal routes—

We feel, on the basis of the unhappy experience to which I have referred, that this is one power which should not be delegated by the Postmaster General.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Dinsdale:** The new Postmaster General has become a rather different kind of Postmaster General since the passing of the omnibus bill. As was suggested in the committee the other day, the Postmaster General has been incarnated. I give him credit in this respect. One of his first actions on assuming responsibility—before that he was merely Minister without Portfolio responsible for the Post Office—was to announce during a cabinet safari to Saskatchewan that he was going to bring to an abrupt end the wholesale closing of rural post offices in western Canada, because this was having a disastrous effect on the well-being of small communities in that area.

On the basis of that assurance we should perhaps be quite happy to let the clause stand as it is now outlined. But Postmasters General come and Postmasters General go and therefore we feel it is of the utmost importance to have this matter specifically dealt with in the amending legislation. The reason this question is of great importance to rural constituencies not only in western Canada but in all parts of the country lies in the fact that the continuing decline in service to rural communities is having a detrimental effect on their well-being. This matter was debated on the motion introduced a week ago by the leader of the NDP. He suggested this situation was the result of government policy and was encouraging the depopulation of rural Canada, aggravating both rural and urban community life and intensifying the problems facing all communities. He suggested that it could be regarded as an integral aspect of some of our social and economic problems of today.

I have spoken on this matter on many occasions in the House of Commons. In 1968-69 we were debating the previous amendment to the Post Office Act. At that time we took a strong stand on this question. In spite of our representations post office closures continued. I quote from a weekly newspaper, the *Reston Recorder*. It is published in the southwestern corner of Manitoba. This article attributes the end of one of our long-standing communities to the disappearance of the rural post offices. The article is entitled "End of an era for the Findlay community". Let me read some of the homespun writing which forms part of this story:

Life was never dull to these energetic, intelligent folks. The majority of each generation left to fill various occupations—but in each case the "home place" was taken over by some member of the family. Now the fourth and fifth generation is coming along.