

• (1250)

I am coming close to the end of my remarks. I want to finish by simply indicating that it is quite unfortunate the government did not attempt to address the question of service as opposed to the question of potential profit. It is important to have profits when they can be achieved, but at what price? Surely people must come first. Surely receiving communications in the kind of country we are in and in the kind of world we are in has to be a first priority.

[*Translation*]

I close by saying again to emphasize it that it is unfortunate, because the government could have used this bill not only to do what it decided to do but also to address the question of services, to ensure that all the problems which are regularly reported to all hon. members across Canada about Canada Post's services would be addressed. But it preferred to do something that will not change that at all. As I said at the beginning, there is nothing there for the employees and the government has in no way addressed the issue of services. That is too bad.

The government has again lost a chance to restore some credibility and to try to address Canadians' real problems. Unfortunately, the government has failed to do so.

[*English*]

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burlington—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I too have a few things to say about Bill C-73 which proposes certain amendments to the Canada Post Corporation Act.

It is well known to the House and maybe to those who are watching today that the bill would make a few cosmetic changes. There is nothing to get terribly excited about, except to the degree that it sends a larger signal. The signal we have been getting from the government for some time is that it is the government's full intention to privatize Canada Post.

In that context these amendments are another nail in the coffin of service to people, particularly those in rural Canada, people who live in small communities, have grown up with the post office outlet and have come to see it as a part of the service and as a meeting place.

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There are few meeting places left in rural communities. Very often the school is gone because the students are being bused down the highway to a larger community. Very often the church has been consolidated with a congregation in another community. It is the same with the parish and community halls; they do not exist in every community to the degree they did years ago. Very often the only meeting place left is the post office. Indeed in many of those communities the local shop does not exist any more. With the change in shopping and buying patterns we find that many smaller communities no longer have anything more than a corner store or a candy store if that.

The role of the post office as a meeting place should not be underestimated. As a place of service, as a place to buy stamps, to receive mail, to send mail, to pay bills, to pay mortgages on houses and to make payments on boats and cars, it plays a disproportionately crucial role in small communities. I would have thought, whatever the over-all objective of government in terms of having Canada Post pay its way and so on, there would have been a particular strategy for the small community. That has not been the case.

• (1255)

As with just about everything of a policy nature in this government we see the same credo. If it works in Toronto it must be marvellous for Tompkins in my riding. If it works in a large urban centre the government rushes out to make it apply, to make it work, in the less populated parts of the country.

That effort, that stubborn strategy of applying urban solutions to rural situations, is causing a lot of pain. Whether it is the issue we speak about today, the post office, whether it is in decreased health care opportunities for people in rural areas, whether it is less convenient transportation availability, or whether it is the increased difficulty to access student loans to further education after secondary school, in all those areas the government's hand is seen making life more difficult for people in rural Canada.

Yes, we in this party are opposed to the privatization of Canada Post. We have said that many times. We are also opposed to this particular bill. As I said, as I implied a moment ago, this bill is the latest step in aiding and