

Supply—Post Office

Service—

320. Transportation—movement of mail by land, air and water, \$36,919,486.

Mr. Knowles: This deals with transportation of mail, and gives me an opportunity to remind the minister that on several occasions I have taken up the case of the men known as the postal couriers who drive the trucks in the city of Winnipeg that pick up the mail from the letter boxes and transport it between stations, to trains and so on. I have pointed out to him and to the house that, contrary to the general opinion that the public has, these trucks are not owned by the government, nor are the men who drive them employees of the Post Office Department. Rather they come under contracts let by the Post Office Department to private contractors who in turn pay the wages received by these men. I have pointed out to him that the wages received by men doing this work in Winnipeg are below the wages for all comparable employment. I made two or three suggestions as to what might be done during this year. Can the Postmaster General say whether he has been able to do anything about it since the matter was last up for discussion?

Mr. Rinfret: Yes, I have. We have been reviewing all our city collection contracts. In the latter contracts we have some sort of clause drawn which allows the Postmaster General to raise the amount payable to the contractor in so far as the salaries to the truckers are concerned, to bring them in conformity with the prevailing wage in that particular locality. Unfortunately, in the old contracts we did not have that authority. We have redrafted our contracts and have asked council to give us that authority to bring the rate up to the level of the prevailing rate. At the same time we have also asked council to give us the authority to continue to do that if the prevailing rate goes up.

In the case of Winnipeg I have recommended to council that that be done in the various contracts. I am sorry I cannot give the exact date of the recommendation but I know it is before council now.

Mr. Knowles: Can the Postmaster General indicate the amount of the increase that is being provided for in these contracts?

Mr. Rinfret: The recommendation does not provide for a specific amount. It just mentions the words "prevailing rate" which is to be fixed by the Department of Labour.

Mr. Knowles: I am glad to hear that something is being done. I am sure it will mean something to the men to get an increase as a result of this action.

We all have had experience with the way in which these prevailing rates are set. There

[Mr. Rinfret.]

is a tendency for the information obtained by the Department of Labour to be a bit below what other people know to be the prevailing wages. I hope the minister will see to it that these men are treated properly. If he cannot give me the figures now, I will be able to give him the figures in the fall, and if he has not done what he should have done I am glad to know he is asking for authority to do it in the future. He can look forward to hearing from me if something more needs to be done.

Mr. Rinfret: I am quite sure they will be satisfied. While I am on my feet may I be permitted to read into the record an answer to the question that was put to me yesterday by the hon. member for Calgary East? I think the best way to answer his question is by reading into the record a letter I wrote to my colleague and deskmate, the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys, about conditions in the Renfrew district of Calgary:

My dear colleague:

With the return of the attached telegram addressed to you by the mayor of Calgary in connection with letter carrier delivery service in the Renfrew district of that city, I am informed that the big difficulty in that case was the absence of proper pathways from the street line to the various houses, but we have now received a report from the postmaster to the effect that our requirements have been met and that the service can be given. We will, therefore, submit a recommendation to treasury board for authority to employ one extra man to take into delivery these 300 homes and to relieve the carriers on three adjoining walks where excessive overtime is being performed.

As soon as the approval of treasury board is received, I will further communicate with you.

Since then a recommendation has been made to the civil service commission which has to approve the new job. When the civil service commission approves this additional job it has to be submitted to treasury board and then to council. I admit that it is a long-drawn-out affair but the wheels are in motion, and I hope to be able to send the letter carrier within a short time.

Mr. Harkness: Can the minister tell me how long it is likely to be before the wheels go full circle?

Mr. Rinfret: I inquired this morning about that, and I think it will be much sooner than the hon. gentleman expects.

Mr. Hodgson: Just one more question. On page 331 of the details there is an item of boot allowance, \$151,200. What is that?

Mr. Rinfret: Twice a year we give each of our letter carriers an allowance of \$12.85. We supply them with boots.

Mr. McLure: On this item I should like to mention something about the tenders of the couriers. I am not going to go into it at