

decision to close rural post offices. It is incumbent on the government to pay attention or to heed the cry of those who see it as another blow essentially hurting or trying to dismantle those elements that hold rural Canada together.

This would be bad enough without the present circumstances of a recession and the difficulty that rural Canada is experiencing but there are other aspects that bother me. I am not going to dwell on the social aspect of a post office being the only real federal presence in small communities or on the aspect of Canada Post providing a service above and beyond Canada Post where seniors and people with various difficulties would inevitably get assistance from the affable postmaster or postmistress who always seemed to be present in post offices.

• (1205)

The policy of Canada Post in amalgamating post offices and closing down over 5,000 rural post offices is very much against two other policies. One is autonomous living for seniors, a policy of this government, and the other is affirmative action for women. There are some inconsistent policies.

The idea of autonomous living for seniors was that they would be able to live alone with minimum help. Normally seniors would go to post offices. The warmth and cheer of the post service would be topped up by seniors being able to get their mail from post offices. That does not happen now. Seniors quite often—and I have seen it happen—have to go to postal boxes. Particularly in the wintertime, this time of the year, it is almost impossible for them to get to their postal boxes either to get their cheques or mail from their loved ones, mail that is so important to them.

With respect to affirmative action for women the closing of the 5,221 post offices, with an average of two to three people and in some cases one person losing their jobs, would mean just over 10,000 jobs disappearing with this policy. It is significant that 83 per cent of the 10,000 jobs are held by women. I do not have to refer to the difficulty of women getting jobs. It is the subject of continuous debate and continuous media discussion, both printed and on the airwaves. For the government to pursue a policy and to insist on a policy that goes against

Government Orders

the employment of women, particularly in rural Canada, really bears another look.

I cannot help but say it is a source of personal sadness to me as I drive around the 250 rural communities I serve as a member of Parliament to notice the inevitable disappearance of post office buildings, in some cases very small, that used to have the Canadian flag flying over them.

When it comes to profit margins I may be told it is not a big concern, that they are in it to make money. Making money is one thing but the purpose of Canada Post as espoused by the Prime Minister in 1984 was to give service to Canadians. Closing post offices and replacing them with impersonal post boxes or retail post offices is not giving the best service possible to Canadians. It is denigrating the over-all effort of community living. After all, one of the purposes of a government is to provide leadership and encouragement for living in smaller communities at a time when jobs are scarce, almost non-existent, when the economy of the country is so bad and when the debt situation is nothing less than depressing.

This is a bill to privatize Canada Post. It does not address the service to Canadians about which I spoke in the last five minutes. It does not provide specifics of the share offering to employees. It does not place any value on the assets or on the shares. It does not, above anything else, protect the employees about whom I spoke in glowing terms at the outset of my presentation.

The bill is indicative of the things happening in Canada Post upper management. The president of Canada Post makes in excess of \$280,000 to \$300,000 a year and supports this kind of a policy.

What do I see in the media? I see things like, for example, what went wrong with Canada Post that it is not going to make the profit it said it would make? I see a really gruelling example that has been the subject of discussion in the House, a private company getting \$700,000 to send mail abroad. Even government agencies are saying that it is cheaper and more efficient to use private companies than to use Canada Post. The signals from the government are not very good in support of all the things Canada Post is doing.

• (1210)

Two and a half weeks ago I had a meeting in Spaniard's Bay, a community just short of 3,000 people. They are very worked up and concerned that their post office is