

Postal Service

city, some 350 miles away, by the following morning. Since last November it has taken up to three days for such letters to be delivered. I do not know what has gone on in the department. The minister has made a number of fatuous statements in the house but no one has given any explanation. I do not know what the answer can be, but some time after last November the service was just cut off. What has happened in the rest of Canada I do not know, but I gather it is the same story.

I hope the minister's good intentions continue and that he will even more ardently pursue them. I trust that even if he cannot reduce the rates, even if he insists on making the Post Office pay for itself when nothing else does, he will at least make it a little more efficient.

Mr. Jack McIntosh (Swift Current-Maple Creek): I have a couple of questions to ask the Postmaster General, Mr. Speaker. He is not sitting in the house but he can stay behind the curtains and enjoy his coffee since he can hear me from there.

My first question has to do with the policy of the Post Office Department, maybe it was not the minister's policy in the first place, with regard to rural post offices. I believe I am not the only member who has written to the hon. gentleman in this connection. My objection is this: the department is following a blanket policy which is applicable not only to the suburbs of urban areas but to the rural parts of Canada. I suggest that the situation in the rural areas is a special one and that the same policy should therefore not be applied.

As I understand it, under the formula presently favoured, post offices are to be closed where there are less than 30 patrons. To hon. members representing urban centres, 30 patrons may not seem very many, but in areas such as I represent, areas devoted to ranching and farming, it is not unusual to find no more than 30 patrons within a radius of 50 miles. It is possible the Postmaster General does not realise that in areas such as these a rural post office is essential, particularly when we bear in mind the difficulty experienced in keeping young people on the farms and ranches in the face of the attraction of the urban centres. It is hard to keep young people on the farms out west at the present time. One of the considerations which hasten the movement to the cities is the lack of an adequate postal service.

On a previous occasion I had an opportunity to prove that information received by the Postmaster General from his officials was

entirely wrong. The information related to two post offices in my area, offices whose future was in doubt. The officials wanted to close one of them because, they said, people residing in that particular area went to the other area to carry out all the rest of their business. I wrote to the Postmaster General of that day pointing out that in each case the post office was located in a ranch home, and that the information supplied by his officials to the effect that the people went to one particular place to buy groceries and so on was erroneous. I believe this situation was dealt with.

We are now receiving protests and petitions from our constituents in areas which may lose the services of their local post offices. I could explain to the Postmaster General at great length why it is necessary to keep many of these post offices open, even if they do fall within the terms of his formula. I have written to the hon. gentleman on a couple of occasions in this regard and I must say these representations have met with partial success. But I suggest to the minister that he review this formula and even if he makes it applicable to some areas, it should not be made to apply to certain rural areas which some of his officials have, quite possibly, never seen and never lived in.

I agree with those of my hon. friends who have referred to the Post Office as a service department rather than a revenue producing department. If it had been regarded as a revenue producing department, I suggest the west might never have been built up. I point out to him that regardless of the places where people buy their money orders and their stamps, the revenue will still flow to his department. I ask him again to recognize the special conditions which exist in the farming areas.

The second point I wish to raise flows from a question I asked the Postmaster General the other day. I had intended to ask a supplementary question but I did not press it after Mr. Speaker pointed out there would be an opportunity to go into the matter later on. I asked the Postmaster General why the department had removed second class mail privileges from the Canadian Legion magazine. He said it was because the magazine represented a particular group.

● (9:00 p.m.)

Then, I asked this supplementary question:

Can the minister explain why his department, while lifting second class privileges from legitimate