

Government Organization

courtesy for which I asked—was to try to point out to him that in closing down rural post offices he might be making infinitesimally small savings which, as has been indicated, will amount to \$292,000. At the same time he is playing havoc with a fundamental social organization in the rural parts of western Canada, as well as in other parts of the country. I am sure the same problem applies to the maritimes as well as to the rural parts of Ontario and to the province of Quebec. Most of these post offices are located in the general store. In many cases, as I have gathered from personal contact with the situation and from representations that I have received in letters, it will mean the difference between whether the store remains in business or whether it goes out of business. This is one of our great sociological problems at the moment, namely the depopulation of the rural areas and the increasing trend toward urbanization.

This means that we are faced with the chronic social problems of urbanization that will be a lot more expensive to cope with than the servicing of the rural communities of Canada through the small rural post offices. This is the point I want to make, and I want to encourage the minister to give it earnest reconsideration. If he wants to save money in the millions and not only \$292,000, there are all sorts of examples of waste and extravagance in the Auditor General's report. If rural mail service is downgraded the government will save money and at the same time a fundamental communication service that has been the responsibility of the Canadian government ever since confederation 100 years ago will be destroyed.

At the beginning of this great debate last fall a committee of 35 backbenchers on the government side was formed to protest against what the Postmaster General was doing with regard to the reorganization of his department. I understand that his committee of 35 made such a strong impact on the Postmaster General that he partially altered his decision. I would urge that in some way this committee should be reconstituted, possibly on Wednesday morning when members opposite are in caucus. In the privacy of caucus they can inform the Postmaster General in no uncertain terms that he is completely out of touch with the basic needs of this country, as I have already indicated through the comments of such illustrious journalists as Mr. Robertson. I could have quoted Mr. Bruce Hutchison who comes from the same province

as does the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour, B.S. for short. I understand that the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour was a member of this committee of 35, and perhaps he will take responsibility for reorganizing the committee. If the Postmaster General will not listen to members of the opposition, surely the backbenchers on the government side will be able to get through to him.

• (9:40 p.m.)

Although the hon. member for York East, who is not in his place tonight, has indicated that the government has ordered that there should be no disagreement, no change in what the cabinet dictates, surely there are members opposite besides the hon. member for York East who have the courage of their convictions and are prepared to speak up on behalf of their constituencies.

Mr. Perrault: I had not intended to take part in this debate but since reference has been made in the house to the position I am supposed to have taken I think I should stand up and make my position clear. I was not a member of this rumoured group of 35 but I do know, as I believe most members of this house know, just how difficult a task is facing the minister responsible for the post office.

There was a ludicrous situation—we discovered this in meetings of the committee—which saw no change in postal rates for publications since 1957. And before that there was another 20-year period in which the rates were left unaltered. As far as the Canadian taxpayer is concerned, the situation would assume disastrous proportions unless a minister had the courage to initiate the kind of program my hon. friend is attempting to pilot through the House of Commons.

Members who have spoken in this debate have been careful not to refer at any time to the economic impact on Canadian taxpayers of continuing deficits in the Post Office Department, deficits which would have reached enormous proportions in a few years had not major surgery been undertaken by the present minister. Not one statistic has been produced to buttress the arguments which have been advanced, mainly for political purposes, in this debate. No mention has been made of the \$134 million deficit which would have arisen in the forthcoming fiscal year had not decisive action been taken.

I have listened in vain tonight for the views of opposition parties with respect to this new department of communications, this vital area which involves other media as well