

for the economic recovery that we and a consensus of private sector forecasters expect to begin in the very near future.

There are abundant signs that the economic activity is beginning to firm both in Quebec and nation-wide. Housing starts have risen and resale activity has picked up sharply. Export growth resumed in March and car sales have picked up more recently. Employment increased significantly in April after stabilizing in March. Business confidence has strengthened.

The Conference Board's business confidence index rose by over 20 per cent in the first quarter. These developments are consistent with a recovery in the second half of the year since they are precisely the indicator that one expects to respond first to a decline in interest rates. It obviously takes time for some business people and households to make specific plans for major new purchases once they see lower interest rates.

New orders in turn generate new production. This is why we are now seeing and will continue in the coming months to see a marked increase in economic activity in response to lower interest rates. The Quebec economy will obviously share fully in this pickup. The policies of this government will continue to create the conditions that will permit sustainable and non-inflationary growth.

CANADA POST

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I wish to come back to a question I asked the minister responsible for Canada Post last Thursday, regarding the imminent closure by Canada Post of some 200 rural post offices across Canada, including the post office in Mabou in my constituency.

The following day one of the minister's own backbenchers, the member for Carleton—Charlotte, asked the very legitimate question: why at the same time as Canada Post is jacking up postal rates and closing rural post offices has the corporation rented a penthouse box at the Toronto Skydome for its corporate friends? I am told that the rental on this box amounts to somewhere between \$100,000 and \$225,000 per year.

Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting question and one that the minister cannot so easily slough off by saying that his government no longer interferes with the business of this Crown corporation. It was his government that approved

the corporate plan which is leading to the elimination of hundreds of post offices across Canada, including the one in Mabou.

The minister himself has been free with his opinion that Canada Post ought to be privatized completely.

This is one of the most short sighted and wrong-headed Tory government's policies, policies which are effectively leading to the decimation of infrastructure and the government presence in rural Canada.

What galls the residents of Mabou and Avonmore, Ontario, St. Redempteur in la Gaspésie and all the other places that have lost their rural post offices recently is not so much losing their post office, though that is bad enough.

It is the way Canada Post goes about it. It is the complete lack of consultation and candour. It is the trampling of the interests of the people in the communities Canada Post is there to serve.

It is Canada Post calling the residents of Mabou to a public meeting to tell them that Canada Post carried out a 12-month review and did not talk to anybody in Mabou.

It is telling the residents of that community, who are 100 per cent satisfied with their post office and their postmaster, that the closure is to provide better service but that keeping their post office and their postmaster, with whom they are 100 per cent satisfied, is not an option that is available to them.

It is calling a meeting to consult the communities after the decision has been made and telling them that the decision they are opposed to is irreversible. Some consultation that is.

It is this unbelievable arrogance that the mandarins of Canada Post know better than do those communities they are supposedly in business to serve, what is best for them. If they would just shut up and take it, later on they will like it.

The people of Avonmore, Ontario, of Mabou, Nova Scotia, and St. Redempteur, Quebec are not backward hicks who are totally resistant to all forms of change. They are proud and educated people who want a postal communications system that does not treat them as second class citizens. They are willing to work with Canada Post toward orderly methods of delivering on the Canada Post mandate.