

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Munro: I think it is fair to say that the capacity of the department to analyse all the drugs which are sent in by various agencies and individuals is not unlimited and we have to use our own discernment in deciding what drugs we shall analyse.

POST OFFICE**RECONSIDERATION OF CLOSURE OF RURAL BRANCHES**

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): My question is directed to the Postmaster General and Minister of Communications. It has nothing to do with the currently threatened postal strike; it has to do with orders which have been issued for the closure of many rural post offices in remote and pioneer areas where the people believe that the post offices should exist for service rather than for profit. In view of the widespread criticism which is being directed against these closures, would the minister be willing to hold up this process and give consideration to bringing in new regulations so that large areas, particularly on the prairies, which will suffer from the removal of their post offices may hope that the orders already made will be revoked?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Eric W. Kierans (Postmaster General and Minister of Communications): The right hon. gentleman and, indeed, all hon. members on both sides of the House will be relieved to learn that this program is coming to a close. We have examined the circumstances of several thousand post offices and we have only a few hundred more to examine. I would imagine that of every five decisions we will take, four will be to keep the post offices open. This means we are taking into account the circumstances to which the right hon. gentleman has just alluded.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not know what manner of mathematical productions the minister has just brought before the House. All I know is that apparently he does not receive full information concerning the degree to which whole areas are being deprived of rural post offices by arbitrary, bureaucratic order.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Bearing in mind the commitment given by the minister to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications that no further closures

[Mr. Orlikow.]

of post offices would take place until the users of those post offices had been afforded ample opportunity to make representations, can the hon. gentleman tell us whether these people have in fact been allowed ample chance to make their views known?

Mr. Kierans: Investigation usually takes at least three months and a further three months elapses before decisions are implemented.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is not so—three weeks, or three days.

HEALTH AND WELFARE**UNITED CHURCH APPEAL FOR IMPROVEMENT OF CONDITIONS FOR OLD AGE PENSIONERS**

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey): I have a question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Can the minister tell us what consideration is being given to the appeal by the Toronto Conference of the United Church of Canada for immediate action to improve conditions for old age pensioners?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): We are giving their representations serious consideration.

DISCOUNTING OF POST-DATED OLD AGE PENSION, FAMILY AND VETERANS ALLOWANCE CHEQUES

Mr. W. M. Howe (Wellington-Grey): I have a question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It arises from the fact that by reason of the threatened mail strike cheques in payment of family allowances, old age pensions and veterans allowances have been issued prematurely. There are the only funds which some of these pensioners possess. Has it been brought to the minister's attention that certain organizations and individuals are taking advantage of this situation by discounting these cheques in advance at tremendous rates of interest?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I consider it a disgrace that these organizations should be undertaking this kind of discounting procedure, encouraging old age pensioners to cash their cheques prematurely. However, I do not know precisely what action could be taken to combat the practice.

Mr. Howe: Would the minister consider issuing a news release advising everyone in