

my constituency, the municipality of Saint-Louis-de-Bonsecours, where the post office was closed down. The people of that community are now served by the post office in Saint-Aimé-sur-Richelieu. In order to give an even poorer service than the one that was formerly provided to the citizens of Saint-Louis-de-Bonsecours, the department's expenditures had to be increased, without mentioning the dissatisfaction created in the Saint-Louis-de-Bonsecours parish.

As I said earlier, so as to supply service which is not as satisfactory as it used to be to the people of Saint-Louis-de-Bonsecours, the department has had to increase the staff of the Saint-Aimé-sur-Richelieu post office and also to raise the salary of the rural mail contractor now providing service to the Saint-Louis-de-Bonsecours parish.

I would like to ask the minister to see to it that in future such unfortunate situations that hurt the people so much do not arise again.

Everyone knows that in our rural communities, the postmaster renders great services to the people and each parish is deeply humiliated when its post office is closed. Quite often it is an occasion for the people from the neighbouring parishes to laugh at those who have lost their post office and say that their municipality is of no importance since it gets no attention from the federal government. I know that the minister will not allow such situations to happen again and will at least, in future, get the facts and consult the hon. member because it should be said that no meeting was held by the minister at the time, nor by his officials, with the hon. member of that constituency to get his opinion and learn whether he would give his recommendation.

These are facts on which I wished to call the minister's attention and I would like him to pay attention to the problem in future in order to prevent situations that create nothing but dissatisfaction among the people. No doubt the present minister will take into due consideration the remarks that were made to him by the hon. members who spoke before me. In turn, I shall consider it my duty to support the amendment moved by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale).

Hon. Jean-Pierre Côté (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words on this amendment.

No doubt arguments were put forward in the course of this short debate on the merit of the closing of rural post offices. In the amendment I am moving, there is no question of reverting to a policy aimed at closing rural post offices. Here the question is the delegation of powers.

● (9:10 p.m.)

[English]

As I said on second reading, when delegated the authority will be exercised within guidelines established by the Postmaster General. The sole purpose of the proposed delegation of authority is to enable us to derive the full benefit of decentralized administration by making it possible for field managers to deal primarily with prob-

lems without the necessity of awaiting decisions from headquarters.

I also said that powers which are not already delegated to the deputy minister will not be delegated to other persons. This means that all the powers we are going to delegate to certain people in the field have already been delegated to the deputy postmaster general. These policies have to be in accordance with the guidelines that are being decided by the Postmaster General.

Hon. members know my policy regarding the closure of rural post offices. In the department we decided to close many rural post offices and many have been closed. This was for reasons of economy. Since October, 1970, I have said that we will not close any rural post offices for reasons of economy or in order to save money. Since that time we have closed some rural post offices. There are some reasons for which we will have to close more post offices. Upon the death of a postmaster in an area where there are only 25 or 30 families it is sometimes not possible to find someone to take the job. Upon the death of a postmaster we sometimes have to close the post office because we cannot find another postmaster. Many times no one wants to take over the post office and it must be closed. Sometimes there is a shortage of post office funds and revenue. On these occasions the people in the field have the authority to close the post offices concerned.

Under the present policy, the permanent closure of any post office must be personally authorized by the Postmaster General. Any future delegation of this authority which might be contemplated will be exercised within policy guidelines established by the Postmaster General. As I said before, no post office will be closed only for the purpose of saving money. I do not know what other safeguards hon. members can expect in this regard.

That is about all I have to say on this question, Mr. Speaker. I would like hon. members to clearly understand that any change in the legislation will not bring about the closure of rural post-offices. It is only a delegation of powers which will be exercised within guidelines established by the Postmaster General.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The question is on motion No. 1, standing in the name of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale). Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. Members: Yea.