

Post Office Act

ing me the department had decided that the Esk post office still served a very important function in that community but that Serath did not. The department said Serath did not have any banking facilities, but neither did Esk; that Serath did not have any medical facilities, but neither did Esk. There were a couple of other things, mentioned which neither municipality had. Nevertheless, because there was a political factor involved, because, I suggest, the local Liberal executive in that area wanted to see the Serath post office closed and the Esk post office kept open, the government decided to keep the Esk post office open. This type of thing is not good enough. I think it is the type of thing that simply has to stop if we are to deal satisfactorily with the problems of the Post Office.

What have we experienced in recent years? We have had increases in postal rates from four cents for local delivery and five cents for out of town delivery to eight cents for first class mail. This is a substantial increase. We have had reductions in service of various sorts which have already been mentioned during the current debate. Yet, in spite of these increases in rates, the Post Office Department could not keep little Serath open. When it came to a matter of political patronage, political considerations, Serath was clobbered. That community suffered. I suggest there is a place for a post office in that community which is far removed from other communities. This is the type of thing that I think must be corrected if we are going to see any change of direction in the course of affairs in the Post Office Department.

There is one other matter with which I would like to deal as well, and which I think warrants further investigation. The minister is aware of the fact that a certain event will take place in the province of Saskatchewan which will be of considerable interest to him, I am sure, as well as to all members in the House. I refer to the election on June 23. I have had some contact with some people in various rural communities and I understand they are receiving mail these days, some of it in plain envelopes. There is one item of mail that is being delivered in plain envelopes in several rural communities in north western Saskatchewan, and inside there is a pamphlet put out by the Saskatchewan government information services which describes what a fine job the government is doing about highways. The information I have, which I am not in a position to authenticate at the moment but which nevertheless I feel is reliable, is that the householder mail rate for this particular item was paid by the premier's office. It is not clear whether this payment was made out of the funds of the government of Saskatchewan, by the Liberal party of Saskatchewan or out of the premier's own private funds, whatever they may be. However, it seems to me to be a questionable sort of activity in terms of the way the mails are being used. There are laws against pornography in the mails. Well, I suggest that the type of rubbish and refined fertilizer that is being distributed through the mails from the office of the premier of Saskatchewan at present certainly warrants as much investigation as the Post Office Department has carried out from time to time of mail which has been alleged to be pornographic in nature.

[Mr. Burton.]

Mr. Rose: I have a question, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Will the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton) allow the hon. member to ask a question?

Mr. Burton: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rose: The hon. member for Regina East made some remarks concerning a piece of literature that is being distributed through the mails, and he suggested that it might be pornographic. I want to ask the hon. member whether he has undertaken any kind of investigation of this literature through the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford), under whose jurisdiction this matter would fall, I believe, under the truth in advertising provisions of the act.

Mr. Burton: I did not suggest directly that this letter was pornographic in nature. Certainly, there might be some elements of indecency in it. I suggested it was refined fertilizer. At the same time, I think the suggestion made by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Rose) is one that merits attention. I suggest that the minister in charge of the Post Office should take this under consideration as well to ensure that the truth in advertising laws are followed with respect to materials such as I have described which are distributed through the mail.

In conclusion, I want to make an urgent appeal to the minister in charge of the Post Office to come to grips with the problems of rural postal service and that he take a different approach than the Post Office Department has taken in the past several years. I want to suggest that there are ways of dealing with problems, which I have to acknowledge exist. I am quite aware that on the basis of the salaries being paid to postmasters, which are set out in certain schedules, and on the basis of the volume of mail handlings, on the basis of receipts and revenues in various post offices, it is difficult to justify the setting up of a full postal structure in a number of communities.

I want to suggest that there are alternatives that could be considered. I would like to suggest that the Post Office further investigate the establishment of sub-post offices in rural areas. This, I might mention, is done in our large urban centres. In my own city of Regina there are around 37 sub-post offices. I recognize that for the most part they do not handle mail deliveries. There are a few of these sub-post offices at which patrons can pick up their mail, but that is not their normal function in an urban setting. They are there to sell stamps and provide the other services which are provided by the post office. Of course, sub-post offices would require a further adaptation to the rural scene if such a system were adopted. But it seems to me that it would make a great deal of sense if we did have regular post offices in main centres in the various rural areas of Canada, while in the smaller centres which are too small to justify a full postal service, there could be established sub-post offices which would be under the jurisdiction of a full-time postmaster. I want to suggest that there are many people