

The Address—Mr. Comeau

was in an area last week where new post offices were being built to replace old and rickety buildings. The minister has increased his staff, as have other ministers. The only reason the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) is cutting some of these services is that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) instructed him to do so. The minister cannot cut these services in the urban areas because too many people would be affected, therefore it is the people in the rural areas who must suffer. The policies of the minister are affecting only the rural parts of Canada, those areas under the jurisdiction of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion should investigate the type of service being supplied by the Post Office Department.

Yesterday we heard from the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson). We did not hear anything about transportation, but we did hear from the minister. What is his department doing to improve services in the designated areas? In the Maritimes, and other designated areas, freight rates have increased during the past year. The CNR is removing railway stations. The member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Harries) is in favour of this. He does not want the CNR, but in some sections of Canada there is nothing else. The services between Toronto and Montreal are profitable, and make up for the losses in areas such as the area I represent. The services in the large industrial centres are improving, but in the rural areas of Canada they are deteriorating.

It is not possible to promote growth and prosperity in designated areas in Canada by cutting back transportation and post office services. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion should ensure that the Minister of Transport follows the policy of the government to reduce the disparity between the regions. When the Department of Regional Economic Expansion was formed we were told this sort of thing would not happen, that the ministers would co-operate with each other.

In my area, the department recently removed a lightship. This may appear minor, but it was providing protection for the fishermen as well as employment.

What is happening to the air services in the designated areas of Canada? There are rumours that Air Canada will phase out many rural airfields. Is Air Canada not operating at a profit? I am under the impression it is. A government agency should provide services to all parts of Canada. If the

[Mr. Comeau.]

department can provide comparable services by regional carriers or other methods, that is fine, but I doubt very much that this can be done.

The Department of Regional Economic Expansion should also ascertain what the Department of Public Works is doing.

Mr. Crouse: Nothing!

Mr. Comeau: I am not the only member who comes from a fishing village. It is impossible to obtain \$2,000 to have a small amount of dredging done in a small harbour. It is impossible.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Comeau: Last week the fishermen in my constituency had to dredge their own canal. It is impossible to get \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000 or \$4,000 to repair a small wharf. These people are not asking for the moon. They are not asking for half a million dollars, all they are asking for is \$2,000 or \$3,000. A lot of money is being spent to staff the minister's office and other things.

An hon. Member: The Arts Centre.

Mr. Comeau: I mentioned the Arts Centre before. I would be repeating myself for the tenth time if I mentioned it again. The government is hiring staff all the time—the highest paid ones of course; the lowest paid ones are being fired.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Comeau: I was under the impression that the austerity measures would not affect the designated areas. However, the government is reducing the services being provided to rural Canada in order that they might balance their budget or fight the so-called inflation. I do not argue the fact that inflation is a problem, but I do not see how it will help Canada to cut off services in the slow growth areas.

When the Department of Regional Economic Expansion was set up, the Prime Minister stated there would be designated areas in the Maritime provinces, some sections of the west and Ontario. It is not good enough to simply apply the axe, without considering the effect that course will have on the social and economic standards of some sections of Canada. It is not good enough for a government to stop growth and development in the already underdeveloped areas of Canada