

Post Office Act

which existed before. Probably the cost of the janitorial services alone for these facilities exceeds what the previous Postmaster received for the discharge of his duties. Of course, since they are more expensive there are not as many of them so the service deteriorates and the area suffers.

When the minister speaks to this motion, I hope he will explain why we must have this further delegation of responsibility and whether it relieves him from the actual accountability that he owes to members of this House. As things stand now, I think all members should support the motion by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris so some accountability will remain in this area.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): I, too, would like to speak briefly on the amendment before the House. I endorse the motion and I congratulate the member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) who introduced it. The area I represent is largely rural with many small post offices. A great number of these have been closed to the detriment of the area generally, I believe.

It seems to me that one of the tragedies of the over-all closing program carried out a number of months ago was the fact that the Post Office Department viewed it strictly as a business venture. The criterion used was whether this small post office paid and whether it was in a certain category. The department did not look into the entire background of the community to find why the office was set up in the first place, the role played by the post office or how essential it was to other services in the area. I regret that although I got in touch with the department on a number of occasions urging that some of these small post offices be kept open, they were closed down. I think the area has lost a great deal from what I consider were ill-advised decisions taken at the administrative level. Unfortunately, this sort of thing often happens.

• (9:00 p.m.)

I now wish to raise a point that has been raised before. I ask is the Post Office to be run as a service or as a business? If you are to make it a paying proposition, that is one approach. But if it is to provide a service to the Canadian people, and if we are interested in keeping alive many of our rural communities, I suggest to the minister that the department must be run as one that is providing a service. In many instances you will take a loss, but you must take a loss sometimes in giving postal service to rural areas of Canada.

As other hon. members have said, there are statistics pointing to the increasing urbanization of our society. So far as I am concerned, this is one of the worst things that could happen to our nation.

Mr. McCleave: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harding: We must again build up our rural communities.

Mr. Dinsdale: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Schumacher.]

Mr. Harding: We must begin spreading out industries and getting people to move out to God's country, if I may put it that way, so they may know what it really means to live in a clean environment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harding: If you take away amenities such as post office service from rural areas, the people will not want to move to those rural areas, I know this. I have lived in a rural area for a great part of my life, and receiving your mail daily and having good mail service is a right that no one should be denied. People in rural communities already do without many of the important amenities of life such as theatres, art and cultural centres. These facilities are to be found in urban centres. They are there because the taxpayers of the nation have put them there. Many of our taxpayers live in rural areas. I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that when it is the turn of people in rural communities to be given a small subsidy in the form of mail service, that subsidy should not be withheld or taken away from them by a government that looks only at the dollars and cents side of the ledger when considering the benefits of mail service.

May I point out a matter that has been referred to previously. The silliest arguments were used by the Post Office to justify the closing of a number of small post offices. First, the department said that there were not enough people in the area to warrant the service. Then they suggested that people who lived 15 or 20 miles from another community should collect their mail from that community. Mr. Speaker, I am sure nobody in Ottawa and no hon. member would like to drive 15 or 20 miles every day for mail. Then the department said: There is a shopping centre in that community, and if people can drive 20 or 30 miles to do their shopping they can pick up their mail at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, people do not go shopping every day of their lives. Many people do not own a vehicle in which to drive 15 or 20 miles to the next town. In any event, they would not want to shop every day of their lives merely to pick up mail. Driving such distances involves considerable cost for those who have chosen to live in rural communities. They are like the pioneers who helped to build our nation. I suggest to the department that we should not deprive any more rural communities of these services which they should not be without and to which they are entitled 100 per cent. I therefore support the amendment and suggest that the minister incorporate it in the bill.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Théogène Ricard (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, I cannot miss this opportunity of calling the attention of the minister to the dissatisfaction caused by the closing of some post offices in my constituency.

I am sure the present minister is not responsible for those changes that were made on the pretence that they meant substantial savings for the department.

I believe it is wrong to maintain such a thing, since facts show exactly the opposite. There is for instance, in