

Mail Contracts

culties. I refer to those people in the urban centres who carry the mail from the post office to the railway trains, and back again.

From year to year these people have found their operating costs increasing at a tremendous rate. When they have bid on contracts expecting those costs to be a certain amount, they have found that before many months the costs have increased to a point much greater than had been expected. I am not clear whether these people are included in the bill, the resolution of which we are now considering. Would the minister assure the committee of that?

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this legislation is to get authority, upon the renewal of a contract in which there has been payment of a supplement, to include such supplement. We do not intend to give more supplements. It is understood that they were given in the last two years because of the rapid increase in the cost of living. Contractors who believed that their contract rates were no longer commensurate with the cost of the work they were performing asked for this supplement. As a result of careful examination we gave the supplements wherever the officers of the department thought they might reasonably be given—and I might say that this applied to the vast majority of cases.

This law expires on March 31. Therefore in order to renew contracts now in existence we must renew with the added supplement; and in order to add the supplement we are asking for the passage of this legislation. The purpose of the legislation is to secure the privilege of including the supplement which was paid last year in the contract price for the coming year.

Mr. Bentley: It will exclude any new contracts?

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Yes; contracts cannot be for more than four years. If we were to renew a contract today it would be on a basis without the supplement, because it was to apply only for 1947 and 1948. Therefore we are asking permission to add the supplement to the original contract rates when renewals are made. I should suppose that those who are going to tender today would tender at rates which would seem profitable under present circumstances.

Mr. Brooks: As there are many rural mail routes in my constituency, I am interested in this resolution.

One condition which has been causing much dissatisfaction in recent months in rural areas has been the curtailment of daily mail deliveries. I believe the department regulation requires four boxes to the mile. Many of the

districts do not average this number, with the result that, instead of continuing the daily mail delivery which has been in operation for many years, the minister's department is cutting down the deliveries to three days a week.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Might I point out that that has nothing to do with this measure.

Mr. Brooks: I understand that. My question is this: When these supplementary payments have been made to rural mail couriers who we consider have not been paid enough, why would it not be possible to pay a supplementary sum in back areas so as to maintain in those districts daily mail deliveries where, in present circumstances, those deliveries are being reduced? I think it is most necessary that people in the country receive their mail each day. I should like to have the minister's reaction to that suggestion.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Any hon. member could get up and make an interesting speech about rural mail contracts, because each contract in the different sections of the country is different from the others. It is almost impossible to arrive at a unit price per mile. If we could do so, we would gladly adopt such a system. The matter has been studied for some time. These contracts have been in force ever since the Hon. Mr. Lemieux established rural mail deliveries back in 1908, I believe.

The officers of the department have done considerable thinking about this matter. I would have no objection to a committee studying this, but it has been studied before and I am sure that the members of such a committee would come to the conclusion that it is almost impossible to establish a unit price.

In certain places deliveries have been reduced from six a week to three a week, but this was done because of the small amount of mail that was being delivered. It is not efficient to spend money to deliver mail to points seven or eight miles from the railroad when there is only a little to deliver. The other day the hon. member for Mackenzie asked how many post offices had a yearly revenue of less than \$25. It is hard to understand that a post office could have a revenue of less than \$25 per year, but the fact is that there are thirty-four such post offices in one province. Surely when such a post office is located ten or fifteen miles from the railroad it is not wise to give deliveries six times a week, because there would be practically no mail to carry. The man would have to go to pick up the mail when there was practically no mail.

We are ready to give six deliveries a week wherever we can. For some time the Post Office Department has had considerable revenue owing to the increase in business and