

Post Office

\$1.35 an hour. In addition, the 24 hours must be spread over 5½ days. How many city people would be tied to a job 5½ days a week for the glorious salary of \$1,660 a year? In view of that kind of offer I do not think the government is serious about providing postal service in that area.

What is even worse is the fact that the rental allowance is \$150 a year, which works out to 40 cents a day. I do not know how many members in this chamber would like to turn their home into a post office and have people going in and out for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for 40 cents a day. In that area in the winter, whatever you earn would be gone before breakfast because of the door opening and closing. The government expects janitor service, a building, heat, light, and so on, for 40 cents a day.

I wish to cite a typical example of the treatment received by people in small towns. A veteran whose health was affected while serving in the army worked in the post office for 20 years. He erected a building and rented it to the Post Office Department for \$1,800 a year. One day a work unit survey was conducted and he was advised that this post office was not providing enough revenue and it was changed from a class I to a class II. This man was informed that after a certain date he would have to provide the premises, as this was a fair sized town, but they would pay only \$480 a year for the rental.

As a condition of employment these people must provide the premises. I do not know how many businesses or city people would put up with that kind of deal. I understand that there are now discussions under way to provide constituency offices and secretaries for members of parliament. It is estimated that this will cost \$200 a month for each member, yet the Post Office Department will allow only \$480 a year to rent a post office. In some cases people who have been operating post offices for 20 years have received letters stating that because they were now revenue post offices their salaries would be frozen and they would no longer qualify for sick benefits or any of the other benefits they received for years as employees of the Post Office Department. In many cases this involved large families with dependent children. Their post offices have been reclassified and they have had to provide their own premises even though, with inflation, their costs are rising all the time.

In his speech the minister spoke about job security and better salaries. Job security and better salaries for whom? It is certainly not for people in the rural areas. The object seems to be to completely discourage anyone who dares to live in a rural area and tries to carry the rest of the country on his back. I suggest that the minister give serious consideration to a minimum rental allowance of at least \$50 a month, \$600 a year, to anyone who assumes the responsibility of operating a post office, handling government money and all the rest of it. If the Post Office is going to rent facilities from its employees, it should be prepared to pay a lot more than \$10 or \$20 a month. Also, the salary of these people should be the minimum wage of the province. In Saskatchewan this is \$1.75 an hour. The present situation is ridiculous. If the postmaster hires someone during a period when he must be away, he must pay the minimum wage of the province; but the federal government will pay him only \$1.35 an hour, or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Cyr (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, the motion now before us deals with an issue which has been, for a long time and indeed since the very beginning of the Confederation, much important in daily lives of the Canadian people. The postal service is one of the first public services which was established in Canadian communities.

I do not agree at all with the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) who asserts, in his motion, that the Canadian postal service has deteriorated during the past six years. I will not speak as a government member but as a Canadian who knows perfectly well the Post Office Department for having worked there during three years.

Mr. Speaker, the motion covers six different points; it would take too long to deal with all these matters but let me make a few comments about the closure of small rural post offices.

This program was initiated in 1965 in the Gaspé Peninsula which was used as a pilot region, and in the ridings of Gaspé and Bonaventure alone more than 80 small post offices were closed. Thanks to this program, the Department of Public Works built in the riding of Gaspé alone 26 small offices—

Mr. Béchard: In Bonaventure as well.

Mr. Cyr:—and in Bonaventure, as my colleague points out, and this grouping of post offices provided a much improved postal service in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Before this grouping, the postal van had to stop every two or three miles to deliver the mail, but since 1967 it stops only every 10 or 20 miles and the mail coming from Montreal or Quebec City or even Ottawa is now delivered 15 hours earlier than under the old system.

Early this year, I tried to find out what was the real situation within the postal service in Canada and I dispatched two series of letters to 37 postmasters throughout Canada. Mr. Speaker, the results clearly show that Canada has the best postal service in the world.

Mail sent from the Commons' post office to Moncton, Winnipeg, Gaspé, Murdochville, Sept-Îles, Rimouski, Mont-Laurier, Chicoutimi, Rivière-du-Loup, Sudbury, was delivered within 20 hours and in some cases within ten. However, it should be noted that the letter I sent the postmaster in Hull, and mailed at the Commons' post office, took exactly three days to cross the Ottawa River.

Mr. Isabelle: It is still the same thing now.

Mr. Cyr: That well shows the excellent mail delivery service in Canada, even if there is still room for improvement in the service in large centers like Ottawa, Montréal, Toronto and Winnipeg.

The Post Office Department knows that there is a lack of discipline in the larger post offices, and it is not easy to solve that. Outside those large centers, the mail is sorted out more carefully and it seems that the employees of small post offices and rural service centers do a better job than those in the large urban centers.