

Adjournment Debate

to close our rural post office is simply a smoke-screen which is not fooling the people and certainly not the rural people of this country. Will putting these people on welfare or UIC reduce the deficit?

I want to say on behalf of the rural people in my riding, and I think in all of Canada, that we do not want our rural post offices closed. We want to retain our mail service and see it improved. Are we, through the back door, trying to kill our towns and villages? Small rural towns and villages are desperately competing with large metropolitan areas. For business to remain viable, good communication service is essential and a post office in an incorporated area is a must. Who among you would open a business in a town or village which did not have a post office? No one. If Canada Post and the Government permit this corporate plan to go into effect with regard to privatizing and closing rural post offices it will be a catastrophe. It could well wipe out any Government that permits it to happen. As one of my rural constituents said to me last week, "it would be political suicide".

The second portion of my question dealt with the corporate plan to increase rates for weekly newspapers and religious magazines. I understand that part of the plan has been cancelled. I want it killed for all time so that it will never again raise its ugly and cruel head. Such an increase is another attack on rural Canada. Many of our rural people do not get the dailies from the cities and depend on their weekly for news, services and other things. Weekly newspapers themselves are having a difficult time surviving and to increase their postal rate would put many of them out of business and thus deny the people a newspaper of any kind. Our weeklies and religious papers are a vitally important part of our communities and we want them retained.

Mail service is a government responsibility. Every Canadian citizen has a right to expect his or her mail to be dispatched and delivered promptly. Deliveries today are far from satisfactory. For example, a letter marked "urgent" left the Post Office in the House of Commons on December 29 and was not delivered to Brampton, Ontario, until January 9, nine working days later. I could have pedalled a bicycle there in less time than that. I get a letter from California in five or even four days. It is high time that Canada Post cleaned up its own backyard, things such as overtime, sick leave, taxi service galore, and learned how to get a letter from one part of Canada to another with dispatch. If they have to go to another country to learn how, so be it. The deficit is not the main problem, the delivery of mail is.

Now that increased rates have been approved, emphasis should be placed on delivering mail. Failure to do so up until now has led to the rise of couriers galore as people and businesses must get their mail delivered promptly. The message I send to Canada Post and the federal Government is: We want our rural post offices retained and improved and we want our mail delivered with dispatch.

Rural Canada has spoken!

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion): Mr. Speaker, first, I understand and appreciate the emotional concern about rural post service. I think we all do. The Minister has made it very clear that there will be a cessation, an absolute halt, an end, a stopping—what is another word?

Mr. Redway: *Fini*.

Mr. Forrestall: —*tout fini*, to any changes in rural postal services. Should there be need in the wisdom of Canada Post to go on with programs, the instructions to Mr. Lander, president of Canada Post, are that he will advise the Minister responsible in the first instance. In the second instance, he will advise the Member of Parliament directly involved. This is to allow the community to decide what their options are and what is best suited for their purposes. Only after that has been accomplished will the Minister permit Canada Post to make any changes whatsoever.

Where it is deemed necessary and advantageous and in the interests of our rural communities, there will be no change. Understand that, no change. What is going on today in rural Canada is wrong. It is misleading. This overwhelming desire to organize is being misconstrued. There are rumours floating around rural Canada about disastrous things that will happen to Canada Post and rural Canada and they are simply not true. The Minister has been unequivocal and very clear. Nothing will happen. I repeat: Nothing will happen until Canada Post advises the Minister and the local member and until the process of consultation with the community is completed. Nothing will happen. Nothing. You are safe, Mr. Speaker!

● (1800)

BANKS AND BANKING—INCREASES IN BANK SERVICE CHARGES

Mr. Bill Attewell (Don Valley East): Mr. Speaker, on January 20 I asked the Minister of State for Finance (Mr. Hockin) about a growing problem of the constituents of my riding with regard to bank charges. The question was with regard to the excessive level of increases, the lack of adequate communication and, in some cases, the arbitrary nature of some of the changes. I do not intend to name the banks individually as I do not intend to make a bank-bashing speech today. However, I do want to share with the House a few examples of what I am talking about.

Last April Bert Newman of Alamosa Drive visited my office to talk about a case which had been very frustrating to him. He had done business with this major Canadian chartered bank for over 40 years. He is now retired. He visited that bank downtown and learned that his account had been charged \$225 for the rental of three safety deposit boxes. That was a \$35 increase from the previous year, an 18.6 per cent increase in one year. He talked to people at that branch and tried to find out who had made the decision and what was the logic of it. He was totally frustrated. One clerk to whom he spoke did some very convoluted mathematics saying that since he had