

Adjournment Debate

individuals affected will be provided with alternative employment and that there will continue to exist in Edmonton, the Hon. Member's home city, some 208 person-years within the Department of Agriculture which will provide an important service to agriculture and I think will have a very important presence in Edmonton as well. The federal Government continues to accept the mandate of providing a service in as decentralized a manner as possible. We understand the points which the Hon. Member is making.

● (1825)

I want to say to you, Madam Speaker, that certainly the Government thanks him very much and continues to be aware of his concerns. His voice will always be heard by the Government.

CANADA POST CORPORATION—MEETING PROTESTING PLANS FOR FUTURE SERVICE/WOMEN—POSITION OF MINISTER

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, a number of days ago, on September 28, 1987, I raised a question in the House about Canada Post. The basic message that I was bringing to the Government was a message on behalf of ordinary Canadians who had held a press conference that day indicating to the Government that in their view the Government's plans for the Post Office meant reductions in service and that what the Government was doing to the Post Office was putting in place a skeleton service.

What quite surprised me was the reaction of the Minister responsible for the Post Office. Rather than dealing with the issue and rather than responding to the views of Canadians he attempted to side-step the issue by saying that, well, the only person who was at the press conference was Jean-Claude Parrot and myself, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre, and my colleagues. That was a complete distortion of the reality.

I want to start out by saying this, and I hope that the government Member who speaks will answer it. What the Minister was doing in that case was putting forward the proposition that just because a union was a part of a group that was telling the Government that it was reducing service, that somehow the whole exercise was illegitimate. I think that that is a dangerous distortion. It is a dangerous procedure.

One of the basic fundamentals that allows us to have a democratic society is the right of collective bargaining, the right of associating collectively. That is a right that is fundamental to a democratic society. So for the Minister to side-step the issue by trying to say: "These people are involved in a very unpopular union, therefore, I do not have to respond to their concerns about service", is wrong.

The unions in this case have something to offer. They work at the Post Office. They know what is going on so they have information that they can offer to Canadians. It was not only the union that was involved. There were other groups representing ordinary Canadians at this press conference.

For example, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women was represented. Its representatives were concerned about the salary levels that are involved in the Government's plan for the Post Office, poverty-level salaries. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women speaks for women and their concerns. Women constitute some 50 per cent of the population. This was an important group that attended.

In addition, there was the the National Anti-Poverty Organization. It speaks out for the poor of the country. The poor in Canada represent at least one-fifth if not one-third of the population. So this was another group that represented a good proportion of ordinary Canadians.

Not only were there representatives present saying to the Government that its plans for the Post Office meant a reduction in service, but we had postcards that had been signed by ordinary Canadians—11 mail-bags of postcards. Can you imagine what a sight that would be if I could have brought those mail-bags into this Chamber, Madam Speaker? They would have taken up three or four desks.

There are a great many ordinary Canadians who are seeking to tell the Government that in their view the Government's plans for the Post Office means a reduction in service. They do not find that acceptable. They want the Government to change direction in that regard.

I know that the Minister said to me: "Well, we have to act in a fiscally responsible manner". We would not argue with that. That is essential. But the Government does have an option. It could pursue a policy of cross-subsidization in order to handle the financial needs of the Post Office. It could allow the Post Office to be involved in areas in which it could earn a revenue and use that revenue to cross-subsidize those aspects of the Post Office that lose money.

The question that Canadians were asking the Government that day was this. In order to be fiscally responsible, in order to balance the books of the Post Office, why do people who live in suburban locations have to be treated in an unfair fashion? Why is there door-to-door delivery down one street, and not down the next street? Why this unfairness? Why is it that rural post offices have to be closed? Why is it that the delivery dates for letters have been watered down in order to maintain the statistical standards?

● (1830)

I wish to make it clear to the government side today that, when I put that question, I was seeking to remind them that ordinary Canadians are saying, "From our point of view, your plans for the Post Office mean the reduction in service. We find that unacceptable". That has been highlighted over the last few days in regard to the whole question of rural post offices. In the news we have heard of the community of Wilno, Ontario.

The postmistress there has refused to accept the plan of the Government to cut her wage down to one-fifth of what it has