

committed great acts of heroism in their attempts to provide the public with good service. I am sure many members of this House could cite examples which constitute service above and beyond the call of duty by today's standards. However, times change and the Post Office is no exception. The esteem in which Canadians once held the Post Office has all but vanished. Gone are the days when a postman would walk miles in a blizzard to deliver one piece of mail.

At this point I think it is only fair to say that not all the people who work for the Post Office deserve the image which is now theirs. I know the Post Office employs many people who are diligent and conscientious and who reflect the image of postmen from days gone by. It only takes a few people to ruin it for everyone. The few who are not overly concerned about providing good service have done a remarkable job of pulling down the image of all the rest.

I personally know people who work for the Post Office. They have been delivering mail for years. In fact, there is a family in my riding whose occupational tradition is delivering mail. Through wind, rain, snow and sleet they have provided the people on their route with the finest of service. You can count on them to deliver the mail through the worst of conditions. They are proud of the mailman's tradition of excellence of service and are committed to keeping that tradition alive. These people are a part of a larger body of postal workers who share their commitment to this tradition. Across this country they serve with distinction 4,991 routes and over a million homes and businesses. Who are these people? They are the rural mailmen. They do not get a half-hour paid lunch break or a boot and glove allowance; they cannot look forward to annual cost of living allowances and, to my knowledge, they have never instigated a strike. Yet the last time they saw a statutory raise was in 1956.

**Mr. Dinsdale:** Shame!

**Mr. Vankoughnet:** It was in 1956 that an amendment to the Post Office Act raised the maximum ceiling for rural postal contracts to \$10,000. The price of gasoline in 1956 bears no resemblance to the price of gasoline today. The price of repairs to cars and trucks between now and then is equally distorted. The cost of a vehicle today can be well over \$10,000. But the rural mailmen have had to live with that provision since 1956.

I was told by an official in the public affairs department of Canada Post in Ottawa that from 1965 to 1979 the letter carriers in urban centres received eight salary increases. I do not know how many times they have gone on strike to get the increases which they demanded. But I do know that while they were on strike, while they tied up the nation's mail and while they stopped working in support of other striking workers in the Post Office, the rural carriers have taken a back seat with respect to their salaries. Their salaries have not been increased beyond an arbitrarily determined ceiling since 1956. That is one year short of a quarter century and, Mr. Speaker, it is a disgrace. To be honest, when this condition was first brought to my attention, shortly after my election to the House in May, 1979, I could hardly believe it was true. After I checked into

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the matter and found out the facts, I still had trouble believing it. But an official in the Post Office confirmed it was correct. Would Jean-Claude Parrot have settled for such an inequity if the urban letter carriers had been treated in the same way as their rural counterparts? I doubt it very much.

The Post Office administration has known for a number of years that this provision was hopelessly outdated. They know now, as they knew a long time ago, that holding a \$10,000 ceiling on rural postal contracts was a provision completely out of line with the costs involved in the delivery of mail to rural Canadians. Yet this ceiling has remained in place for 24 years. The Liberal government, in 1968, had the opportunity to raise the ceiling, but it did not do so. The former postmaster general, my hon. friend from Vancouver South, was aware of this problem. He was also aware of other serious problems in the Post Office and he was working on solutions to them through the preparation of a comprehensive Crown corporation bill. Unfortunately, the February election came between him and the bill. It is therefore my hope that the bill before us today reflects his concerns about the Post Office and will provide concrete solutions to correct the problems.

It now appears that the rural postal carriers, who pride themselves in carrying on the excellent service in the tradition set by Canada's postal employees, are finally going to receive their just reward. And it is about time.

I have a written commitment from the present Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) stating that the new Post Office Crown Corporation Act will rectify the situation. For the purpose of placing the minister's commitment on the record I would like to quote from a letter he sent to me dated July 17, 1980. It reads as follows:

I have noted that you have written in the past to express your concern regarding the \$10,000 limit which currently governs mail contracts, in particular, rural route contracts.

In this regard, you may be interested to note that passage of the Crown corporation legislation, which I have introduced today, will resolve this difficulty in the future by removing the legislative constraint contained in the Post Office Act. Under the corporation, all contracts, including mail contracts, will be the subject of bylaws. Therefore, it will become far easier to adapt to changes.

I sent the minister a note of thanks for informing me of this and I thank him again today. I hope the authorities charged with the responsibility of correcting this situation will make this one of their top priorities.

Another issue which I hope will be of top priority to the new corporation is the question of closing rural post offices on Saturdays. The former postmaster general, the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser), gave his assurance that closings would not occur without extensive consultations with those affected. I know the present Postmaster General is concerned about this issue and I understand he plans to adopt the same approach as his predecessor.

• (1600)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Order, please. It being four o'clock p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, public bills, notices of motions and private bills.