

We talk on a very high plane about doing things for people in other parts of the world, but we should not forget that there are some people on our own home front who deserve help. Having that in mind I want to make a constructive suggestion to the minister. Will he not this session appoint a special committee of this house for the purpose of hearing evidence and going into the whole question of the rural mail carriers and the rural postmasters, to the end that members of all parties working together may evolve something which will remove this sore spot from the public service of Canada and give these people that which they so justly deserve.

Mr. BRYCE: Mr. Chairman, speaking on behalf of this group I wish to say that we welcome this resolution. As I understand it, what is being done today by order in council is to be done in the future by legislation. There will be quite a few matters we shall want to discuss when the bill is before us, but we will not waste the time of the committee at this stage.

Mr. LESAGE: Mr. Chairman, I was surprised to hear the hon. member for Peel say what he did. After all, there are only two ways of dealing with this matter—by calling for tenders from the carriers, or by taking them into the civil service. Since the hon. member for Peel is a member of the Progressive Conservative party I was much surprised to hear him criticize a system which is based on free enterprise.

An hon. MEMBER: Local competition.

Mr. LESAGE: Yes, local competition.

Mr. GRAYDON: Is that the hon. member's conception of free enterprise?

Mr. LESAGE: No, it is not.

Mr. GRAYDON: It is not mine, either.

The CHAIRMAN: Order.

Mr. LESAGE: I have also received a letter from the rural mail couriers' association. They favour a basic mileage rate which would assure every courier a reasonable wage for the amount of work done. The secretary of the association says:

We do agree with Postmaster General Bertrand that a fixed mileage rate would be impossible, but rural delivery is at all times under supervision and we believe a plan could be worked out to take care of "out of the ordinary" routes.

I do not think that we can classify some routes as ordinary and others as extraordinary. All routes are completely different. Many factors enter into a study of the cost in each case.

[Mr. Graydon.]

There are two objections to a flat rate: first it would mean a heavy cost to the country and to the taxpayers. The system was tried in the United States and it was an unhappy experience. The authorities still regret having adopted such a system.

Costs vary because of many factors. First there is the factor of weather. In my constituency, for instance, in the summer a courier delivers the mail with an automobile and in winter with a horse-drawn vehicle. It means that all during the winter he has his car in the garage doing nothing and there is depreciation taking place all the year round although he uses it for only six months. During the summer he must feed his horses. There is also depreciation on the horse and on the vehicle. It doubles the capital cost involved. This situation does not apply in the most southerly part of Ontario, and I believe the same can be said for the island of Vancouver. There is also this factor: some routes are very hilly; others are not. Some are paved; others are not. Some are muddy; others are not.

In the Vancouver district there are 112 routes, and the total number of box holders is 21,095. In the postal district of Edmonton the number of routes is 165, and the total number of box holders is only 9,369; therefore the situation is not the same at all. On one route you may have a box every quarter of a mile; on another route you may have one every 100 or 200 yards. Every route is different. With all due respect to what has been said on this matter, and with all due respect to the hon. member for Peel, I believe the best way out of the difficulty is to continue the tender system, and when a special situation arises, as it does here because of the higher cost of living, we must deal with it according to what is fair and just.

Mr. TUSTIN: I do not think it is necessary to fight the cause of the rural mail couriers. Every hon. member knows the situation in which the mail courier is placed. Every hon. member who comes from a rural constituency knows what a fine job these men are doing. Many of them are not paid nearly enough to cover the expenses incurred in the job which they have undertaken.

I should like to know how the department arrives at the wartime bonus. What is the operational bonus? No doubt the minister will take the stand that he is trying to bring these routes up to a certain number of dollars a mile. I should like to draw the attention of the committee to a case or two which I have before me, and I have many. In one county where the routes run out on an angle,