

Oral Questions

ments in relation to provincial sales tax with the province of Quebec or other province which might want a change?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I could make one or two comments with respect to the question, but I would like to tell the Leader of the Opposition that I expect the Prime Minister to be in the House before 2.30 and it might be better to continue then the dialogue which began on Friday.

I explain the absence of the Minister of Finance by telling the House that he is attending a meeting of the board of governors of the InterAmerican Development Bank, in Vancouver, where he has been elected chairman of the board of governors.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, with the agreement of the House, I would like to defer the opportunity to put questions until the Prime Minister arrives.

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POST OFFICE**PROPOSED PHASING OUT OF LETTER CARRIERS IN VANCOUVER**

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Postmaster General: it has to do with the study which was done in March of this year, called "Manpower Goals, 1981-1982; Vancouver Retail and Delivery Division". That study proposes the phasing out of 421 letter carriers in the Vancouver area. Was that study done in consultation, in any way, with the letter carriers or the letters carriers' union, and can the Postmaster General advise whether he has rejected the recommendations in that study?

[*Translation*]

Hon. J.-Gilles Lamontagne (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I feel that this straightforward question deserves an equally straightforward reply. I must say there is nothing secret about this document. The postal carriers' union must have already been aware of this document, having discussed it with Post Office officials. I want to state emphatically once again that absolutely no major change and no lay-off will occur in the Post Office before management and labour have discussed and reached an agreement on this issue.

[*English*]

I would like to repeat what I said in this House, I think on April 4. If we are to contemplate any changes or expansion in delivery methods, we must re-evaluate the over-all situation and consult the unions to obtain their full collaboration. That still stands.

Mr. Leggatt: Mr. Speaker, I expected that kind of answer just before an election. That still will not guarantee the 421 letter carriers that they will not be laid off. The question is not about consultation; it is whether the Postmaster General is

[Mr. Clark.]

willing to allow the workers in the Post Office—I am referring particularly to the letter carriers—to participate in these studies. It is not a question of consultation; it is a question of whether we are going to have peace in the postal service—and the way to have peace is to allow the letter carriers to participate.

Can the Postmaster General now give a commitment to this House that in future these studies—and this is not the first one that has talked about phasing out letter carriers—will be done not merely on a consultative basis but the letter carriers will be involved in them with regard to their own future and their own jobs?

Mr. Lamontagne: Mr. Speaker, I think the letter carriers themselves admitted that they knew about this study. I can confirm that the letter carriers are participating in all discussions which take place in the Post Office. We have what we call an intergroup which meets practically every month to discuss with the unions proposed changes in the way the Post Office is administered and to discuss ways to give better service to more Canadians.

Mr. Leggatt: Mr. Speaker, with regard to future service to more Canadians, there are a number of routes in new subdivisions all across Canada.

● (1417)

I do not think many of us in the House have found, especially in urban areas, that delivery has gone forward in new subdivision areas. Can the Postmaster General give some commitment to the House that, in fact, we will see the letter carrier service expanded into those areas—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Leggatt:—so that there will not be someone picking up a dollar and running that mail in. That is the real risk. I am asking the Postmaster General to provide us with a commitment, today, in the House—it is a good time now for a commitment, because we are about to have an election—that routes which are presently underserved in the suburban areas of this country will be serviced within the next three months by the addition of regular mail carrier service.

Mr. Lamontagne: I would love to say to the hon. member that we will provide more service and expand our letter carrier service all across Canada. However, I have listened to the opposition since coming to the House and I have heard them complaining and accusing us of having too many civil servants. They even said they would be ready to cut 50,000 of them. I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who said that.

Furthermore, we have a budget and we have a deficit. We are trying to do the best we can with what we have. But I can tell the hon. member that all routes in all areas are under revision, and if with a reasonable budget we can expand this service, we will do so.