

Oral Questions

were set for rural mail-delivery in Canada? There was only the closure of 5,000 post offices and the laying off of 8,700 people?

[Translation]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, anyone who is prepared to face facts and has followed committee proceedings when Canada Post officials gave evidence would realize that the premise of the Hon. Member's question rests on fiction. Committee members scrutinized the Canada Post business plan and questioned postal officials for over two weeks. The committee will report to the House of Commons in due time, and then the Government will be in a position to consider the committee recommendations and decide whether or not the plan ought to be changed.

[English]

PROPOSED PRIVATIZATION OF RURAL POST OFFICES

Mr. George Baker (Gander—Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that rural Canadians face a situation of having their mail handled by either a superbox or the local business merchant. Enough said about superbox.

Let me ask the Acting Minister this question. Does he really believe that a local business merchant can handle the mail, receiving that paltry, tiny sum of profits from the sale of postage stamps, as efficiently as today's postmaster and postmistress in rural Canada? We are being robbed and rooked in rural Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member were aware of what is going on he would know that the private sector already handles 25 per cent of Canada Post business. That is a fact. Under the proposed plan, over the next ten years . . . They are talking about lay-offs, throwing figures around to scare Canadians. The people who might be affected as a result of such transfers to the private sector should know that, whenever possible, Canada Post will follow a program of attrition. Committee members were made aware of this as well, so perhaps the Hon. Member should have attended the proceedings.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

ASSISTANCE FOR GRAIN PRODUCERS

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister. During his press conference this morning the Prime Minister said something along the lines that he never made a commitment to

western Canadian grain farmers to make a \$1 billion payment during this fiscal year. During the Saskatchewan election campaign western Canadian farmers certainly felt that they had a commitment that there would be \$1 billion either before Christmas or shortly thereafter, but certainly during this fiscal year. Why is the Prime Minister cutting western Canadian grain farmers adrift? Why are they not receiving their money before Christmas or in this fiscal year? Farmers want to know. The campaign is over and they want their money.

• (1130)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, what a silly attitude to adopt. The Government of Canada, pursuant to undertakings made in this House, has put together a package designed to assist Canadian farmers which, I believe, and according to the Minister, is the largest assistance package to aid Canadian farmers in history. That is an extremely important measure for western Canada in particular but for all Canadian agricultural communities in general.

The commitment that I made in the House of Commons on behalf of the Government will be honoured in its entirety. That money will find its way, as we indicated—

Mr. Benjamin: When?

Mr. Mulroney: As I indicated at this morning's press conference, the Minister will be indicating no later than next week the timing of this measure. It will be pursuant to my undertakings and it will benefit Canadian farmers to the tune of \$1 billion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TIMING OF PAYMENT

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question put by the Leader of the Opposition on October 7, the Prime Minister said that this is new money in the hands of farmers. The impression western farmers had was that they would be getting the money this fiscal year. Why is that money not coming in this fiscal year? If it is not coming in this year, can the Prime Minister tell the farmers when they will be getting that money? They have to plant crops next spring. They need the money now.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is distorting what I said. What I said is on the record and is very clear-cut. I can go a little further. The Hon. Member went into his riding during the provincial election campaign to which he refers and he gave the electorate a choice: take the NDP position or the government position. As I believe it, every single provincial riding in the Hon. Member's federal riding went Progressive Conservative.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!