

the House of Commons, and that is undoubtedly as it should be because he is one of her Majesty's ministers. But also, if this awful task of determining whether or not to close a post office is to be delegated to a public servant, then we will wind up with that public servant being faced by an angry MP. I suggest that on a good many occasions the public servant will be damned by the MP if he does close the post office, and damned by his boss, whether that be the Postmaster General or the Department in Ottawa, if he keeps the post office open. So I suggest that from several different aspects, but largely on the ground of political accountability, the Postmaster General would be well advised to accept the amendment which is suggested by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale).

If I may trespass briefly into the field of the arts, Mr. Speaker, it is not very often that a poem will encompass such disparate communities as Joe Baths Arm, Ste. Anne de la Pocatière, Kouchibouguac and Ecum Secum, but a year ago when the hon. member for Duvernay (Mr. Kierans) was the Postmaster General, I wrote such a poem. It is to be found in the records of this House, records which no longer are read, and I am sure we are all the better off for that. But when I did make the plea that for historical, social, economic and other reasons post offices should not be closed, and in particular simply should not be closed according to strict rules of thumb—and as I say my poetry did include all the small post offices at these various establishments—I concluded my poem to the then postmaster general with these lines:

Lest in his zeal he abolish them all
Including the office in Montreal.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if you want to stretch arguments, formulae or the like to their logical limit, there possibly is not a post office in Canada you could not close down for economic reasons, because we are told with great sincerity, by the minister and his staff, that the Post Office is losing a great deal of money for Canadian taxpayers. Therefore, I suggest that in order to save himself some difficulties the Postmaster General should be a good fellow, accept the principle of the amendment moved by my hon. friend from Brandon-Souris and be prepared to have members stand up from time to time in the House of Commons and defend their favourite small post offices. I suggest that he should not turn what is a rather difficult political chore into something that really could be much worse, namely, the wielding of an axe by a bureaucratic computer. For these reasons, I hope the Postmaster General will now tell us that the argument of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris has made a great impression on him.

● (8:50 p.m.)

Mr. Stan Schumacher (Palliser): I should like to pursue the theme introduced by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants. I do not know whether I misunderstand the situation, but it would appear to me that the clause to which the amendment of the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) pertains would allow the Postmaster General (Mr. Coté) to delegate all of his responsibilities

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under the act to certain public servants. This raises a question in my mind about what has been going on in the Post Office Department for the past number of years. It would appear that what the Postmaster General is now seeking is authority to carry out his duties under the act by a process of delegation. Surely, this is what should have been happening all along. If there has not been a delegation of responsibilities in the department, then it is little wonder it is faced with the problems which have plagued it in recent years.

My understanding of the public service is that it is there to carry out the policy of the government of the day on the basis of delegated authority. There is a minister who is responsible to this House and he has a deputy minister who is head of that branch of the public service. Surely, the public servants within that branch act on the basis of delegated authority. Obviously, no minister can do everything within his department. If the process of delegation is not being followed at the present time, I wonder what the people named in this amendment to the act are doing, that is, the Assistant Deputy Postmaster General, regional general managers and directors of postal districts. Surely, their duties must arise as a result of the process of delegation. I really cannot see the need for subclause 3 of clause one in the bill, and I hope when the Postmaster General speaks to this motion he can explain it. If the process of delegation has not already been followed, then I think there is a very grave misunderstanding on the part of this government as to how the job of governing the country is to be accomplished.

A reading of this amendment would lead one to believe that the minister, is attempting to get away from the principle of ministerial responsibility in the discharge of his duties. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether this is a harbinger of a later proposal to this House, which would be the ultimate in eliminating ministerial responsibility, namely the creation of a Crown corporation to carry out the functions of the Post Office Department. I take the position that such a proposal would only reduce the principle of political accountability in the discharge of this very important public service. I hope we are not presented with that proposal in the near future. I hope we are never presented with it, but it appears that this amendment to the present act is a step in that direction.

Previous speakers have made reference to how the wholesale closing of rural post offices has weakened the fabric of that portion of this country's society. We keep hearing about the inevitability of urbanization and the weakening of our rural society's fabric. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it is because of the type of action exemplified by the post office closings that this inevitability becomes a fact. The government is responsible in large measure for this situation, even though we hear that it cannot be stopped. It has been contended that there have not been any great savings as a result of the closings.

There have been a great number of post office closings in the province of Newfoundland and a great number of memorials to Mr. Pickersgill have been erected there at the expense of the lower cost community type service