

*Mail Contracts*

the rural mail couriers. I am going to ask the minister fairly and honestly this afternoon why we cannot set up a committee in this parliament to deal once and for all with this vexed problem of the rural mail courier. He is entitled to a square deal, and even though these supplementals do go a considerable distance to give him a better deal, he is entitled to the same kind of treatment as other servants of the government who are paid under the various contracts which they have entered into in the public service. It is not fair to single out the rural mail courier and treat him differently from other people in the service who are getting a much better deal.

I leave that suggestion with the minister in the hope that, in addition to the legislation which is now being brought down, he will consider the rural mail courier's position and bring in some legislation which will permanently solve the difficulty. When he does that he will be entitled to join that great throng to which the Minister of Finance referred last night as the intelligent and prudent part of the national community. Until the minister does that, I am afraid that we shall have to defer judgment on him.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Before the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Shaw) speaks, may I refer to the interruption which I made a few moments ago when I stopped the Postmaster General replying to questions which are put to him? I think I was correct in suggesting that he should not answer questions at this time. However, I stated that he would have the right to reply. I was under the impression that we were on the second reading of the bill. Of course we are not on the second reading of the bill. The motion is that I do now leave the chair for the house to consider this resolution. There is no reply on that motion. I suggest that if there are questions to be asked the minister could answer them when we reach the committee stage.

**Mr. F. D. Shaw (Red Deer):** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately it was difficult if not quite impossible for us at this end of the chamber to hear what the minister said when he spoke briefly a moment ago. It is my understanding that the resolution now before us will enable his department to continue the payment of supplemental bonuses to those mail couriers who have been receiving them during the past few years, and where renewals are necessary a continuation of such bonuses will be provided.

However, one point troubles me. I believe the minister said that about 1,600 contracts would expire in the coming year. Many of

[Mr. Graydon.]

those will be simple renewals, while in other cases it will be necessary to call for contracts. Is it the intention of his department to call for contracts, where such procedure is necessary, and then to pay the bonus on top of those contract rates?

**Mr. Bertrand (Laurier):** I would not be allowed to do that. The right expires on March 31. We had the right to pay a supplement only when the contract had been in force for at least one year.

**Mr. Shaw:** I just wished to be clear on the point. Were that not so we would be introducing a dangerous principle. I agree with the hon. member for Peel (Mr. Graydon) that concrete action should be taken soon to clear up once and for all the numerous conditions which do prevail and have prevailed for a long time with respect to rural mail couriers. It is one of the most unhappy activities in which one could engage. On the other hand, I do not know of any group of persons in the public service who have to contend with as many difficulties, unless one were to mention rural postmasters. However, I do not wish to go into that field at the present time.

We agree with the hon. member for Peel that a useful purpose could be served if a committee of the house were set up to enable hon. members to examine into the matter most carefully. I know last year there was considerable discussion of the suggestion made in some quarters that mail couriers should be appointed rather than placed in a position where they bid on contracts. However, before I would support that suggestion I would have to insist upon the clarification of certain conditions which at present surround the appointment of postmasters in many of our rural post offices. I am not at all happy about some of the conditions of which I am aware. Possibly before too long we will have an opportunity in the house to refer to some of those conditions.

Meantime may I repeat that, as in the past, we continue to support the payment of bonuses where they are necessary, and would also support the establishment of a committee so that we might consider this matter in greater detail.

Motion agreed to and the house went into committee, Mr. Golding in the chair.

**Mr. Bentley:** As usual, when the minister was making his statement he did not take into his confidence those of us who are at this end of the chamber. It was difficult to hear what he said. There is a certain type of mail contractor in whom I am particularly interested, because I hear about his diffi-