

Oral Questions

have in my hand, states that the Government will be rationalizing—that means shut down—5,221 rural post offices by 1996. Given there are 10,000 employees in rural post offices, 83 per cent of whom are women, how does the Minister feel about firing 8,300 women, which is likely the largest firing of women in the history of Canada? What is he trying to do, outdo his boss when he shut down Schefferville?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, that document or article about which the CP story was written said that in the last fiscal year 269 rural post offices were supposed to be rationalized. In fact, last fiscal year 119 rural post offices were privatized. They were put into local general stores.

● (1440)

Incidentally, during the last fiscal year 218 new rural postmasters were hired and I understand that 80 per cent of them were women. Therefore, new postmistresses are being hired, not fired. The Hon. Member should get his facts right and not make such stupid statements.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, the Government will be rationalized out of a job after the next election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

REQUEST THAT MINISTER INTERVENE

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): My supplementary question deals with the shutdown of 5,221 rural post offices. The document suggests that the Government could close this year 387 post offices, an average of one a day, and if—Heaven forbids—it were returned to power, it could close next year 858 post offices, an average of two a day.

When are the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister going to assume their responsibilities and order the Minister to end this sad joke and stop once and for all this discriminatory practice? What has the Government got against Canadians living in rural areas?

[English]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, on May 12 the corporate plan for Canada Post was issued by the president. The press was there and perhaps members of the Opposition were there. I can send them the kit.

Over the period of time about which the Hon. Member is talking there will be an increase from the current 5,200 rural post offices to 7,000. There will be an increase. That means up, that doesn't mean down. That means people added, not fired. That means the Hon. Member should try to stick to the truth.

The fact of the matter is that service is going to be increased in rural Canada. The Hon. Member, as usual, knows nothing of what he speaks.

PROJECTED NUMBER OF CONVERTED POST OFFICES

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for the Post Office. The Minister has just said that although the newspapers are reporting today that the conversions of post offices for 1987-88 were to be 269, in fact there were 119 conversions.

Is the Minister telling this House that the Government has been slowed down in the implementation of its corporate plan for converting rural post offices because of the protests that are being held across the country, and that the way to reduce the number of conversions included in the corporate plan is for Canadians to make their voices heard and say no to this corporate plan?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. However, I wonder whether the Hon. Member would really like us to do that. In his Province of Manitoba a survey of people who are now being served by these converted post offices indicates that 86 per cent think the service is the same or better. Is the Member saying that his constituents should not get that better service?

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, if the Minister is simply going to continue to quote a survey which gave people the alternatives of "keep it here through a local retailer" or "move it to another town", I think he is simply trying to mislead people.

EXISTENCE OF CORPORATE PLAN

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister confirm to this House that this confidential document, this corporate plan, exists and outlines the number of conversions which are going to take place year by year? Will he confirm those numbers and will he tell us which will be the next 300 communities to be converted?

Will it be Boat Harbour in Newfoundland, will it be Weston Shore in Nova Scotia, or will it be St. Tite in Quebec? Just which communities are on the corporate plan for conversion?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is often difficult to know where the NDP is coming from. The other day the Leader of the New Democratic Party talked about scrapping nuclear subs so that we can put up post offices. Yet their resolutions book, in Resolution A.4.3 says:

An NDP government would put full employment as its primary goal... (would)

(3) accelerate other public works, but only after re-evaluating their social usefulness. New post offices may not be nearly as important as new convalescent or nursing home beds.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: It says "new post offices".

Mr. Rodriguez: What's the matter with you?

Mr. Broadbent: Can you read?