

Post Office

the new postal code is nearly useless. The Postmaster General has not shown evidence that it is any good. The hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) mentioned a letter which ended up in Tokyo because the postal code resembled the word Tokyo. So apparently difficulties have arisen over the use of the postal code.

Because I represent a rural and urban area I am concerned about rural post offices and the situation of rural postmasters. On a number of occasions I have raised this matter with the Postmaster General; he is aware of it and intends to alleviate the situation, or gives the impression that he intends to alleviate the situation of rural postmasters in areas such as Assiniboia, Saskatchewan. The hon. member for Winnipeg (Mr. Orlikow) has shown how top heavy is the Post Office Department with management personnel. The salary levels of these people increased considerably between 1968 and 1972. He showed that the guy who works directly with the public, that the postie who walks the beat, that the rural postmaster who deals directly with his neighbours has not done as well as people in management. The salary increases of people at lower levels, in percentage terms, have been smaller than those of management people in the Post Office Department.

I have put over 40 questions on the order paper relating to salaries in different departments and to salary increases. For instance, I have asked the following questions of the Post Office Department: How many full time employees were there as of January 31, 1970, in the Post Office Department? How many of these employees were earning more than \$15,000 annually, distributed according to \$1,000 intervals? How many full time employees were there as of January 31, 1973, in the Post Office Department? How many of these employees were earning more than \$18,000 annually, distributed according to \$1,000 intervals?

Similar questions were asked of every other department on March 5. Every other department has answered my questions. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) is present today. I believe it is correct to say that the number of employees earning over \$18,000 in his department, compared with the number of employees earning \$15,000 in 1970, has increased in the neighbourhood of 40 per cent. The Post Office, however, has not yet answered that question. I am interested in seeing the answer and in seeing if Post Office management is top heavy. I suspect it is. On the other hand, I believe that those at the lower level who directly serve the Canadian public have not in many ways been as fairly dealt with by the Post Office and by Treasury Board. My colleague for Winnipeg North adequately dealt with this matter when he cited figures.

In my constituency the local, rural post office is the backbone—or a joint in the backbone, if you like—of local rural communities such as Dahinda, Scout Lake, Bromhead, McCord and Beaubier, which are small with populations of less than 200. The people in those post offices work 40 hours per week at low salaries which seem to be below the minimum wage paid in some provinces. They serve the local community. When they are sick or go on holiday and have to be replaced by someone else, it sometimes costs more to hire the replacement than to pay the absent employee.

[Mr. Knight.]

I hope my meaning is clear. These people have written to me about this situation. They have sent me dozens of letters about it and I am glad they have informed their member of parliament because it is a difficult problem. I hope that in the present round of negotiations the Post Office will improve the salary levels and working conditions of our rural postmen. The Postmaster General has said he is aware of these problems and will look into them. I believe if the department can come to a just settlement with these people it will be a feather in the cap of the Postmaster General. The local post office people will be pleased if their salary level is raised substantially. I am pleased the minister has taken the time to listen to me, and I look forward in the coming months to his attempts to solve these problems.

Mr. Norval Horner (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, I want to use my time to impress upon the minister the plight of the rural postmaster, especially the so-called revenue postmaster. For some reason this government is determined to move people into large cities; no doubt that serves its socialistic tendencies.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Horner (Battleford-Kindersley): The people are more easily served in large cities. The government is trying to centralize service in cities such as Saskatoon and Regina. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang), who is in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, has been talking to experts and trying to convince people that they do not need elevators and the removal of elevators will not affect their communities. He tries to say that rail lines can be removed, that the people do not need the railroad. It seems to me that is the kind of attitude we are now getting from the Post Office Department. The government is trying to discourage the rural postmaster; it hopes that revenue postmasters will be phased out. If that postmaster goes, the people will be left without service. The people be damned—that seems to be the policy of this Liberal government.

Let me say a word about rural areas and the people who are served by revenue post offices. Many people living in rural areas travel ten miles for their mail. If the revenue post offices are removed, or if you encourage revenue postmasters to quit simply by not paying them adequate salaries, if you ask people in the rural post office to work ten hours a day six days a week, or 60 hours a week, they will quit and then the people of the area will be forced to drive 20 miles or more for their mail. The fellow in the city works 36 hours a week and has all the time in the world to get his mail, yet he has it delivered to his door. That is the kind of injustice from which our rural people suffer. These are the people who are raising the cattle and growing the wheat upon which much of the employment of the city dweller depends. Instead of providing rural people with the decent mail service to which they are entitled, we seem to be making them scapegoats.

● (1540)

I have here a public service poster advertising for a postmaster in the town of Hoosier. It offers a salary of \$1,660 a year. This post office must be open 24 hours a week. According to my calculations, that works out to