

Oral Questions

29, before the strike began, by management in his department who sent a letter to Priority Post customers, those rich enough to afford it. That letter guaranteed normal service at normal rates during the strike, with any additional costs incurred to be borne by the government. I repeat that the minister said yesterday he was not aware of it.

Could the Postmaster General please explain to this House how he justifies guaranteeing and subsidizing mail delivery for the rich and powerful, while he ignores or, worse, bankrupts ordinary Canadians?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, let me say that I totally disapprove of the line taken by the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr. Crosbie: I guess you do.

Mr. Ouellet:—yesterday, and by the hon. member today in saying we divide the service and give different treatment of various kinds of Canadians. It is absolutely untrue and unfounded that we are subsidizing the rich in this country in relation to postal services.

Miss MacDonald: Only part of the time.

Mr. Ouellet: The reality is quite the contrary, Madam Speaker. We, as a government, took every step necessary to assure pensioners, indeed every Canadian who receives social benefit cheques, that they will receive them despite the strike. Indeed, we are subsidizing those services for those in need in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ouellet: Secondly, we have a service called Priority Post which is addressed not only to the rich and to large firms in Canada, but to a number of Canadian businessmen, large, medium and small. They are paying a premium price for that type of service, on which the Post Office has made a good profit in the past and hopes to do so in the future.

The Post Office has taken every step to protect its clients, to keep them rather than to lose them to private couriers. And I want to say, Madam Speaker, despite the heckling on the other side by those who do not want to listen to the answer, that we are not subsidizing the rich. We are doing our utmost to keep a profitable service for the Post Office, one which brings in substantial revenue, and we intend to continue to do that despite this very regrettable line taken by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday.

NEED FOR RESTORATION OF FULL SERVICE

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): We are now in a position, Madam Speaker, where the Postmaster General finally admits that he has indeed maintained services for those parts of the system which he describes as profitable, while leaving everyone else who depends on the mail to hang out to dry.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bosley: Madam Speaker, I would like to get an answer to a question we asked last week. In defence of not bringing in back to work legislation, the answer we were given was that any strike, anywhere, is bound to hurt someone. Now that we know whom the government will hurt and whom it will protect, will the Postmaster General please tell this House how long he intends to continue a practice such as this before he will recognize that the public interest is not just those who can afford courier services or Priority Post, and that thousands of ordinary Canadians desperately need their mail contract honoured and their mail service restored?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, only a few days ago, on July 7, the hon. member for Provencher asked me whether we would attempt to maintain postal services in the small rural post offices in Canada. I told him then that of course we would try as much as possible to maintain services in those small post offices since the government is committed to deliver pension cheques, family allowances cheques and various social security cheques to the most needy Canadians. Notwithstanding the Progressive Conservative opposition, we will try to honour the contracts we have signed with Canadian companies—large, medium-sized or small—which use the Priority Post and pay a high price for that service.

● (1420)

[English]

REQUEST THAT SERVICE BE RESTORED BEFORE ECONOMIC SUMMIT MEETINGS COMMENCE

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): Madam Speaker, my final question is directed to the Postmaster General who at least finally has the honesty to admit that he is trying to divide postal customers into two classes—first class and the rest of us.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bosley: Since the government is headed by a gentleman who presumes these days to roam the world telling the rich nations that next week's economic summit meeting should focus on help for the poor nations, will the Postmaster General guarantee to ordinary Canadians that the Government of Canada will practise in Canada what it preaches abroad, that normal service at normal rates for all will be restored before next week's summit meeting, not just a continuation of the service for those who are least hurt and can afford a strike the most?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, in my opinion this persiflage simply does not help solve the current labour dispute. The irresponsible attitude of the Leader of the