

Routine Proceedings

station, shop or restaurant running a franchise post office on the side, so the alternative is to have none.

A post office serviced the community for decades and now because of this policy there will be no post office. The corporation can say "Cheer up, folks, we are going to put some boxes in your community where you can pick up your mail". That is small comfort for a community that has had a post office for about 120 years. That is despicable, disgraceful and unCanadian. It is anti-rural Canada. It is as if there was a wish to destroy rural Canada. There is always someplace to put a franchise in the cities.

My hon. friend across the way is shaking his head. I can hear him from here.

In rural Canada there is not always an alternative. There is not always a shop to franchise the postal operation. As in this community, there is no way to have a post office. They either have the existing one or none at all.

Do hon. members opposite really want to say that they represent a government that wants to take away the post office from Westwold, British Columbia? I see the Conservatives nodding their head that yes, this is their policy. This is what they support. We, in the New Democratic Party do not support this system. We feel that the taxpayers of Canada, the people who work hard and pay taxes, buy stamps and provide all the necessary costs, deserve to have small post offices.

Mr. Speaker, you should see this post office. This is not a fancy post office with big pillars. It is a little small box. It is a very small place packed full of boxes. It is very crowded and inconvenient for the postmaster. It is a very modest, humble post office. The government is saying "You cannot even have that kind of post office". It is a disgrace. It is unCanadian.

Ms. Mitchell: Right, absolutely.

Mr. Riis: This is not what this country is built on.

The government is saying that it does not have confidence in Westwold, British Columbia.

It does not appreciate what the people who have lived on that land since the 1880s and have developed that community have done for the country. The one federal government installation that provides support for that community is going to be ripped out by this government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is like ripping out your heart. It is like ripping a vital organ out of your body.

An hon. member: They want postal services!

Mr. Riis: Listen, he can't understand very well what I am saying, Mr. Speaker. There is a goat or something over there bleating, saying that they want postal services. I am telling you they cannot have postal services because there are no alternatives other than a post office. I know that is a hard concept for the member opposite on the Conservative benches to understand, and I respect that. But I will explain it to him later—as a matter of fact I will put it in writing if it will make it any easier for him to comprehend.

There is something sinister going on in this country. When I read in the report that the government intends to close down over 5,220 rural post offices, I wonder what kind of government would close down every single rural post office in Canada if it had any respect for the people who built this country.

The people who built this country are from rural Canada by and large. We have had a rural-based economy for years. They are the ones who struggle hard. They are the ones who work 18 hours a day and continue to do so. They are the ones who are being challenged by high interest rates and the spectre of a GST and the dismantling of a whole number of services. Now the final death blow to the community, the final spike is being driven into the heart of Westwold, British Columbia, and the people of Westwold, with the government saying it is going to rip out their post office.

Mr. Speaker, it is a despicable act by an uncaring, arrogant government. That is the only way to describe it. I hate to do so because I know the hon. members across the way are not like that. As individuals they are wonderful people, but when they get together in a group something goes wrong. Their minds close off, or they blank out in terms of logic and rationale. There is something about a group of Conservatives that makes me shudder when they get together because this is what they come up with, a lovely plan to dismantle a rural postal system.

According to this report, the government is going to remove support for a number of Canadian publications. In other words, one of the ways that the federal government can encourage a Canadian identity is to promote