

*Post Office*

Sarre by the Librairie Régent Enregistrée on April 3, 1973, that is 19 days later, and there was no strike.

Mr. Speaker, it is true that distances are long in remote regions, like Abitibi, but such delays virtually never occurred when mail was carried by railway but ever since mail has been carried by truck or by air, there have been similar delays nearly every week, or every month.

Mr. Speaker, I think there is room for improvement and I draw the minister's attention to this in order that service in rural centres might become as rapid as in cities. Taxpayers of our rural centres pay the same rates for mail as taxpayers who live in towns. I think we have a right to ask for the same services.

● (1420)

In the second part of the motion, the closing of small rural post offices is deplored. Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I do not entirely agree with the motion. It is true that small post offices have been closed, but one must indeed realize that when a parish or a community of people is set up somewhere, they ask for postal services; a post office and its related services are then brought in. But when this same parish or community becomes deserted, after all one cannot ask the department to keep a permanent post office when there are practically no more families living there.

In my area, we cannot complain too much since the few post offices that were closed down have been replaced by other kinds of services, and I think the people get the service they are entitled to.

As for the reduction of urban service from six to five days, it created many more problems because small businesses mainly were affected.

Earlier this morning, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro), in reply to a question of mine, said that he had ordered a study on the possibility of reducing the work-week to four days in federal services.

If in services such as the postal service the work-week were reduced to four days, two shifts of workers would have to be used to ensure services throughout the week, which would probably entail high expenses. I do not know whether the minister considered this, whether he consulted the Minister of Labour in this connection nor whether the latter consulted him as he did other ministers; but, in my opinion, it is a serious question which will have to be weighed carefully to make sure the post office users do not suffer from whatever decision of Minister of Labour makes following the studies.

I also have another complaint which I find most important and to which I drew the minister's attention last fall. I take this opportunity to bring it to the House's attention.

I am speaking about the delivery of parcels containing valuable objects which are a temptation to thieves. In fact, a jeweller of La Sarre, on September 7, 1972—and this was not the first time it happened to him—mailed two parcels of jewels to Montreal. Those parcels were shipped from La Sarre to Rouyn by postal trucks then transferred later on for transportation from Rouyn to Montreal by Air Canada. In this regard, I had the following question put on the Order Paper under No. 189 and I quote:

[Mr. Laprise.]

1. What was the date of Air Canada Flight 556 between Rouyn and Montreal where the disappearance of postal bags was discovered?

2. Was an investigation carried out and, if so, how long did it last?

The answer of Air Canada was given in the House by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Guay), and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, in answer to question No. 189, Air Canada has not discovered any disappearance or loss of postal bags from Flight 556 between Rouyn and Montreal. Provided with more details, Air Canada might make a more detailed investigation.

This answer was given on February 21, 1973, but earlier, the former Postmaster General (Mr. Côté), who is now a senator, informed me by letter as follows:

We reached by telephone our regional officials in Montreal who informed us that the inquiry is going on this regard. Mr. Giasson's registered items were sent from La Sarre to Rouyn by truck, was forwarded to Montreal by flight 556. According to records, these items were duly received in Rouyn but never reached Montreal.

The parcel disappeared between Rouyn and Montreal. Since the department got in touch by telephone with its regional officials in Montreal, I assume that they had inquired at Air Canada and, on February 21, Air Canada's official informs the House that they were not aware of it. Either the answer given by Air Canada was wrong or the Post Office Department did not carry out a thorough inquiry to find out what happened to this mail bag.

Mr. Speaker, when this mail bag containing these items sent by registered mail arrived in Rouyn and was transferred, from the truck to the plane, someone must have signed to accept responsibility for it. I suggest that it should be quite easy to trace these items and find out who was the last person who signed for these parcels, and that it would also be interesting to know how come mail bags are stolen only when there are valuables in them, and who informs those make those valuables disappear from the mail. Everything indicates, Mr. Speaker—and this suspicion, in my opinion, is justified—that someone takes it upon himself to notify others that valuables are in the mail, and then they are stolen.

Mr. Speaker, I asked another question—

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the 20 minutes allotted to him have expired. He can, however, continue with unanimous consent.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is not unanimous consent.

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) for having raised the issue of the Post Office today, because it allows me to make my maiden speech in the House as Postmaster General.

Many times since last December have I had the opportunity of speaking on the problems concerning the Post Office, either by answering questions during the oral