

The Address—Mr. Malone

of annual income but what it boils down to in terms of dollar amounts and services provided to people. This is why I am pleased that the Liberal Party has progressed with regard to social programs for the elderly and families. The time has now come to consider that and perhaps to conclude eventually that providing a guaranteed annual income is not necessarily in the best interest of those who need assistance, contrarily to NDP ideology, which is basically biased.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I want to commence by extending to the Speaker, his deputies and the new process my best wishes. I wish you and yours well.

I rise today to express a concern for rural Canada, not only for the food producers and other persons who live from the resources of the land but also for the towns, villages and hamlets which dot the country. The census of 1891 reported that 82 per cent of Canadians lived in rural areas. Today 4 per cent of Canadians live on farms and an additional 16 per cent live in rural non-farm situations.

I assert that the pattern of our population settlement is now reason for legitimate concern. Fifty-seven per cent of Canada's population is held within the 23 largest cities. Seventy-nine point five per cent of the Canadian population is within the 23 largest cities and 148 smaller cities. It is clear that that is where the political power is also harboured. As a result it is, by degree, more difficult to get the proper focus of attention that we need for the aspirations of rural Canada. The 9,500 towns and villages, along with the primary producers in agriculture, fishing, mining and forestry, have to knock harder and longer to get attention at the door of society's decision-makers. Simply put, while the hinterlands provide the lion's share of the nation's wealth, the cities harvest the benefit.

Today there are more Members of Parliament representing the urban settlements in and around the Cities of Montreal and Toronto than representing the three prairie provinces and the two northern territories. The three largest cities in Canada, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, collectively have more voting power in Parliament than has 85 per cent of Canada's land area. The voting power is such that it is its own concern.

There is a need for Canadian society to refocus on the potential of our hinterland and to diversify our population settlement patterns. It is my view that there is a bias which arises in urban citizens against the country cousins, albeit unintended and certainly without malice. Nevertheless, there is therein a real damage.

I want to set forward a few examples. The first one is relatively harmless and perhaps borders on trivia. I am going to talk about the urban weather reporter. After six weeks of drought in the rural communities, this pesky little fellow, armed with pointer and weather map, appears on our television screens and announces that there is good news, that it will be hot and dry for the weekend. This kind of announcement is

received in rural communities as an insult. It irritates rural people who are dependent upon the weather in a way in which urban communities can hardly imagine.

Who among us can justly claim that Canada Post is acting with justice and fair-mindedness when it provides free door-to-door postal service in urban areas but forces rural people to rent metal mail boxes? Most rural people would never expect door-to-door delivery, but they remain perplexed by the fact that they are charged while urban citizens have a free ride on the public purse.

There is the question of what makes the Post Office remain and what makes it disappear. Canada Post is presently shooting off small rural post offices like clay pigeons. It matters not that rural citizens may have to travel 100 or more miles on a return trip to obtain their mail. It matters not how busy a farmer or rancher is in the sprawling country of southern Alberta. The only consideration of Canada Post is the number of people per mile and whether or not the local post office makes money.

It does not matter that the petroleum and agricultural resources near Big Stone, Alberta, earns Governments \$60 million annually. If the local post office loses \$5,000 per year, Canada Post will close it down. Moreover, it does not bat an eyelash at free door-to-door delivery in urban communities. The fact that it costs millions of dollars annually to provide the door-to-door service in urban areas is unpersuasive. It is those far away post offices in rural Canada upon which Canada Post pins its hopes for a balanced budget. That is a pattern that may work but it is a pattern which is flooded with shame and insensitivity.

I would like to give the telephone company as another example. This corporate giant is under the jurisdiction of provincial Governments, yet the same sociological forces are exerted. If you are in urban Canada, you can have a private telephone in your home for \$8, \$9 or \$10 a month. For the same price in many parts of rural Canada you can deal on a \$130,000 harvest combine while three of your neighbours listen in. We are in the computer age and farmers need private phone lines to access data banks for their computers on accounting, market information, nutritional requirements and veterinary services.

I would now like to talk about the bias that exists in police service. I had occasion to phone the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at Camrose, Alberta, on a Saturday this summer. My call was intercepted and transferred to Red Deer. When I told that to a colleague of mine in the House of Commons, he gave me a better example than my own. At 4 a.m. a man was caught beating his wife. A phone call was made to the police for help. The operator transferred the call to Kamloops, British Columbia, more than 100 miles away from the incident. The officer who received the phone call said that someone from the local detachment would attend at nine o'clock in the morning, some five hours later.