

Mail Contracts

Time after time we on this side of the house have asked the ministry, even if they did not want to change their policy, to go so far as to set up a committee to investigate the question how best to handle the rural mail-carrying situation in the country. But at no time, either in war or in peace, has this government seen fit to accept that proposal. What could possibly be in the minds of the government when they refuse to accept the suggestion? Are they afraid to have a committee set up? Are they afraid of the evidence which would be adduced by the rural mail couriers and by the people whom they are serving? Are they afraid of the evidence that would be brought out showing the disgraceful conditions under which the rural mail couriers have operated all during those years? I have never been quite able to see the government's point of view in dealing with rural mail couriers.

Last night the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) used such words as "intelligence" and "prudence", which he applied to himself and no doubt to the government, because I am sure that he would not want to monopolize these words himself.

Mr. Abbott: No, indeed.

Mr. Graydon: I am sure he would not. I am sure he had the Postmaster General in mind when he used those words.

Mr. Abbott: He certainly did.

Mr. Graydon: If he did not he should have had.

Mr. Abbott: Put him right at the top of the list.

Mr. Graydon: I do not think I would have done that. Nevertheless, he must be near the top because I am sure they are all in the same grab bag over there at the moment. In view of the fact that this government has chosen to interpret its actions as intelligent and prudent, the minister should not have taken such an adamant attitude to the setting up of a committee to deal with this question. Surely there can be no reason why the rural mail couriers problem should not have been investigated. If we take the government's word for it, in other lines of endeavour they are able to solve great problems in a masterly way.

Mr. Michaud: Hear, hear.

Mr. Graydon: Just a minute; I did not think you were following me very closely. The government say that they have been able to handle some problems in a masterly way, but they have not been able to solve the problem of the rural mail couriers in Canada, and I think that is a pretty good indication of how they do handle problems in general.

This arrangement for supplementary contracts is a necessary thing. It is a necessary thing not because we like the idea of the principle and method involved. It is necessary because of the failure of the government to face up to the whole problem and solve it on a proper basis. I want to leave one suggestion with the minister. I have always felt that there was an injustice in connection with these supplemental payments. I could never understand why the rural mail courier, or someone in his behalf, should have had to make a complaint or to make a suggestion to the government, in the first instance, that he should have more money for his contract. There never seemed to be any justification for that. I could never understand why the government should single out the rural mail courier again and say to him, unless you ask for the money we will not bother giving it to you. I ask the government if there is any other single employee of theirs who has to come to them and ask for the pay that he is to get. Why single out the rural mail courier for that kind of treatment? That is what he has had to do.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Because he had a contract.

Mr. Graydon: The minister can explain it in that way if he likes, after I am through. The point is that every one of the mail couriers should have been told that a supplemental grant is available for them under certain conditions, having regard to the contractual position in which they find themselves. The government never did that; the government never notified a single rural mail courier in Canada that he was entitled to a supplementary grant on his contract. I have no doubt that in Canada there are hundreds of mail couriers who have received less than they should have because they have not known that they could get a supplemental grant from the government. The minister dare not deny that.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Yes, I do.

Mr. Graydon: I am sure that that situation has existed. I am hopeful that the minister will see that those who are entitled to this extra grant will be told that they are entitled to it and that the department will calculate what they are getting for the mileage and the conditions of the route, so that they will receive that to which they are entitled.

I have nothing more to add except to appeal again to the minister. I do not like to be hard on the minister. He has a genial disposition. It must be the fault of somebody else on the government benches because I cannot imagine the minister and his department not trying to do the best they can for