

As I say, I understand that most Perthites are satisfied with the service they do receive at the RPOs. However, I am told that some RPOs employ people who are not as well-qualified as were their predecessors, who were specialists qualified to carry out customer service. There are reports that children as young as eight years of age are stamping and sorting mail. I wonder what Charles Dickens would say about that.

In some areas, I am told the hours of service have been cut back from 32 hours per week to four. We can get this information at committee, but I am putting it on the record now because I hope the committee will ask about it.

What of those communities who use the post office to fulfil their banking needs? Can the same level of service in such transactions be provided by RPOs? According to one resident of Black Point, Nova Scotia, who had to wait one week for money orders to arrive at the RPO because the operator forgot to order new ones once he ran out, the answer would be no. That is from another rural dignity pamphlet called "Post Privatization — What Canada Post surveys don't say".

You can see that the common theme running through all of this is the fear that any control which the taxpayers have over Canada Post will be lost, because this is just an important and perhaps irreversible step towards privatization. I sense a real fear among Canadians that the post office will no longer be something that they consider their post office, but rather a new corporation, no different from any of the other corporations playing the roles that they play in their lives, where they feel the motivation is simply increased profits.

Rural residents are forced to spend valuable time and gas to drive to other communities — although this is not the problem in Perth but in some cases it is — to receive a service that once was provided to all Canadians, urban and rural residents alike. The act of picking up one's mail is made more difficult. Another serious problem with this legislation is that the difficulty is only for some Canadians. The closings I am talking about do not seem to be consistent. Rural Dignity of Canada in further material, another pamphlet and a letter, have said:

How is it that in Dunville, Newfoundland, the mayor and council were able to get a reversal of the Canada Post decision to close their post office after the intervention of their MP, the Honourable John Crosbie?

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That is no criticism of John Crosbie. He was being a good MP in that case. In playing the role of ombudsman, he succeeded. It is the inconsistency that is the problem.

How it is the mayor and citizens' committee were able to get an "indefinite postponement of the closure of their

post office following the intervention of their MP, the Honourable Jean Charest?"

My source for the references pertaining to Mr. Crosbie and Mr. Charest is a Rural Dignity of Canada pamphlet entitled, "Are Rural Canadians Truly Satisfied".

How is it that the communities of Avonmore, Ont.; Mabou, N.S.; Marystown, B.C.; Qu'appelle, Sask; Clair, N.B.; and Anse aux Griffons and La Rédemption, Qué. "get to keep their lock boxes inside the federally owned building, along with a commitment from Canada Post to pay maintenance costs, while other towns...

such as Berwick —

...had themselves to buy the building in order to provide an indoor location for the boxes?"

That is from the same source.

Such inequities jeopardize the universality of service and indicate to the public that our federal postal service, which was once mandated to provide "basic customary service" to communities in all parts of the country now has standards that are becoming increasingly more inconsistent and unpredictable. In fact, if we believe this material, and I do — and I hope we will have it on the record at the committee — it is discriminatory.

With regard to the effects on the autonomy or independence of citizens — and I promise to explain that before concluding — according to Rural Dignity of Canada, of Canadians 65 years and over, one-third live in communities with populations of 10,000 people and under. Furthermore, over 3,000 of Canada's small towns have concentrations of seniors over twice that of the national average. That reference comes from the House of Commons Debates of February 5, 1993, page 15514.

In the Perth area, 20 per cent of the citizens are aged 55 years or over and approximately 15 per cent are 65 years and over. I got those figures from Anne Farquharson of the Chamber of Commerce in Perth.

It is evident that in communities like Perth, seniors, as a segment of the population, may be justified if they feel discrimination by privatization. For many seniors and all citizens alike, the post office has always been a friendly gathering place where one can meet and talk with neighbours and friends; a practical, working, day-to-day community centre, you might say — the local post office. Super mailboxes and the closing of local post offices cause a loss of social contact and, for some, in that sense, a loss of their personal independence because they often have to depend on others to pick up their mail, and it is not picked up in the same atmosphere, anyway.