

The CHAIRMAN: I have not interrupted other hon. members when they have referred to rural post offices. Strictly speaking, however, the discussion of rural post offices is not in order under this resolution.

Mr. FRASER: I agree with what you have said, Mr. Chairman. I was going to mention only this, that many of these rural post offices cannot sell money orders or insure parcels, thus causing great inconvenience to some people when they have to travel ten or fifteen miles to buy money orders or to insure parcels.

I believe every rural office should be permitted to insure parcels. I hope the minister will accept the suggestion of the hon. member for Peel and set up a committee to look into the matter. This is of vital importance to the people of the country who get their mail because these rural carriers make it their business to see that, despite the weather, the mail goes through.

Mr. JAENICKE: Will the proposed legislation cover contractors who carry mail from the station to the post offices and back again?

Mr. BERTRAND (Laurier): Yes, it does.

Mr. HATFIELD: In my constituency twelve or fifteen routes have been discontinued because of tenders being too high. The people along those routes have not had mail delivery service for months. Post offices which have served people for seventy-five years have been closed. One postmistress in the community was operating a post office at thirty cents a day. Two other post offices were placed under her charge, but she was allowed no extra pay.

The rural mail system in my constituency has been a disgrace to the Post Office Department. I hope the minister will accept the suggestion of the hon. member for Peel, and set up a committee, so that a decent mail delivery service can be given the country.

Mr. WHITE (Hastings-Peterborough): The minister has said in answer to a question that this legislation will cover delivery from railway stations to post offices. What is the yardstick used in arriving at a proper payment for this service? In rural mail delivery contracts the number of boxes served gives some lead as to a basis on which to fix a price. But on this stage service one can consider only the actual distance travelled, with the possible further consideration of the quantity of mail carried.

If the minister will look at any list of contracts he will find that, so far as stage service contracts are concerned, the measure of pay-

[Mr. Fraser.]

ment is not clear. To indicate what I mean, let me say I know of an instance where two different carriers meet the same Canadian Pacific train at approximately the same hour. The stations are only two miles apart. One man travels a distance of only four miles over a provincial highway which is kept in first-class condition, and he receives \$1,050.

Mr. BERTRAND (Laurier): Once a day?

Mr. WHITE (Hastings-Peterborough): No, he goes twice a day. The other man, who also goes twice a day, travels a distance of 6.5 miles and receives only \$750, and the amount of mail carried is considerably greater than that carried by the man who receives \$1,050. That is just an example of the differences that exist in this service. I would be interested if the minister would tell us what basis is used to arrive at these rates.

Mr. BERTRAND (Laurier): I would not be able to answer a question like that without knowing all the circumstances. Mail contracts differ considerably one from the other. I do not know whether hon. members realize it, but they vary from a dog-team route of 100 to 150 miles on the north shore of the St. Lawrence to the man who takes the mail from a station and carries it to a village less than a mile away. It is almost impossible to find a yardstick that would fit all the circumstances. Down below Quebec are mail contractors who must have snowmobiles, while others must have sleighs and automobiles and horses according to the season. Some of these men have to travel over mountains; others go along the south shore of the St. Lawrence down into the peninsula; some have good roads to travel on and others have not.

There is only one sure way of getting a fair price, that is by asking for tenders. All people who are interested have an opportunity to submit tenders because the notices are posted in the post offices, in the city halls, in the churches or in any place where the people might see them. Tenders are submitted, and we take the lowest tender provided that we are satisfied the man has the necessary equipment to carry out his contract.

I do not think any member of this committee can say that the present Postmaster General has not given every possible attention to this question. Only a few postmasters have been dismissed, and some of them were of my own creed. I have no objection to having a committee consider this matter in an effort to improve the service. The service can be improved but it will cost more money. Rural mail routes are established according to certain rules. A route is not extended unless there are at least four families per mile. We would