

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Laprise: Mr. Speaker, it has been quite some time since the House had the opportunity to scrutinize the postal services. That is why I am grateful to the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) for providing us with this opportunity today.

The motion contains several elements and it will be rather difficult, in so short a period of debate, to consider fully all the points it raises. However, I am interested in some of them as they relate to some problems I have come up against.

In the first part of the motion, it is said, and I quote:

That this House regrets the drastic deterioration of the Postal Service in Canada during the past six years: . . .

I have been able to find such a deterioration of the postal services in my large constituency of Abitibi which can be regarded as a rural one. There are some small towns of 8,000, 10,000 or 12,000 inhabitants, but there are also a great many villages, rural parishes, where mail delivery is rather slow and sometimes delayed.

● (1410)

I would like to call again the attention of the minister to some examples I have in mind to prove that some unexplainable delays have occurred, and I refer to those which took place not so long ago, since the beginning of the year. It is said that the deterioration of the mail service has occurred during the last six years. If we go back further, when the mail was carried by the Canadian National Railways, we will remember that we could then receive in Abitibi a piece of mail at most 24 hours after it had been mailed in cities such as Quebec, Montreal or even Toronto.

A lot of people in my area come from around Quebec City and they would like to get the daily papers from that city. But as it is almost impossible to get those papers in time, they cancel their subscription to those dailies because the news come too late. They get their paper only five or six days after they have been published, three of four issues at the same time. So it is an unacceptable solution.

Mr. Speaker, I have in mind a few examples of delayed mail. I have here a letter which had been forwarded from Nipigon, Ontario on November 30, 1972 and it reached Authier, in Abitibi, on December 7, 1972. I believe it took quite a long time to deliver a letter for which an 8-cent stamp had been paid. A parcel sent from Sackville, New Brunswick, on November 27 to the same person arrived in Authier, on December 7, 1972. This parcel included parts to repair a furnace and everyone knows that in Abitibi by the end of November or early in December, it is most important that a furnace be in proper condition. That undue delay in the distribution or movement of mail riles customers, taxpayers.

I will quote parts of the letter I received from that taxpayer on that occasion:

Dear Mr. Laprise:

For your information, I repeat that the movement of mail since the CNR abandoned it is nothing short of most rotten as far as we are concerned in Authier. I do not blame the postmaster for it.

Post Office

I receive my Quebec newspaper the *L'Action* a couple of times a week, etc.

We are not all millionnaires and we cannot all live in cities.

Does the right to live in rural areas in this big country still exist? Practically speaking, no.

What the signer of that letter, Mr. Adrien Lambert, of Authier, meant is that in recent months, particularly in recent years, it has been considered more important to provide reasonable service to people living in cities and people living in rural areas have been neglected, and they find that quite unpleasant.

I have here a letter addressed to the Department of the Postmaster General and dated January 16, 1973:

Dear Sir:

Today, January 16, I received a parcel that I had been waiting for for at least three weeks and which was sent on December 12.

I cannot understand a service so rotten on the part of your department. Those pieces were very important and caused enormous prejudice—

La Sarre Enr. Farm Agency,

R. Lauzon

The Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) investigated that case and gave me an answer after I brought that complaint to his attention.

Here is the reply from the Postmaster General, dated March 29, 1973:

I am being told by our regional representatives that they conducted an inquiry but cannot explain the delay exactly.

They conducted an inquiry without any results, since they could not find anything.

Except for registered mail, we do not keep any record of mail items. So it is seldom possible to find the cause of an irregularity of that kind. Furthermore, Mr. Lauzon told the postmaster in La Sarre that the parcel's wrapping had been destroyed. The wrappings of delayed articles often show marks that enable us to tell how the item was handled and why it was delayed.

However, labour disputes in the Post Office in December 1972 and in early January 1973 might explain the delay.

So the responsibility is shifted on to the postal workers. Simple and easy enough, isn't it?

I keep quoting from the letter:

As you certainly know, we signed about a month ago a labour contract with the union which represent about 30,000 out of our 45,000 employees. However, after the negotiations reached a deadlock, management and the unions had to resort to conciliation. In spite of that, a few workers decided to object to such a measure, and there was some slackening down and a few stoppages in many postal service centres.

That is an explanation. We know that there has been work to rule. But it is rather simple and easy to blame only the postal workers. And the minister adds:

Moreover, bad weather did not help either and transportation services were delayed,—

It depends on the weather now. Cloud seeding may have caused unusual rainfalls or snowfalls. It does not say. Attempts are made to find all kinds of reasons except the real ones.

I shall mention another case which, I think, is not caused by the rotating or not rotating strike, because there was no strike at the time. A parcel mailed by H. Fortier Ltée from Montreal on March 16, 1973 was received in La