

Postal Service Policies

since it has been proven that the program related to the closing of small post offices, implemented in 1966, enables the Post Office and Communications Department to give a better service in the rural parts of the country.

The Canadian postal service is very expensive and tradition-ridden, as the Postmaster General and Minister of Communications (Mr. Kierans) remarked earlier. In order to give the population better services, his department must find new methods of mail delivery.

Mr. Speaker, in the century we live in, when governments propose practical reforms in the interest of citizens, they immediately face the protests of certain groups, and particularly in deliberative assemblies such as the Chamber of Commons.

But I wonder whether those who protest have alternative solutions to offer. After listening to the speeches made this afternoon on this opposition motion I have heard no member of the opposition suggest a single solution the minister might deem acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, some services provided by the Post Office should be subsidized by the government, because due to the vastness of our country and the sparseness of the population, in particular in several rural areas, the Canadian Postal authorities have very serious financial difficulties to overcome.

Some rural post offices make only from \$500 to \$1,000 profit a year. Managing expenses amount, in some cases, to \$2,000 while returns are only \$100 a year.

When I was the executive assistant of the Postmaster General, we established a program to close small post offices and, in the beginning, it was implemented in the Gaspé area which was designated as a pilot-area.

In the ridings of Gaspé and Bonaventure, 90 small post offices have been closed since 1966. In the single riding of Gaspé, which I represent in this House, 56 have been closed down. During the same period of time, postal delivery services have been changed. Four distribution centres were created. I challenge any member of this House to go to the Gaspé area and find one person who is not satisfied with the new postal service.

Mail from Montreal, Quebec and Toronto used to reach us through the CN at 8 p.m. With the closure of smaller post offices mail trucks which stop at fewer places first deliver the mail at the various distribution centres. We therefore receive our mail at 8 in the

morning instead of at 8 at night, that is 12 hours earlier.

And as a proof of this a letter mailed in Gaspé used to take from four to five days to reach Ottawa.

Now, on Wednesday night, May 20, a letter was sent to me from Grande-Rivière, in the Gaspé peninsula, and I received it this morning. Yet, at this time of the year service is very slow, since it is known that with delays at certain distribution centres, such as in Montreal, it is difficult to dispatch mail as fast as before.

But in January and October of last year I had the following experience. I found out that a letter sent from Ottawa to the Gaspé area or vice versa gets through in 15 hours due to the new program applied in 1966 by the Post Office Department, a program which provides for the closing down of small post offices and the establishment of distribution centres.

Opposition members who criticize this program are dabbling in petty politics. I recall that, in the beautiful province where the mover of the motion lives, while I was employed by the Post Office Department, we had to close down some small post offices, including those of Iona, Alma, Cherry Valley and Somerville. In Cherry Valley, there were only five users; in Iona, there were 34, and in Somerville, 38.

And we received complaints from small patronage handlers in the area, or from the local postmaster who did not want to lose his job or again from the contractor who carried the mail from one post office to another. We have established a rural mail delivery service in those localities. And I challenge the members from that province to go back home and ask users in Iona, Alma, Cherry Valley or Somerville if they are satisfied with the programs that the Liberal government has implemented since 1968 without receiving an affirmative answer. Mr. Speaker, the proof that they are satisfied lies in the fact that they recently elected Mr. Campbell as Premier of Prince Edward Island with an overwhelming majority.

• (3:40 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, if there is a delay in mail delivery in Canada, the cause is not the closing down of small post offices in rural areas, but rather the mail handling problem in large centres such as Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and Winnipeg.

Hon. members who opposed the program of closing down small post offices and establish-