

Post Office Act

exactly the same as the Postmaster General. Both parties are similar. Put them in the same bag, shake it and the first one to come out will be exactly the same as the other one.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

[*English*]

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, in my few remarks today I want to speak directly to the amendment before the house, submitted by the members of the official opposition, to the effect that this bill be not now read a second time but that the subject matter be referred to a standing committee for further consideration. What has transpired in the deliberations of the house today has reinforced my thinking in this regard. I had hoped to speak last night but we got into a new aspect of the debate. Actually, however, I am very pleased that I am speaking now following the earlier events today. The house leader in response to a plea that this debate be set aside in favour of a matter that I as a member from western Canada regard as being of much greater priority, namely, the agricultural emergency, confirmed my viewpoint that the government from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) down is out of touch with the priority needs of this nation.

If we were to follow the good precedents that have been established in this house during recent years there is no reason at all why we could not deal with this complex matter in committee. Everybody recognizes that the amendments to the Post Office Act, as they have been brought forward by the minister, involve a complex subject which could be detoured temporarily into the responsible committee to make way for the farm legislation, which has been pending ever since this house opened. We could deal expeditiously and much more intelligently with the subject matter of the post office bill in a committee and in the meantime get on with a subject of greater priority. Then, the post office bill could come back to the house and I am sure the debate would proceed much more expeditiously. Instead, the member of the government charged with the responsibility for guiding the day to day business of the house, the house leader, has used the old threat that we have seen used far too frequently under Liberal administrations. He has said: "You will get the farm legislation as soon as you have dealt with the post office legislation." Mr. Speaker, this is a complete misunderstanding and abuse of the whole matter of priorities, and my intention to

devote my remarks entirely to the amendment before the house has been reconfirmed by what has already transpired here today.

The minister made a comprehensive statement yesterday which indicated that as the member of the cabinet responsible for the administration of the Post Office Department he had approached the subject from a very narrow perspective. As I listened to his remarks he sounded more like a voice from the board room rather than vox populi. I was not in the house when the initial debate on the resolution took place; I was away at the United Nations at the time. As I reviewed the debate, however, it seemed to me that the same emphasis was given to the matter by the minister at that time; it was an urban-oriented approach. Now the minister has partially backed down and has conceded that there are special communications problems in the more outlying areas of the country, particularly in the rural areas. But he still has not come to grips with what I and the members associated with me in this party regard as the fundamental issue, that is, the purpose and the functions of such an important service as the post office.

● (3:40 p.m.)

It is obvious from press statements and from what the minister himself has said that there has been unhappiness within the Liberal caucus. The hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) indicated in his excellent speech yesterday that the committee of 35 was formed to approach the minister on this important matter. It is obvious that the minister is amenable to suggestions because he responded to some of the requests of that committee. How much more important it is that this matter be taken into a much larger committee arena than the committee of 35 and referred to a committee drawn from all parties in the house so its members might put the Postmaster General in touch with the viewpoint held in various parts of the country and draw him away from his urban-oriented viewpoint and what I feel is his complete misunderstanding of the important function of the Post Office Department as a communications system in this nation. How much more effective it would be if a committee were brought into operation for this purpose.

Over the past ten years, because of the growing complexity of national affairs we have been gradually resorting to a greater, more effective and efficient use of the committee system of the House of Commons. The