

Postal Service

rightly expect from the minister a decision to the effect that it will remain open.

[English]

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, in supporting the motion as presented by the party to which I belong I am pleased to have the opportunity of attempting to impress on the minister responsible for communications his obvious lack of regard for all the people of Canada in instituting changes in the Post Office Department for reasons which, it is quite evident, he alone feels will provide a better service and at the same time save money for the government.

To be more specific, I refer to those rural communities of Canada which in many cases are so isolated that one of their most important and vital forms of communication is the small post office. This action by the Postmaster General is another substantial reason for the feeling of disillusionment I find as a new member. I thought that after coming here I would see and experience the ultimate in organization and planning—the smartest minds in the country charged with responsibility for introducing or amending legislation for the common good of all Canadians.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, I find a group of ministers across the floor who may have a high standard of intellect in theory, who can spout and expound supposed words of wisdom regarding their dreams for the future of communications, who can write pages of fancy words of wisdom about ways in which to improve our country, but who certainly do not get their message to the intended receivers even when they put all those pages of words in an envelope and send it through the Post Office. I found instead, Mr. Speaker, a group of ministers vying with each other for popularity and power, in some cases by going around the country kissing teenagers. And in this case we have a minister who is kissing in another way, by playing post office.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we see evidence of intellectual studies and task forces. This time we have been told about an "inside task force". The department intended to make a study of the effect of closing post offices across the country under certain circumstances—an on-the-spot survey to determine whether or not to close uneconomical post offices in communities where fewer than 30 families live or where revenue amounted to less than \$1,000.

In my district alone, this would mean the closing of 60 out of 90 post offices. It would

[Mr. Gauthier.]

completely cut off the people from any form of communication, further isolate them, and deprive them of the only form of contact with the outside world. Many of these post offices serve not only one small community but five or six surrounding communities spread over a wide area. Things are inconvenient enough as they are now, and to deprive local people of this due public service is not only undemocratic but downright discriminatory.

I was interested to look back at one of the recent issues of *Time* magazine and read the Postmaster General's prediction that within six months of the changes in the Post Office Department being put into effect the esprit de corps of the postal employees would be the highest ever. Mr. Speaker, I do not have the time in which to discuss the esprit de corps of the many thousands of postal employees across the country, but I can tell the minister that the moral of citizens in some 70 per cent of the communities in Newfoundland which are threatened with losing a decent postal service was never lower. I can tell him, too, that the esprit de corps of the many postmasters who have given devoted service to the department for many years was never lower.

I did not find this out by sending in a task force, either an inside one or an outside one. I found out through a process of simple dialogue and discussion with the people concerned—people who do not have a union or anyone else to speak for them but who continue to serve the department and, what is more important, to serve their neighbours in their communities without concern for time or remuneration.

Let us consider for a moment the results of my contact with the hon. gentleman's employees. One postmaster, classified as a revenue postmaster group 16, in my riding is getting a salary of \$2,700 a year. I was astounded to find that out of this salary he operates a government-owned post office in a government-owned building and pays the government \$305 a year for rent. He also gets the magnificent sum of \$32.33 for operating the C.N.T. office in the same building—but he has to pay \$30 a month for janitor service.

An hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Marshall: Just a minute. He gets an increment of 4 per cent of his annual salary for holiday pay, which amounts to \$108, but in order to go on leave for two weeks he has to hire another postmaster for relief work at pay which amounts to \$116.50.