

# "Wild sessions" erupt on Canada Post debate



**On The Hill**  
With  
Garth Turner

**OTTAWA**—What do you think about the post office?

Last week the president of Canada Post, along with a crew of his officials, came before the committee of the House of Commons which I chair. We had two pretty wild sessions, and at the end of the hearings there was a motion made to conduct a full-scale enquiry into the operations of the post office.

This week, the committee should decide whether or not that's going to happen.

As I sat there, watching the grilling take place, I couldn't help but think of Limehouse and Terra Cotta and Belfountain and the other rural post offices here in the riding of Halton-Peel.

I think it was just a day or two after the federal election last November that Canada Post let me know the post office in Limehouse was going to close. A month or two later they told me about a scheme for reduced hours at four other locations, including Inglewood. And just over the last while there was real concern that postal service in Terra Cotta would be disrupted.

As a lot of people know, I was bothered by all those incidents - and I found myself more than a few times on the phone saying loud things to the boys at Canada Post. On the one hand are people like Liz Armstrong, who speaks eloquently for the lobby group Rural Dignity, saying Canada Post is gutting service in our community. On the other is the post office itself, bragging of increased hours and increased locations, and now a \$96 million profit for the crown corporation.

The stories are so different that it's tough to know who's really giving you the straight goods.

So, being a Member of Parliament, and now chairman of that Commons committee to which the post office reports, I have a better chance of finding out.

What I've learned is that Canada Post wants to operate like a private-sector company. It plans on making a lot of money, bringing out new products and investing a ton of cash in new trucks and equipment. The president, Don Lander, is an aggressive executive who is running the place like a boot camp.

I've been to the head office in Ottawa, and into the high-tech command centre there. It feels like a war room, but I'm not sure exactly who the enemy is. I sure hope it's not rural Canada.

Last week one of the newspapers here carried a story with the headline "Political influence saves Post Office - Canada Post denies Turner had a role."

It was about Terra Cotta. The post office there is in the general store, and a dispute had erupted between Canada Post and the owner, Ted Rombough. Ted thought he was being offered too little for the postal franchise there and the Ottawa guys were digging in their heels.

In the end, however, Ted apparently got the terms he wanted. I gather everybody compromised a bit, and the mail flowed as usual.

Di I get involved?  
You're damn right I did. That's my job. I talked to Ted and regional postal officials. I talked to the national director of rural services, and I talked to the president himself. I don't know if any of this played a role, or if saner heads just prevailed on both sides. All I care is that nobody's letters went undelivered.

To be honest with you, my experiences here in our communities with the post office leaves me with a few questions. I had a chance to ask some of them last week. Are profits being generated through higher stamp prices and decreased service? Or is it really a case of more efficiencies and smarter management?

I don't know yet. The enquiries in Ottawa are not yet over. Along with other MPs, I am not yet satisfied with the answers. It's my hunch postal authorities have not seen the end of the committee room.

And it's my commitment to you that - above all - nobody lays a finger on the post offices in this area without a hell of a fight from me.

Well, just a couple of more weeks are left in the current session of Parliament, before an expected summer break.

On one hand, it will be great to get back to the farm for a few weeks. On the other, it means the final days here are literally jammed with events.

Last week the House of Commons committee which I chair held hearings into credit cards - asking questions about whether consumers pay too much for credit or get sufficient information about the cards themselves. Not everybody came away happy with what they heard - including me.

At this point (and we have three more hearings to hold) it seems like the way interest is calculated has become so complex the average card user has no way of knowing if he or she has been fairly charged.

And we found that the "grace" period on Visa and MasterCard - that time when interest is not charged - is largely a myth. It only

applies if you pay your card balance off in full every month. A partial payment doesn't save you any interest charges - something most people are completely unaware of.

After the week, there's reason to believe the committee may recommend changes - which should put some bankers into orbit. Whatever happens, the bottom line will be to do all we can to protect consumers.

You may be aware that our hearings got off-track on the very day they started.

The Consumers Association of Canada came to appear as a witness, and some MPs objected to the fact notes given to the committee were in English only, with no French translation.

What happened that night was quite extraordinary. For over 40 minutes, I listened to speech after speech denouncing the Consumers Association for insulting French-speaking MPs, the committee and Parliament itself. As chairman, I tried to ride herd on an increasingly emotional group of people.

Finally, a motion was put not to even hear the witnesses. I had to call a vote, and the motion carried

without a dissenter. (As chairman, I can't vote.)

In rejecting my compromise that the notes simply be withdrawn, the committee has raised a few eyebrows around this place. Why, some ask, can't witnesses come and testify in English if they want to?

The issue is more complex in its detail, but the fact remains that MPs that night sent out a troubling signal. The whole incident just shows me again that politics can be the quicksand of life. Needless to say, I've invited the Consumers Association back to the committee.

Last time I looked, this was still a free country.

I had a chance in the House of Commons last week to talk about garbage, landfill sites and some of the things which happen when governments get paralyzed on an issue.

Every bag of garbage I put out at the end of my laneway now ends up in an incinerator in New York state. That's because the Region of Halton has no more landfill capacity available.

That American incinerator, by

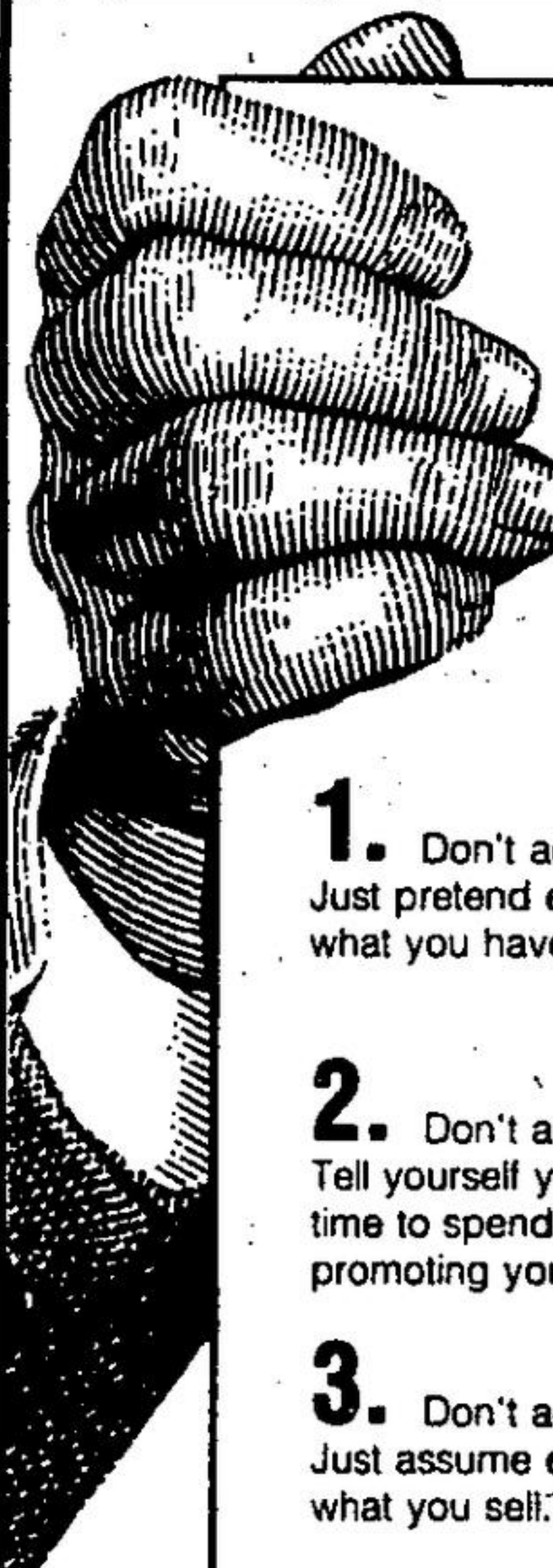
the way, is a polluting one - with a portion of the emissions certainly finding their way back across the border into Canada.

Meanwhile, the search for a new landfill site in the region has pitted municipalities against each other. Millions of taxpayer dollars have been flushed away as communities sued one another and hired consultants to prove the next dump should be in the other guy's backyard.

This bothers me. It's wasteful in both an environmental and economic sense. All that money - and not an inch closer to a solution.

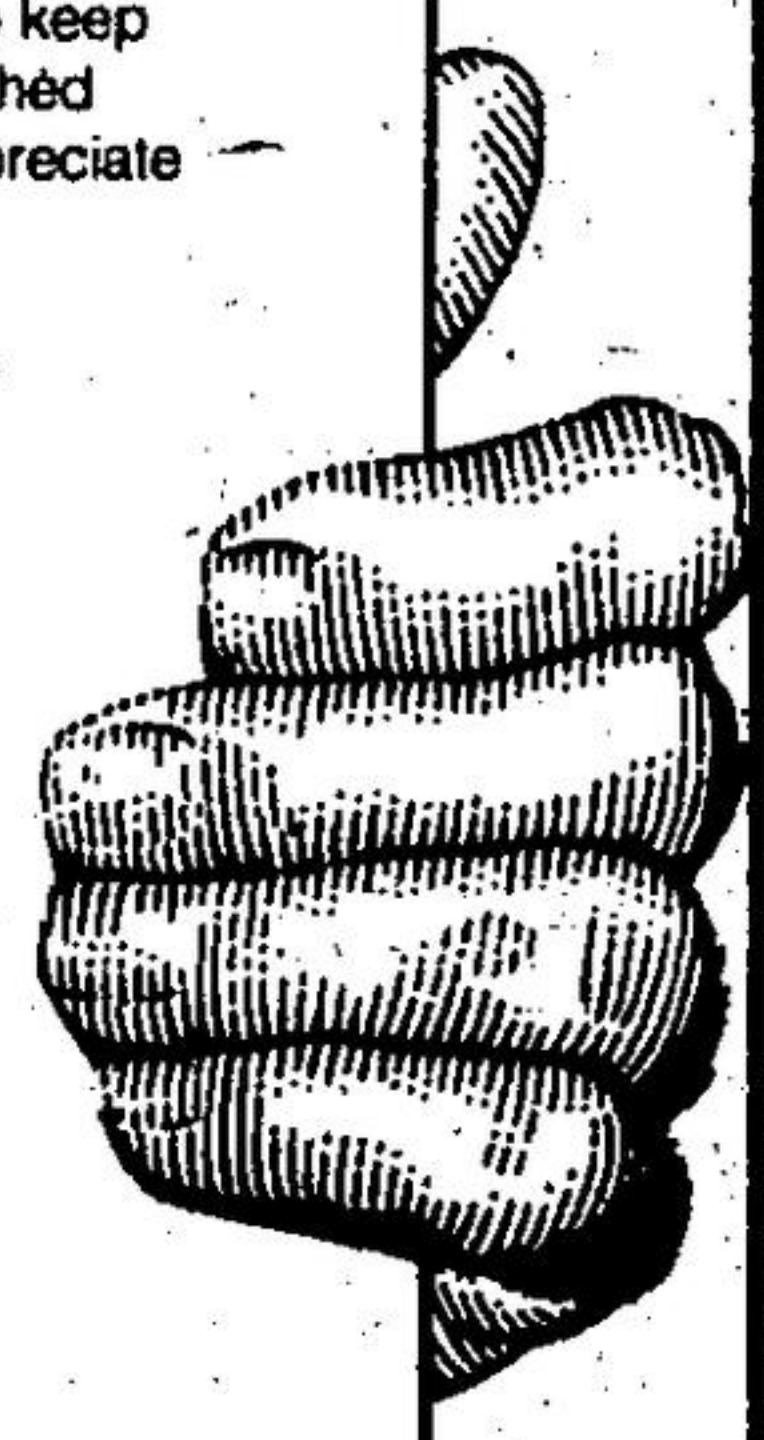
So I told the House that maybe it's time for politicians at all levels to come together and form a super-agency for waste management. The feds should work with the province, the regions around Toronto and the municipalities themselves to get serious about the problem.

This, of course, doesn't mean just digging holes and pushing our garbage in. Instead, it means serious, and effective, recycling efforts. We need to recover and reuse and rethink. The waste stream has to be reduced, not just channelled into a new landfill.



## How To Kill A Business In Ten Easy Steps

1. Don't advertise. Just pretend everybody knows what you have to offer.
2. Don't advertise. Tell yourself you just don't have time to spend thinking about promoting your business.
3. Don't advertise. Just assume everybody knows what you sell.
4. Don't advertise. Convince yourself that you've been in business so long customers will automatically come to you.
5. Don't advertise. Forget that there are new potential customers who would do business with you if they were urged to do so.
6. Don't advertise. Forget that you have competition trying to attract your customers away from you.
7. Don't advertise. Tell yourself it costs too much to advertise and that you don't get enough out of it.
8. Don't advertise. Overlook the fact that advertising is an investment in selling - not an expense.
9. Don't advertise. Be sure not to provide an adequate advertising budget for business.
10. Don't advertise. Forget that you have to keep reminding your established customers that you appreciate their business.



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## Canada Day parade set for Ballinafad

By BETTY SOJKA  
Ballinafad Correspondent

The place to be on Saturday, July 1, is Ballinafad. Come join in the fun to celebrate Canada's Birthday. The day starts with a parade at 11 a.m. Kids and adults are being asked to participate in the parade. Come dressed in a costume, decorate your bike, drive your old vintage car, put together a float, or dress up your pet. All are welcome and more the merrier for a successful parade. There will be prizes for the best participants. Please come to the east of Shortill Road at 10 a.m. if you would like to be in the parade. Judging will be at 10:30 a.m.

After the parade, there will be a lunch which will include hot dogs and pop. The park will be officially opened. At 1 p.m. the Ballinafad Ladies will be taking on local dignitaries in a game of three pitch. Also at 1 p.m. there will be a variety of games and races for the children. After the ball game there will be tea and dessert served to end the day. For more information on the great Canada Day celebrations, please call Doug Lorrimer

at 877-5318.

Tuesday, June 20 was the last U.C.W. meeting until after the summer. There was a good attendance of about 30 as the ladies were joined by their husbands. Grace McEnery read scripture and prayers for the Devotion which had the topic of caring. What A Friend We Have In Jesus was the hymn chosen for the evening. Doris Lindsay was the guest speaker. She showed slides of Russia which were taken when on tour with a farm group last fall. All attending found the slides very interesting as so little is known about the day to day lives of the people living in Russia.

Ballinafad Ladies had a rough time this week when they couldn't get their bats going. They lost to Black Brigade 8-6 on Tuesday, and then to the Mauraders 7-4 on Thursday, June 22. Good defence kept the score difference small. Lisa Longstreet made a terrific running catch, grasping the ball at the last second at her knees when playing centrefield against Black Brigade. The Ladies play again on Wednesday, June 28 at Prospect Park in Acton, at 6:30 p.m.