

Post Office Act

Three months later, on September 29, 1967, less than a year before the present minister began his crusade for a black ledger, the minister's predecessor said, as recorded on page 2689 of *Hansard*:

We are starting right now to have a deficit on first class mail. Our estimates forecast, with regard to the first class, indicates a deficit of over \$5 million right now. I can tell hon. members that next year the deficit will be up to \$7.7 million and costs are continuing to rise.

• (4:30 p.m.)

The estimated deficit was \$7.7 million, but the figure I have just quoted for 1968-69, extracted from the elaborate white paper, is \$16,148,000. This is a substantial gap. In June, first class mail was making money, but in September the red ink was flowing freely. Perhaps the adverb "freely" is not a good one to use. My hon. friend says "liberally". Now we are talking about a figure of \$16 million plus. This is not exactly precision forecasting. I wonder whether the former minister was using those up to date sophisticated computers used by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) or, and this is even more harrowing, was the present minister using those sophisticated predictors whose advanced calculations were going to make Einstein's work look like child's play? Of course, they were out about \$400 million. But I am wondering about the computation. What about these elaborate figures in the white paper? They may be as solid as the rock of Gibraltar or as reliable as the Holy Writ, but because of the former minister's trouble in this connection and the substantial miscalculations of the Minister of Finance I submit that further elucidation and a little more sustained examples would be in order.

I should like these figures to be discussed and examined in full before a house committee. I should also like a chance for the experts to discuss them, not the experts in the post office but the particular users of the post office who will get it in the neck if this legislation goes through. Some of these figures are fascinating. I looked at the breakdown of costs and I discovered that for the sortation of United States publications it takes the sum of \$2,223,888. How precise that figure is!

An hon. Member: And no cents.

Mr. Macquarrie: And no cents. There are no figures in that column in this document. I have a picture of sorters in some large post offices who do nothing but sort the *New York Times* and *Life* magazine. If any of these newspapers should be on strike, and it often

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

happens, I suppose these persons would be laid off immediately and we would have a little saving. Or I can think of the little post-mistress in the rural area who is paid so much a day for sorting copies of the *Christian Science Monitor*. This is the kind of calculation that causes one to wonder. I want to speak as moderately as I can because I think so much of the minister who is piloting this bill through the house. When I look at some of the charts my eye focuses on *Time* magazine.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Yes, that pet.

Mr. Macquarrie: I wonder whether *Time* magazine has perhaps been a little more kindly treated in this elaborate calculation than our Canadian daily newspapers. Having asked that question I ask myself why, because we started out by being invoked to think in terms of principle, equity, and so on.

An hon. Member: And a just society.

Mr. Macquarrie: Surely these are matters which in a just society we must reflect upon for more than half a day or part of an afternoon. Do I see in this white paper a recognition of what the Post Office Department does for other departments? Are these charges being entered in the accounts and estimates of other departments or are they still charged to the post office? If this is the case, it seems hardly fair to raise a hue and cry about the appalling deficit in this department if in fact others should share it. The minister recognized this in his annual report for 1968, page 9, as follows:

The Canada Post Office has also taken credit for the services provided to other departments; these services do not compensate for the costs assumed from the other departments.

I am not sure what that statement means but I think it means something close to what I am trying to suggest. We want to plan realistically; we must have realistic figures and must have an opportunity to examine these figures fully and carefully. I am not departing one iota from my suggestion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Does the minister wish to ask a question? It is entirely up to the hon. member for Hillsborough to accept or reject the question.

Mr. Kierans: The hon. member says he wants reliable figures. Is he suggesting that these figures are not reliable?