

committee was to be organized; on two occasions it was announced it would meet for organizational purposes. Yet on each occasion, shortly before the time announced for such meetings, and in one case only half an hour before, they were cancelled, as I understand it, on the instructions of the government whip's office.

These estimates—I refer particularly to those under the umbrella of the Department of the Secretary of State and the Department of Communications—involve some \$140 million in public expenditures. Expenditures for which the Secretary of State is responsible represent the fifth largest supplementary estimate. Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge that this committee will ever be established prior to the expiration of the time available, which is due on some date in December.

I am told informally that the committee might be organized on Thursday of this week, which would, in practice, mean there would be no meetings to discuss matters of a substantive nature until next week. This would leave the committee with little more than a week with which to deal with budgetary items having to do, for instance, with bilingualism, new initiatives in the area of national unity, the activities of a number of Crown Corporations, including the Canada Council, the CBC and the National Film Board. Then, turning to the responsibilities of the Department of Communications, we find the CRTC which was the subject of considerable debate this session.

Mr. Speaker, as the presiding officer of this House you are the protector of the rights and privileges of members. The Standings Orders make it very clear, in Standing Order 58(15), that supplementary estimates shall be referred to a standing committee or committees immediately. We now have a ridiculous situation in which, although the reference was made on November 9, meetings of the committee, after they have been scheduled, have been cancelled unilaterally by the government whip. In effect, this means the committees are unable to meet and do their work.

To my mind, this situation calls for a clear directive, perhaps pursuant to an agreement among the House leaders, which would set dates for these meetings in a binding way. As things are at present, the government whip can cancel meetings for reasons which are unknown to us, and this makes our job even more difficult.

**Mr. Cafik:** Mr. Speaker, I think the question raised by the hon. member for Egmont is one of legitimate concern, and I hope it will be resolved through discussion among the House leaders. Having regard to the timeframe he mentioned, there is no doubt all hon. members would like to see this matter dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity, and I can assure the hon. member that as deputy House leader I shall look into the matter to make sure it is dealt with as quickly as possible.

### *Post Office*

[*Translation*]

### POST OFFICE

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

**Hon. J.-J. Blais (Postmaster General):** Mr. Speaker, at the stage of statements by ministers, I am pleased today to deal with a subject which I feel is fundamental and essential to the administration of my department.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, as I conceive my responsibilities as Postmaster General, they are twofold. First, I must provide a communications service to all Canadians and, second, I must manage postal operations on a business-like basis. This is a mandate which has been and continues to be difficult to discharge. Because 23 million Canadians are able to communicate daily on an instantaneous basis, they expect, and are entitled to, the most reliable delivery service we can provide in the case of packages and written communications.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, for reasons beyond the control of the Post Office, its management and work force, expenditures have continued to outstrip revenues. Inflation, rising material and labour costs, competition, and labour-management relations are some of the factors that add up to some very somber reading along the bottom line of our balance sheet. Rapidly rising costs have outstripped the growth in revenue. Our deficit is growing larger by the year. It reached \$90.9 million in the fiscal year 1972-73; in fiscal year 1976-77 it had risen to \$568.8 million.

[*English*]

This deficit is heavily financed by you, by me and by every other taxpayer because it comes out of general government revenue.

Hon. members will recall that the blue book defines the object of the Post Office as "to provide postal service to the people of Canada at reasonable rates and at a standard of service adequate to meet their needs without incurring subsidization from general taxation." But now, Mr. Speaker, the taxpayer is paying a higher percentage of postal costs, and the postal user is paying less. It is time we began to restore the balance by reducing the cost to the taxpayer, while increasing it to those who are actively using the service.

I should like to take a few moments to give the House a quick rundown of some of the reasons which have led to the present situation and then indicate what we are doing about them.

[*Translation*]

First the costs. A substantial portion of these does not vary with volume. While the mail volume might drop, the number of points of call we must serve will continue to grow. This gives rise to further requests for Post Office services. And as the number of new addresses grows, our costs grow in a way unrelated to income. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, successful federal policies have created the growing number of homes which makes our task that much more difficult.