

Post Office Act

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words on third reading of this bill. The hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) has spoken for the east coast. I want to speak for the west coast and support very strongly his motion for a six months' hoist. I am sure that if the people between Halifax and Vancouver were to be asked their opinion most of them would support this motion, because the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants has put very well one of the major points on which they feel strongly.

The postal service is one of those basic services which people feel should not necessarily be carried out on the basis of whether it is making a profit or carrying its full weight. People believe it is a basic and essential service which should be subsidized if necessary. They feel that the old, reliable postal service is being chiselled away in many ways. This proposal is a very heavy item at a time of rising living costs. A number of my constituents have written to me pointing out that the proposed expense would be a hard one to bear because it is one they did not expect. They were not prepared for an increase in the rates of a service as basic as this.

They are also annoyed about other matters. They are very much annoyed that while we are again ready to increase the postal rates to ordinary people, we have been subsidizing publications which are well able to subsidize themselves. Reference has been made to *Reader's Digest* whose mailing costs the government has been covering to the tune of about 31.3 per cent and on which we have paid about \$800,570 since the last increase in postal rates. Also, 34.7 per cent of the mailing cost of *Time* magazine has been paid and a total subsidy of \$721,527 has been paid to them.

The ordinary people of this country who have to bear the brunt of inflation, unemployment and rising living costs—which is how they translate inflation—are hard put to it to understand why this should be so. They feel that if the Post Office Department is so hard up, the first thing it should have done was to come down hard on publications such as *Time* magazine and *Reader's Digest* which are well able to pay the extra cost, rather than taking it out of the hides of our very hard working citizens. I must say that their reaction is right and that they are talking good sense.

I do not want to give the impression that all is wrong with some of the changes that are being made. I say to the Postmaster General that I received several complaints concerning the guaranteed mail service but there was very quick and satisfactory action by the Post Office. They were largely individual complaints, and they were attended to. I am complaining about mail costs as a whole being too heavy for a large percentage of ordinary users of first-class mail.

When I spoke on this matter before, the only other time that I spoke about it, I referred to another complaint which is being generally voiced. When we increased postal rates on the last occasion it affected many charitable, educational and trade papers, a great many of which had to go out of business or greatly restrict their circulation. Now more of them are worried.

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel).]

• (9:30 p.m.)

The hon. member for Halifax-East Hants mentioned organizations to which I referred previously, such as those which handle the Christmas seals and Easter seals and the War Amputees who look after key tags. These organizations operate on a purely voluntary basis. If their mailing costs are raised they will have no choice but to greatly curtail their services and by curtailing them they will curtail their ability to raise funds or they will have to disband.

The ordinary people of the country feel that this is not fair. They feel that this bill proposes to let off those elements that are well able to pay a higher rate and that it is coming down too heavily on those for whom the mail is their only direct means of communication. Most of the people I am talking about cannot afford long distance telephone calls, telegrams or other methods of making quick communication; they are absolutely dependent upon the mail for that purpose. Some hon. members may talk in lordly terms about communications of other sorts, satellites and all that sort of thing, but the people about whom I speak must rely on the mail.

To raise postal rates by one or two cents or even more may not sound bad to many people here but it will hurt the ordinary people for whom the mail is the only means of communication through which to do a little business across the country or to keep in contact with relatives in other countries. So, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our party I am very pleased to support the motion of the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants.

If the minister is having an in-depth study made of second-class mail, this will provide a wonderful opportunity for him also to make an in-depth study of first-class and other classes of mail and see if he cannot devise a class that ordinary householders can afford, and let organizations like *Time* and *Reader's Digest* pay their way instead of calling on the little people to subsidize these foreign publications which really do not require subsidization.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, we have listened to two persuasive speeches, one from the east coast and one from the west coast. I speak tonight as spokesman for the centre of Canada because my constituency is located right in the heart of the nation, as a matter of fact close to the geographic centre of the North American continent. I can assure the hon. members who have spoken in favour of the six months' hoist that the sentiments of the people of that part of Canada are exactly the same as those they have expressed. It is obvious that even in this House there is no enthusiasm for the bill that is before us. I do not think even the minister is very enthusiastic about it, because throughout its various stages he has handled it in a rather apologetic manner.

I wish to speak just briefly, to emphasize once again that according to the minister, the Post Office has embarked on new policies which he anticipates will streamline its functioning, increase its productivity and