

golden egg. I would think that a loss of \$1 million in postal revenue would make the deficit problem with which the minister is trying to deal in the amendments now before the House significantly more acute.

We can be sure that these worth-while charitable operations will not be discontinued. The department's proposal will only mean that some other method of appeal to the public will have to be adopted by the associations concerned. Unfortunately, this has been the case with so many Canadian associations and businesses as a result of the inefficiency and maladministration of the Post Office Department over the past three years. It is significant that the volume of mail in 1968-69 was 4.9 billion pieces and that in 1969-70 this has decreased to 4.8 billion pieces, notwithstanding a substantial increase in the number of businesses and households served.

This clearly shows that the Post Office, by its confused policy, by its reduction in the service made available to the people has been losing business to other carriers. This is a factor which the minister should take into account in addition to the basic point that the voluntary, charitable associations which are operating to assist the physically and the mentally handicapped deserve as much consideration as do the groups working for the blind. They are all in the same category because the regulations set out in the Post Office Act give the minister power to make special arrangements and concessions.

The amendment I am placing before the House tonight spells out in detail what I have in mind. I am sure this is a motion which all hon. members will desire to support. I am sure there will be almost unanimous support for the amendment as it stands. I do not wish to pursue this argument at length. We hope we can deal with all the amendments tonight. But I should point out that third-class mail does not place undue pressure on the resources of the Post Office, because such mail is handled during off-peak periods.

Then there is the additional argument that if financial assistance generated by the activities of the voluntary groups does not become available, the government of Canada will have to pick up the tab. It is a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. I trust that for all these reasons the minister will accept this amendment without further debate. By so doing he would make it possible for us to conclude discussion of this bill tonight.

Mr. Stan Schumacher (Palliser): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak for a few minutes in support of the motion put forward by my hon. friend from Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) and in particular to say a word or two on behalf of the tuberculosis and respiratory diseases associations of this country which would be adversely affected by the new rates this bill would establish.

About 2½ years ago these organizations were subjected to an increase of 66½ per cent in the postage rates applicable to their work.

• (9:30 p.m.)

We now find that the rate will probably be increased from five cents to six cents per letter in about two weeks'

Post Office Act

time, with the possibility of a further increase in the next two years. The government is losing sight of the good work these voluntary organizations perform. If they are discouraged further, the government will be subject to a further increase in the cost of social endeavours. What we might be doing is operating a shell-type game or robbing Peter to pay Paul. I suggest the work done by voluntary organizations such as the War Amputees of Canada, the tuberculosis association and the council for the rehabilitation of disabled people will become bankrupt and will have to be supported by the government rather than private endeavour.

It is also apparent from past experience that whenever the public sector becomes involved in these areas the cost goes up. The policy of the government appears to be that it knows best how to do these things and that the private sector does not have the capacity to do a good job. I warn the government against continuation of that attitude in this area, although I realize warnings have been expressed before and have gone unheeded. In any event, I feel I should again make the plea.

Speaking from experience as a member of the Kinsmen club of Drumheller which worked with the Alberta Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases Association for a number of years, I know that a great deal of money has been raised and put to good purpose. Over the past 40 or 50 years these organizations have demonstrated they are not lacking in ability in respect of this type of undertaking. They are working for the good of the country in the future. They should be recognized and a special mailing rate should be set. I urge hon. members to support the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Côté (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, again I do not wish to question the merit of the work being performed by benevolent associations. The problem is not there—

[English]

I believe, indeed, that all welfare, charitable and similar institutions serve the public interest and undoubtedly some are affected to a greater degree by increased postage rates. Literally speaking, I could by virtue of the powers vested in the Postmaster General by the Post Office Act establish preferential postage rates for non-profitable, charitable or voluntary organizations. Yet I can assure the House that a decision to introduce such a measure would be fraught with far reaching consequences extending beyond the scope of the Post Office. A measure such as that advocated would more or less compel the Postmaster General to set special rates of postage based on welfare or social considerations.

The question would have to be resolved as to how the Post Office could pass a value judgment on the merits of particular charitable, humanitarian, welfare or voluntary organizations, of which some 35,000 are registered with the Department of National Revenue as charitable institutions for income tax purposes, as opposed to organizations engaged in other worth-while endeavours, without