

*Supply*

have a rational basis on which to judge requests for postal rate increases. That is what I wish to suggest.

The Post Office and the Minister responsible for the post office have asked for an increase in first-class rates of two cents for this year and they have also asked for increases in other rates about which they have not yet told us. They will only tell us about that when it is too late to put a stop to the process.

The Post Office has said that it wants to tie postal rate increases now and in the future to inflation and to something called uncontrollable costs. I would suggest that postal rates be tied to quality of service and measurable improvements in service. Over the last few years, people have seen a drastic deterioration in the postal service. They are fed up with continued requests to accept a deterioration in service at the same time they are asked to pay more for the service. This has been the trend for some time and needs to be reversed.

● (1150)

One justification for a rate increase is the Post Office deficit. We used to call the deficit a public subsidy for postal service. In the last couple of years it has been relabelled as a deficit, a negative term. The plan is put forward as a way to eliminate the deficit, but it will not. It will again relabel it as a subsidy for specific services and add that in when determining whether the Post Office has balanced its books or not. Even though the Post Office is claiming it will eliminate the deficit, if you closely examine the plan it will not.

Commercial rates are not adequately examined in this plan. They will go up by a greater percentage than the first-class rate, but the plan does not acknowledge that they start from a lower base and will therefore remain drastically lower than first-class rates. We have to ask whether or not commercial rates can make a greater contribution to Post Office revenues. Then there is the question of the rate for periodicals and weekly newspapers. That rate is subsidized and this plan throws a cloud over those subsidies. It raises concerns about whether or not the publishers of those periodicals will remain viable.

I now want to move directly to the question of service. How long does it take to get a letter? What is happening to rural service? Whether it goes across the country or from Winnipeg to Vancouver, people are fed up with having to wait a couple of weeks for a letter to be delivered. We constantly hear complaints about aggravating delays. The plan promises on-time delivery. For example, mail will be delivered in urban centres within a couple of days. There are standards for inter-city and interprovincial mail. However, these standards simply water down existing standards. They allow more time for mail to be delivered and the Post Office can then claim a higher percentage of on-time delivery. Performance reports put out by the Post Office itself indicate that these standards held out as a new level of performance have in fact been met in the past. This is simply an attempt to put a new face on an old and inadequate service.

As to rural mail delivery, the people in rural communities are up in arms over this issue. They are worried silly about reductions in service. Last weekend I was in Thunder Bay and visited some of the smaller communities in that area. The people there are dependent upon mail for their sense of community. Small businesses depend on the mail for delivery of parts or other equipment. The Post Office plan projects a continuation of the reduction in rural service and closure of rural post offices. The people affected want this stopped. They want a recognition of their right to equal and adequate service. They are shocked that the Post Office, backed up by the Minister, is planning to introduce these so-called super-mailboxes into rural areas. Instead of having mail delivered to the lot line or the home, people will have to put up with these supermailboxes which have been found to be inadequate in urban areas.

Then we have the question of the red mailboxes disappearing from city streets. People now have to travel greater distances to deposit their mail. People in suburban areas are angry at the discrimination involved when their neighbour gets door-to-door delivery and they have to put up with these superboxes.

We have a continued reduction in service, a deterioration in the quality of that service, and at the same time an increase in rates requested in the plan presented by the Post Office to the Government. The Post Office should be retreating from this plan but it has already been approved.

How did this plan come about? What was the process? It was developed behind closed doors and that is one of its major failings. Every time we point this out to the Government, the Government in turn points to the Marchment Commission Report. It says the Commission went across the country and asked people what they thought. However, the inadequacy of that response lies in the fact that when Marchment went across the country he did not have the Post Office's projected plan so he was unable to consult specifically. He could not ask the people how they felt about this specific plan or that specific plan and whether they had any comments on it. There has simply been no public involvement in the development of this plan. It would have gone ahead but for the fact that when the Minister presented it to the Government caucus they revolted, and quite legitimately. They said there was no way they would stand for this kind of reduction in postal service.

● (1200)

The Minister sent it to committee. Unfortunately the committee has limited its activities to questioning the President of the Post Office. It has failed to have other witnesses appear before it or to travel across the country so that ordinary Canadians could tell the Government what they think of the plan of the Post Office. The plan was developed behind closed doors, and we see the result.

I should like to round out the picture. Postal services have been inadequate up to this point in time. Its plan is a disastrous one because it intends more of the same. Its intention is