

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

It seems to me that in light of these criticisms and in light of the growing concern which is being felt in many areas, the time has come for the minister to give us an evaluation and an assessment of these programs. I think it was summed up very well by Mr. T. N. Brewis of Carleton University who said the following at the conference, as reported in the *Globe and Mail* of October 20:

—there is need for a greater public evaluation by DREE of its efforts. What assessment has been made in ministerial statements has been unsatisfactory and he accused the department of supporting its arguments with “phony” figures.

In view of the money which is being spent, in view of the desirable objectives which this department was set up to achieve, I think the time has come when Parliament has a right to expect from the minister of this department a statement as to the extent to which it has accomplished the goals set out for it, whether or not the programs being carried on have brought about the results which were required and whether the Canadian people are receiving value for these expenditures.

• (10:10 p.m.)

Mr. James Hugh Faulkner (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reply on behalf of the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) as follows: The report of the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council has been received and carefully read. It contains a good deal of useful information and analysis of a number of interesting suggestions. For this reason it will receive intensive study in the department. The report also contains a number of criticisms of departmental programs. To the extent these are constructive, or so intended, they are welcomed. To some extent, however, they seem to be based on misconception or lack of perspective.

The hon. member undoubtedly knows that many of the department's programs are based on a joint planning process that is dependent on a close working relationship with provincial governments. The department is engaged day in and day out in a planning exercise with its provincial counterparts and this exercise is now generating in each of the areas in which the department functions with a comprehensive development strategy. The programs of the department are subject to continuing evaluation, but if changes are considered necessary they will be made. No such changes, however, are contemplated at the moment.

POST OFFICE—STEPS TO IMPROVE SERVICE AND AVOID EXORBITANT COST FOR MAILING LETTERS

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, on October 20 I directed a question to the Postmaster General (Mr. Côté) with respect to a statement that had been made in the city of Winnipeg by one of his officials, supported by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Osler), to the effect that if efficiency did not increase in the Post Office Department in the immediate future, Canadians would be paying 26 cents to mail a letter.

In recent months discussion of the Post Office service has been somewhat quiet compared with what it was immediately following 1968. We have a new Postmaster General and I think hon. members have been waiting to see how he handles the mounting problems of Post Office

[Mr. Douglas.]

service. It now appears that the pattern that took shape in 1968, with services decreasing and costs increasing, is still present in the postal service of Canada.

Tonight I would like to ask whoever will speak for the Postmaster General some very specific questions. When this Postmaster General took over he said he would be adopting a more humane and understanding approach to Post Office problems. We accepted this at face value because, after all, postal service is the basic and most important communications service in any country. I suppose it was the first government service to be established as a public utility for that purpose. But the volume of mail handled by the Post Office still continues to decrease as a result of rather exorbitant increases in rates, along with a declining service. For example, by January 1 of next year the cost of mailing a letter in Canada will have increased by 100 per cent since 1968.

I want to deal specifically with protests that have been raised by the Letter Carriers Union in their publication “The Courier” of September-October, 1971. They point out that there has been a 30 per cent reduction in postal service in recent years. Obviously, there is dissatisfaction among letter carriers. I think it goes without saying that if you are to have an efficient postal service you must have a happy work force.

I would like the comments of the government spokesmen on this point. There can be, and there have been reforms. There was the assured mail delivery reform which was supposed to guarantee 24-hour delivery service to the major cities in Canada. This is not actually an improvement because Canada has had air mail delivery for 20 years. In the ordinary course of events, were it not for the decrease in efficiency over the past three years we should have expected the service to be substantially improved by assured air mail.

Recently there was the announcement of the all up overseas rate which provides air service to all mail originating in Canada at the rate of 15 cents per ounce. This is a five-cent increase on an overseas air letter because the air mail form is no longer used. I understand there has been such a log jam of air mail destined for overseas that there is now a considerable delay, mainly because no reciprocity has been achieved for this service with countries in Europe and other parts of the world. This is one of the matters put forward as an urgent necessity when the Postmaster General originally made his announcement in the House. Now we are to have the zip code which is supposed to bring the dawn of a new age in postal efficiency. It could, if the Canadian public accepts the mechanization of the post office service.

I want to specifically get the answer that I tried to get the other day. Is it the policy of the government to insist on a profit in this basic communications service? This seems to be the thought behind the various changes in operation and direction of the Post Office over the past three years. They say the Post Office is losing money. I would remind hon. gentlemen on the treasury benches that the CBC loses \$200 million in public funds, we are spending \$70 million to launch a Canadian satellite, and railroads and other basic means of communication all lose money. Why does the Post Office Department, why does the Postmaster General, why does the government