

Post Office Act

I should like to ask a few questions regarding the effect of these new postal regulations on the postal workers involved. I am speaking of the men and women who belong to the postal unions and do the distributing and sorting of the mail. I presume that the Postmaster General and his staff have done a great deal of research on this problem. I cannot visualize anyone coming into this house, with all the facts and figures on the circulation of mail, who has not done a great deal of work on how these measures will affect the workers involved.

It appears to me that we cannot have a sharp reduction in mail service without some lay-offs. If one day's delivery is eliminated, as is going to be done in the urban areas, it would seem that some postal workers will have to be discharged from the service. I may be wrong. I should like to ask the Postmaster General to advise this house what the cut-back will be, if any, in the total number of postal employees throughout the country. In plain words, are there going to be any postal employees discharged and, if so how many?

I should like to ask the Postmaster General how many man-days will be saved by eliminating the sixth day of delivery service in urban areas? I presume he has this information too. What will be the average saving by the Post Office Department in this regard? May I also ask the Postmaster General what specific measures he has in mind whereby employees of the department will, in five days, do six days' work? Obviously they cannot do in five days the work they have been doing in six days. If staff is to be reduced the seriousness of the problem will be aggravated. What has the minister in mind to maintain services at their present level?

● (2:40 p.m.)

Will workers be forced to speed up their work or will the department hire extra staff to take care of the increased work load? Also, has the minister talked with representatives of the unions about this matter? What is their attitude to the contemplated change in employment conditions?

Yesterday a question was directed to the Postmaster General in regard to bi-weekly newspapers. I did not hear his answer. Looking at the report of yesterday's proceedings I gather that newspapers published twice a week are to lose most of the concessions which were available to weekly papers. It seems to me that in this regard newspapers in the category I have mentioned have been

[Mr. Harding.]

placed in the same category as daily newspapers in that they have lost free mailing privileges, something the dailies did not enjoy but which the smaller weekly newspapers did.

Small, weekly newspapers will be seriously hurt as a result of the increases the minister has announced. Without doubt other questions will be asked. I should appreciate hearing some answers from the Postmaster General to the questions I have asked this afternoon.

Mr. Kierans: Perhaps I might reply to some of the questions which have just been raised. The hon. member asked if we consulted with the officials of the unions. May I remind him that last night I read a telegram from the president of the postal carriers union, Mr. Houle, in which he said he felt happy about the bill. He wished us all speed and congratulated me for it. I might say that that is also the position of Roger Decarie who is the leader of the other union in the Post Office Department. Both men have been consulted and informed about the bill, and they are extremely happy that we are working toward the concept of balancing the budget and charging for the service rendered to the people of Canada.

It was announced some time ago that by working five days a week we expected to save \$13 million. We have never contemplated laying anyone off, and neither I nor my officers want to cut back to a five day contract any six day contracts at the expense of our rural mail carriers. Normally, when a worker is asked to work for 40 hours a week instead of 45 hours he takes home the same pay. In any event, we expect to save over \$13 million.

The hon. member for Hillsborough and the last speaker asked how it is possible to cut back 1,499 jobs and still not lay anyone off. May I remind hon. members that when you have a staff of 48,000 there is considerable attrition owing to retirement, job changes and so on. Among 32,000 public service employees the attrition rate is about 2,000 employees per year. Also, the jobs of many letter carriers will be redundant. We have instituted a policy of holding down the expansion of positions. We already expand at the rate of 1,100 openings per year and it is hoped to fill jobs which become open with those whose positions are declared redundant. None of this comes into effect, of course, until February 1, so that we have considerable time in which to plan. Taking into consideration normal attrition and the expansion of certain job categories, we feel that full and efficient use will be made of the people affected by this change.