

*Post Office Act*

and because it is very necessary for this means of communication to be adequate to serve the public, the post office has a duty to see that with its monopoly position in its eagerness to arrive at a balanced budget it does not cause considerable dislocation to the economic health and efficiency of the business of the community it serves, especially the productive portion of our economy. In these days of inflation and the increased wages that are necessary, I am sure that rates must be increased to bring the postal deficit more closely in line; but the curtailment of services is also of great importance, and as I have stated previously, before major changes are made there should be a considerable study of this problem.

For many people in rural areas Saturday is the biggest day of the week and on this day much business is transacted. Indeed, should there be only a five day week in rural communities it would seem that Saturday closing should fit in with the general business of the community and should not be subject to an arbitrary ruling by Ottawa in respect of the number of business days in a week.

With this in mind, I believe that this whole problem should be referred to committee, wherein various interested people and business interests could put forward their representations. Possible rate increases over a period of years could be considered. This would be of special value to small newspapers because they would be able to absorb increased rates and their subscribers would become accustomed to them.

The doubling of the subscription rate of \$20 for a subscription to a daily newspaper carried in the mail is very high, especially in the year in which the increased rate is imposed. Whether people living in rural communities should have this very large increase suddenly thrust upon them is a question to which considerable attention should be given. For many magazines, particularly rural magazines, it will amount to an increase of 350 per cent. Should this rate increase come about suddenly, it is possible that many businesses will not function any longer. There is an irreducible minimum below which the post office cannot function. Few business ventures thrive by increasing their charges and decreasing their service at the same time. It might well be that the post office will be pricing itself out of business in certain areas.

Indeed, we may well look at some of the mechanics of the post office. I have here an editorial from a small newspaper in Swan

[Mr. Ritchie.]

River, the *Swan River Star and Times*. The editorial appeared in the issue of July 8, 1968 and states:

We find that a letter mailed in Mafeking, addressed to Birch River (15 miles) passes through its destination, on to Swan River (50 miles) untouched, then on to Dauphin, 110 miles south, to be sorted and returned to Swan River where it is picked up by a second carrier for delivery in Birch River the next day.

This can be said for a letter from Kenville addressed to Swan River (11 miles), which is carried west to Durban, then to Benito, then back to Swan River and on to Dauphin, to be returned for delivery in Swan River the next day. What sort of nonsense is this?

Mail from this area cannot cross the border of Saskatchewan to points en route to Yorkton, Arran, Pelly, Whitebeech and elsewhere. These villages and towns make up part of the vast shopping area centered by Swan River. The mail for these points must again travel from Swan River to Dauphin to be routed to Yorkton for sorting and distribution, travelling some 400 miles to reach its destination, at times less than 25 miles away from the mailing point in Swan River. It is not hard to realize the inconvenience to people in the matter of mailing drugs and other important items of necessity to everyday life.

If present methods of handling local intercommunity mail cannot be improved, we appeal to the Postmaster General to reinstitute the pony express which, we are confident, will meet local need with credit and give the public the service it rightfully deserves at considerable reduction in cost.

Mr. Speaker, the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) has said that the post office is no longer an institution but a function. Many of the rates have not been raised for 17 years, and it seems incongruous to move so quickly to institute new rates which will drastically change the pattern of the mail within a few days. I would strongly urge that this bill be referred to committee, where many interested people who will be very seriously affected by this measure can have their day in court.

● (8:10 p.m.)

[Translation]

**Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, I quite frankly did not intend to take part in the debate about the Post Office Department because I felt that enough speeches had been made already. But after listening to those who have held the floor for many hours, I will say simply that the days and the hours follow one another. Since I came to the house—this is my seventh year here—I have learned to do my homework before getting up to speak, especially when we are dealing with a new minister from our province. It is always