

*Supply—Post Office*

of the revenue account, and then the department could come to parliament and ask us to vote the deficit. I think that is something that should be looked into for the future. The minister spoke of the great study of the rate structure and of the different costs involved in handling letters, and so on. He said we should increase the postage rate in order to meet expenses. He did not say anything about the studies they have made into the costs of operation. Where can the department cut down on expenses? In my general observation of post offices I have come to the conclusion that a great many of them have outdated equipment. The equipment with which they are moving and handling mail is very, very outdated and a great many manhours are spent that could otherwise be saved. I think efficiency could be stepped up and a great deal of the cost of operating our post offices could be reduced. If the minister were to undertake the same amount of research into this matter as he took into the question of raising the postal rates, etc., he should be able to balance things out a little better than is the case at the present time.

My remarks will be very brief, Mr. Chairman, and they will be on four subjects only. They are, the rural post office; the post office savings bank; a little bit on public relations as it refers to staff, and so on; and new stamps. With respect to rural post offices—I refer to those which are classified as rural post offices—where the postmaster is responsible for the facilities and the premises from the revenue he obtains, I know of one in particular in my own riding where the revenue from the post office is not sufficient for the postmaster to maintain reasonable premises. This post office is really a disgrace. I do not think the people of Canada should be asked to patronize such post offices and have no other choice. These post offices are in such a condition due to the fact that the operator does not make enough revenue to be able to improve the premises. I am sure this condition exists pretty well across the country. My feeling has always been that the post office in any community should be the No. 1 building in that area. Its appearance, its landscaping, its flower boxes and everything else should make it the No. 1 building on the main street or in that particular area. It should be a credit to Canada, in other words.

The post office savings bank operation is something that we do not hear very much about, but I was very interested in looking

[Mr. Hales.]

at its operation as described on page 24 of the 1963 report. I see that this operation is going in only one direction, and that is downhill. It certainly is not being patronized to the full extent. I would humbly suggest that if it is the intention of the Post Office Department to carry on this savings bank operation, for goodness sake get out and advertise it; get out and say it is there and its facilities are available. I venture to suggest that very few people know it even exists. I presume that these savings banks are in outlying areas of Canada where there may or may not be other banking facilities available. However, I am sure the house would be interested in hearing a little more about the operation of this branch of the Post Office Department. It is interesting to note that it was set up in 1868 and has been operating ever since. I was also interested to note that the act does not make any provision for dormant accounts. I am sure there must be many dormant accounts in this savings bank. How many are there, and what is going to be the ultimate disposition of these accounts?

With regard to public relations and staff regulations, the hon. member for Kootenay West mentioned this matter, but I have in my hand a circular letter that was sent out by the recording secretary of the federated association of letter carriers, which says in one paragraph:

There is a directive from the Post Office Department that "unknown checks", or "spying" is to be done on the letter carrier. However, it is known that some offices and postal officials abstain from this, thereby avoiding the use of this method of punishment. On the other hand, there are some offices and postal officials who go out of their way to catch the letter carriers, then punish them with the recommended "salary reduction".

I hope the Postmaster General will give serious consideration to changing this system of salary reduction punishment which was instituted by his predecessor. Postal regulations impose a salary reduction on employees for petty or unintentional discrepancies. By this method an employee is forced to work without pay. I would humbly suggest that it would be better to impose a day's suspension or more, according to the seriousness of the infraction. In other words, why should a man be asked to work and not be paid for it? He is entitled to a day's pay for a day's work. I am sure the Postmaster General will look into this matter.

There is one other minor point in connection with public relations. I think the post office could do a much better job of public relations in communities. I think of the wonderful