

*Postal Service*

somehow temporary. But bad service has by now settled down into a bad pattern. It has become the expected thing. And this is not tolerable in a modern industrial nation.

Quite apart from the letters all hon. members are receiving almost every day of the week from people complaining about the difficulty of getting their mail through the postal service, the major complaint is from many church, farm union, co-operative and association papers, small publications which are put out in the interests of the membership or particular group and which under the new rates imposed by the Postmaster General are being asked to pay three, four and five times as much as they paid previously. As a result, these papers are going out of business or are having to cut back from weekly to monthly publication. Speaking in the House of Commons last fall, when the new postal policy was first unveiled, I said:

I agree with the Postmaster General in one respect. I have in mind his statement that the Canadian postal service is one of the best, if not the best, in the world. I would only qualify this by saying "it was" rather than "it is". I am not sure it will continue to be the best under the proposals the hon. gentleman is putting forward.

I do not often regret that I am right about anything, but I really regret that I was entirely correct and that under the present policy our once splendid mail service, by which five billion pieces of mail were distributed every year, the vast bulk delivered without error and within 24 hours, is a thing of the past.

I and my party have urged for many years that business mail and publications which are distributed for private profit should be made to pay their way. This has been our position, and we complimented the minister when he moved to bring it about. But we also asked that the question of non-profit publications should be referred to committee for a proper review, and that small publications which are not published for profit should be allocated a rate which would not curtail their circulation and communication.

It is very easy for those on this side of the house to rise on this subject and make a very critical attack on the postal service. I used to be in that service at one time. I admire the service. I think the minister is well motivated; I believe he attempted to do what he thought was the right thing. What he has done, in effect, is try to perform two or three surgical operations at the same time. This is a very dangerous situation with regard to both surgery and the postal service. We in this

[Mr. Mather.]

country have had eight postmasters general in the last ten years. I hope the present one will not take it as a personal criticism when I say that my party and I hope he will not be the last Postmaster General that we have.

[Translation]

**Mr. C. A. Gauthier (Roberval):** Mr. Speaker, I will try to be rather brief since I have only been allotted ten minutes.

I should like to draw the minister's attention to a number of facts, after all the criticisms he has just heard.

I realize that running his department is an overwhelming task. I wonder, however, whether he has been pursuing the right aim, either to make the Post Office a profitable concern or to provide efficient service. In my opinion, since he runs the department, he has tried rather to make a paying business out of the department which, like the Department of National Defence, is not a department meant to make money but a commercial department.

It is primarily a service department, as the Department of National Defence is meant to ensure protection and I think it should first aim at service. I think the best example of lack of service is the closing down of rural post offices. In my riding, it is certainly one of the areas in which the minister has not tried his best to provide an adequate service to the people.

In my own riding, three post offices have been closed down and a fourth will soon be. I wonder if the minister and his officials have looked fully into the problem.

I have not dwelt on the other problems, because the minister had some arguments. But here is what the minister wrote, in a letter addressed to me and dated November 4:

We are now taking the necessary steps to close down the post office at Saint-Stanislas, Que.—

—a rural parish.

—which serves only 28 patrons.

They will now be served daily on the present route of Mistassini, R.R. No. 3.

Moreover, this road will be extended so as to serve daily the 25 users who now receive their mail through Saint-Stanislas, R.R. No. 1.

I will remind the minister that on February 25 he received from the council of the parish of Saint-Stanislas a petition signed by 40 objectors, and I can assure him that even today there are in the village of Saint-Stanislas 40 users rather than 28. I am not sure, but if the minister can guarantee, even to these 40 users, that the mail will be delivered to them at their door, that will be a lesser evil.