

Postal Rates

er services in Ottawa and from coast to coast. Does the minister intend to do anything about that?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I would say to the hon. member that all of these matters are very much under study. I have a much greater understanding of the difficulties the Post Office is facing, both through competition from the public and the private sector, than I had when I became Postmaster General. I am addressing my mind to many of the matters, in fact I would say to all the matters, the hon. member raised in his speech.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Chairman, I should like to pursue basically the same question. At the time when I had the privilege of occupying the position presently occupied by the hon. minister, we instituted a pilot project involving premium mail which was designed to remove as best we could some of the "bleeding" of our most remunerative mail through the private couriers. At that time an arrangement was made with certain government departments to have them act as part of the pilot project in terms of using premium mail to hasten the implementation of that program. Could the hon. gentleman indicate at this time whether the Post Office is in a position to use the experience it has gained through the pilot project in order to implement a national program?

● (1700)

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, we have a priority post program under way which stems from the study which the hon. gentleman is referring to.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the minister a question about the location of post office boxes for the purpose of mailing letters. This matter has been raised by two or three of my colleagues.

Rather than having the Post Office make strict locations of post boxes according to distance, could the location of boxes be done more on a sociological basis or on a study of the make-up of the population? In Regina, for example, there are three or four areas where half to three-quarters of the population are senior citizens who now have a longer distance to walk through snow banks. Surely it would make more sense to have a higher concentration of mail boxes in an area such as that and a lower concentration in areas of high income.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I understand exactly the point which the hon. member is alluding to. In the city of Winnipeg, as hon. members know, I have given orders for a number of post office boxes to be returned to places to meet that specific problem.

The Chairman: Order, please. I regret to interrupt, but I have a point of order from the hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Nickerson: Mr. Chairman, perhaps you can clarify a matter of order. I understand that we are now supposedly discussing clause 1 of Bill C-11. Clause 1 is very specific. It deals with certain orders in council that were made. I see no

[Mr. Peters.]

reference in clause 1 to the matter of post office boxes or any of the other matters that have been brought up by certain members. Could you direct us as to whether or not we are to actually debate only the specifics of clause 1?

The Chairman: The practice in Committee of the Whole has been that, whatever the content of clause 1, we allow general discussion. Of course, it should remain within the confines of the Post Office, or the particular subject matter. The hon. member will recognize that it is not easy for the Chair always to be on its feet to request an hon. member to speak specifically to a bill. If we did that, half the time of the House would be lost in a dialogue between the Chair and the hon. member who perhaps would speak longer trying to make a case about how his mail boxes are related to something in the bill. By giving some latitude and by allowing this practice of general discussion which has developed over the years, it has proved to be the best way to get results.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Chairman, my question is for the minister. It concerns courier post, premium mail or, as he calls it, priority post. This system was also dependent on ongoing negotiations with the main unions relating to putting that program in place. If I recall correctly, a great deal of co-operation had been obtained from the Union of Letter Carriers and this co-operation has been most helpful in carrying through that priority post. Has CUPW also joined in offering that sort of co-operation so that the system can operate smoothly?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I am not aware this afternoon of any particular difficulties with respect to any of the unions in the Post Office in that regard.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Chairman, the hon. gentleman, also in reply to a question from the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), was offering his support to his senior officials; at least, that is the interpretation I got from his answer. I welcome that support. It is well needed because I think all workers in the Post Office, including the administrators, have to receive the minister's support.

I ask the hon. gentleman whether he recognizes, having said that two years ago was approximately the time when the Post Office came around the corner and started to climb upward, that he did not recognize as well that that was the period of time when the two gentlemen mentioned by the hon. member for Nickel Belt were employed in their present capacities.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I am sure the hon. member would not want to pursue a question of particular individuals in the Post Office, whether they be in unions or in management. I agree with the hon. gentleman who has had experience in this area that it is the duty of the Postmaster General to stand by his employees whether they are in management or on the labour side, unless there are particular reasons why disciplinary action or other measures should be employed.

Mr. Rose: Mr. Chairman, may I say that I do not think the minister has any position that he could take at the moment, when asked in public about a couple of names, other than to