

*Post Office*

Reduction in the number of mail service days in the week, cut from six to five, was carried out in the interest of the same things, Mr. Speaker—efficiency and economy. Do we have more efficiency and reduced costs? No, we do not. All we got out of it was reduced mail service. It would appear to a reasonable person that even this government would learn in time that their policies are not working and that it is time to change their whole approach to the operation of vital government services. This would not reflect against the intelligence and the integrity of those who are charged with running government departments and services: it would have the opposite effect. If the government should indicate in even a small way that it is aware that it has been on the wrong track and is willing to heed good advice, then it would begin to look responsible. I doubt very seriously, though, that that will ever come to pass.

**Mr. Jim Fleming (York West):** Mr. Speaker, we are well on into a Friday afternoon. I am sure that while all of us in this House share a real interest in, and concern for, our Post Office and the job that it does in keeping communications open amongst our people, the businesses of our country, as well of course as our international business, we are also anxious to get home to our constituents and constituencies and to the work at hand. Therefore, I will be brief. It is important, I think, as a government member to rise and speak in defence of our postal department and of what I think is the outstanding job it has done, especially in recent years.

As I see it, the motion strikes at four or five particular areas. It is suggested that there has been a deterioration in the Post Office Department during the last six years. It expresses concern about the closing down of rural post offices. It is always a concern, I am sure, of any member of this House when services to constituents are cut back. The motion discusses the reduction of six-day service to five-day service, and suggests there is a rush to automation that threatens the morale and job security of employees. It then points out that we have had increased postal rates, that these have been to the detriment of the postal service and have imposed a burden upon the public. I should like to discuss those points one by one.

● (1610)

On the issue of the reduction in rural post offices, I must first admit in all honesty that I do not have extensive personal experience in the matter, but when such criticism is put forward in this motion one or two things come to mind. While it should never be taken that this is a reason to cut back a service if it is vital to our people, no matter what numbers are involved, there has been a reduction in rural population and a massive growth in urban population. To some degree, as long as a basic and good service is provided in rural areas, when you are talking about the economy and government, realizing that any service put forward by government is paid for by the taxpayers, you must realize that some reductions in rural service may well be justified so long as the basic standard is maintained. We have better roads, better transportation and better means of moving around in our rural areas, and the service of the Post Office has improved considerably in

[Mr. Scott.]

that transportation has become much more rapid in recent years.

Taking all these facts into consideration, and realizing the necessity in all areas of government to consider the economy, I have yet to hear any argument which can offset the need for reduction where it is justified. It is very easy to stand in the House, as has happened during the question period from time to time, on this issue of the Post Office and its services and ask the minister to explain why a letter took three and a half weeks to arrive at its destination. Nobody is more of a whipping boy than the Post Office Department, Bell Telephone or the Income Tax Department. These are the easy departments to get at because, in fact, they are vital to our communications and to the function of government with respect to the Income Tax Department. They all interrelated in the ability of one Canadian being able to communicate with another and business sectors being able to function; but they are also easy departments to knock.

During my experience of five or six months as a member of the House of Commons representing the constituency of York West, I have received less than a dozen complaints about the postal service, in spite of the fact that my constituency is one of the largest in Canada with a population of 140,000. The complaints I have received, I have dealt with frankly because I think nothing can operate on a 100 per cent perfect basis.

I have sent correspondence to the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) which must have arrived quickly because I have received expeditious replies. In fact, any inquiry I have made, be it about the need of a senior citizen for a post office box closer to his home, or why it was moved, and complaints about mail being delivered to the wrong address, has been answered quickly. I received a prompt reply from one of my local post offices regarding a sincere investigation, not only from the Postmaster General but from the local level as well. There was co-operation and sensitivity, and the reply was fast. That not only suggests to me sensitivity in the Postmaster General's department but also a properly functioning Post Office.

There are many other areas I might use as an example of the difficulty of achieving 100 per cent efficiency in any service involving people. I am sure if I asked other hon. members in this House whether they had ever ordered goods from a large department store via a mail order catalogue, had they dealt with a credit card company, had they checked the tapes they received with their groceries after they had done their shopping every week and searched for mistakes, they would tell me that there is always evidence of mistakes being made. This is something we must always watch for. We must always be on guard and we must demand a sensitive Post Office Department, even as I realize that in the private sector and in business there is frustration and that in dealing with somebody like Eaton's on a mail order basis there are faults.

There are faults—but the question is, are they answered and are they corrected?

When we consider this resolution and the accusation about the deterioration of Post Office services in the last six years we must face up to the complications and problems of modern technology, our rapid rate of advancement