

Post Office Act

which has an agreement concerning the carrying of mail all over the world at certain rates. In regard to second class mail coming to Canada from the United States, I think the minister indicated that this involved a cost to us of some \$3.5 million a year. So to that extent that question was answered.

Another question is: What is the cost of handling bulk mail, such as money, comparing the post office rate with that of private security services? By how much do the taxpayers or the ordinary first class mail users subsidize the special delivery service, which under the proposal now made, as I understand it, to close post offices in cities an extra day of the week will have to be stepped up since regular delivery is to be reduced?

Why is there a different rate for second class mail between the Americas, and between Canada and Great Britain? What percentage of second class mail delivered in Canada originates from American publications or wholly owned American subsidiaries in Canada? What was the value of printed matter imported into Canada in the last ten years and carried by our post office without remuneration under the terms of the universal postal convention?

To those questions, Mr. Speaker, I would add another. Ten years ago Canada had the reputation of being in the first rank of those countries working in the field of postal service mechanization. We were at that time experimenting with machinery which I understand was capable of sorting thousands of letters per hour. The minister said something on this general subject but I would encourage him to give more consideration to this subject. My question is: What has happened to the modernization and our technological progress? In this ever-growing computerized world it seems that the Canadian post office, at one time in the van of such progress, has now dropped behind. What is the reason for this, and what is proposed to bring our post office back to its leading and very necessary role in that area?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my wish and the wish of the members of my party that this whole complex question affecting readers, correspondents and publishers be referred for detailed study to a standing committee of this house. I hope that this will be done. If it is not, then I want to make one last recommendation. I should like to see a review body established to hear from the representatives of the non-profit publications the case that those publications may make for

[Mr. Mather.]

exemption from, or subsidy against, the proposed second class mail rate increases.

I began by saying that I would reverse the usual procedure; instead of summarizing my remarks at the end I did so at the beginning. The main point we wish to make is that we support what we think is a very good step proposed at this time by the official opposition, that of having the whole matter referred to a standing committee.

Mr. Mac T. McCutcheon (Lambton-Kent): Mr. Speaker, ever since the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) started leaking tidbits about his proposed reforms in the department there has certainly been a rising storm of criticism about the various details of the scheme. I hasten to point out that it is not my intention to add my voice to this storm. My chief concern at the moment is with the minister's basic concept and with what I believe is his confused thinking in regard to economy in the public service.

Everybody wants the government to cut unnecessary spending, Mr. Speaker. Everybody would welcome greater responsibility on the part of this government when it comes to the disposal of tax dollars. But I would point out that at the same time everybody expects the government to supply to the public those services which are both the excuse for a central bureaucracy and its duty to render to the citizenry. Trying to do away with an essential public service is a peculiar way indeed to proceed.

I have never heard it preached anywhere that public services, such as postal services, were supposed to be a device to raise revenue. If so, Mr. Speaker, what about our publicly owned railway, our publicly owned air line and, above all, our publicly owned Canadian broadcasting service? Why indeed should one public service be expected to make money and these others to run at a loss?

I think it is sensible, for anybody administering a public service such as the post office to try to do the job as economically as possible. I think it would be a reasonable aim to try to break even on the operation. But I cannot conceive that a public service such as the post office should be run like a profit-seeking, private business.

It is perhaps conceivable, that the present Postmaster General should regard his new responsibilities in the light of a private enterprise where profit is God and shareholders must be paid off. After all, he did spend some