

Post Office

that the reason we have such a deficit is mainly the result of putting a vast amount of money into the building of new facilities, the very substantial amount of money expended in mechanizing our operations and the larger sum required to pay our employees better salaries. We have done all this without—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet), but his allotted 30 minutes in accordance with Standing Order 58(13) has expired. He may continue with the unanimous consent of the House.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. members for allowing me to conclude with a few brief remarks.

We have made these substantial expenditures without increasing the tariff. One should realize that in Canada a letter which travels from one part of the country to another does so at a cost of 8 cents, and that is pretty cheap. If we compare that rate with the rates existing in other countries we must realize that Canadian rates for postal services are low, and much more reasonable than in many other industrialized countries.

I have said, and I repeat again today, that it is not our intention to increase the rates. Quite the contrary; we want to keep these rates and we will try to increase our revenues by performing other services or expanding existing ones.

[*Translation*]

This is why, Mr. Speaker, we will do our utmost during the next few months to enable our Marketing Branch to be more aggressive and test other services yielding new revenues and profits. In order to balance our budget, we will ask our Marketing Branch to make additional efforts to make new revenues, but I must sincerely admit that I do not expect the Post Office Department to become a profit-making undertaking in the near future. I think that the Canadian postal service will still show for several years an appreciable deficit, especially as a result of the mechanization of our current operations and that deficit could even substantially increase as early as next year and still further the year after.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that some measures that we are now taking should have been implemented 10, 15 or even 20 years ago. Had those alterations been carried out 10 or 15 years ago, the Canadian postal service would surely be in a much better financial state and would surely be in a position to assure to the Canadian people the service which they expect.

In spite of that, we will spare nothing to improve the service and I am convinced that we will succeed in giving Canadians the service which they expect and deserve.

● (1500)

[*English*]

Mr. Reg Stackhouse (Scarborough East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by commending the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) for his contribution to this debate. I wish also to say that I appreciate very much the courteous and co-operative attitude he has shown in respect of the

[Mr. Ouellet.]

inquiries I have brought to him on behalf of my constituents. I regret that I have had to bring so many to him, but I have always been glad of the reception I have received.

I also would like to join the minister in paying a compliment to the people in his department. He may know them at the top executive level, while the ones I know are the letter carriers and those employed in the local post offices, and so on; but I have always been impressed with the way they have undertaken their work. At a time when there is such a great amount of technology, much of life is rather impersonal and I have always appreciated the personal approach taken by those who are employed by the postal department.

I rise in this debate to speak especially on behalf of those who pay so much to their government and get back so little, the urban dwellers who comprise what has become the largest single community in our society. In terms of the Post Office they have become its number one user. In the three major metropolitan centres of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver alone, 14 million pieces of mail are handled every day. Montreal and Toronto process 80 per cent of the advertising mail of this entire country. What do we find the people of our cities and towns saying about their postal service? Let me quote one of them for the special benefit of the Postmaster General. While this person is not an expert on the Post Office, he has many qualifications that will commend his judgment to the head of our postal services. He is from Montreal, he is a Liberal, he is the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), and he has told the House, "Everyone knows the mails are slow in this country".

The Prime Minister was never closer to the truth, and on this point he could find such agreement he might think he was back in those halcyon days of 1968. Time after time I have been approached by constituents who wonder why it must be that, while they have to pay more for postal service, they can get only less of it. Pay more, get less, is the policy this department has followed. However much the government may try to divert the public with resolutions on language rights, they will find it is this incredible combination of increased costs and decreased services the people will remember. A typical inquiry from a businessman in my constituency asks why it takes four or five days for mail to travel a distance that should take only two to two and a half hours.

Another constituent wonders why mail between Montreal and Toronto takes a week, and why within Toronto itself it may take three days. A third protests her surface mail between Britain and Canada taking just under two months and her airmail between Britain and Canada taking 17 days. One could speculate that it could have been rowed across the Atlantic faster than it came by mail. All of us appreciate that it has been necessary to increase the price of postal service because we cannot reasonably expect the Post Office to be an island of price stability secure from the turbulent sea of inflation around it. On this point we seem to have the statement of even the Deputy Postmaster General, Mr. J. A. H. Mackay, who was quoted in the press as saying:

We knew our service wasn't what it should be, but we were perhaps inclined to blame it on weather conditions and inability of airlines to fly from point to point, thereby delaying our mail.