

Post Office

I am a little concerned also about the suggestion of flexibility. It seems to me that there is now too much variation in the postal service. Rural Canadians get six-day delivery, urban Canadians get five-day delivery, and there are many Canadians in suburban areas who are not quite sure where they stand or where the postman is going to come from and on what day.

As I said at the beginning, I commend the minister for taking this remedial action, but I say to him that it will not be sufficient. The five-day mail service has been a fiasco, and the sooner we get back to six-day mail service, which most countries in the world have, the better it will be for all, including those in the Post Office. Much of the delay in the mail delivery in Canada—and it has been appalling in the last few years—stems from this lost weekend, this blackout of mail delivery from Friday until Monday, which is followed by a backlog of mail that has to be worked through on Monday, and the delays sometimes last until Wednesday. This is part of the problem.

I commend to the minister's attention the recommendations of the Davey Committee on the mass media. I am not one of those who believe that the Senate is a useless body. I hope the Prime Minister in future days will remember my regard for it.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Macquarrie: I referred yesterday to a question based upon the report of the Davey Committee which said something that many of us have been saying for a long time, namely, that the new postal rates were most injurious to newspapers in the country. It also made a very strong statement on the five-day delivery. It said:

What we do urge to assist these (daily) newspapers—and almost all weekly newspapers—is the earliest possible resumption of Saturday mail deliveries. The lost weekend has hit some newspapers—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Macquarrie: May I ask, Sir, what I have done?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member has made an excellent statement but it appears to the Chair that he is ranging far and wide. The statement which the hon. member is allowed to make according to the Standing Orders should be closely related to the statement made by the minister. The minister dealt with only one aspect of the postal services, but it seems to me that the hon. member is going somewhat beyond the very limited scope of the statement made by the minister. That is why I thought I should invite the hon. member to return as soon as possible to the substance of the statement made by the minister in charge of the Post Office.

Mr. Macquarrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your advice. I was merely commending the minister for what he has done and urging him to do a little more. I was quoting one sentence from the report of the Davey Committee on mass media. I do hope that the minister will rediscover still more of this lost weekend and that we will have even more service on Saturday than that which he has announced today.

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

I commend him for the return to normalcy, and I hope that this small step today will be followed by a giant step tomorrow. I also join him in wishing merry Christmas to the postal employees.

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey): Mr. Speaker, the announcement of this partial restoration of the once proud Canadian postal service will no doubt be welcomed by the people in the areas to be affected. I think it is notable that the public of Canada has had very little to welcome from such announcements in the past two years. Under the present government there has been a notable decrease in service and a substantial increase in postal rates, as well as long drawn-out labour disputes. Part of the trouble involved in the Post Office may be related to the fact that in the last 11 years we have had seven and a half Postmaster Generals. They have not been in office long enough to learn the business, even by mail. Like the previous speaker for the Official Opposition, we hope that the announcement today of this small step restoring part of the service that we used to enjoy will be a mere forerunner of many other such steps in line with those suggested for a long time by the opposition. In wishing the minister a merry Christmas I can assure him that his Christmases will be merrier and merrier in line with his co-operation with the logical proposals of the opposition to improve the service.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues of the Ralliement Créditiste, I wish to offer my sincere congratulations to the Minister without Portfolio who is responsible for the Post Office (Mr. Côté) for having announced today the re-establishment on Saturdays of a service that is essential to the people.

Mr. Speaker, the former Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) stated in the House on September 27, 1968, as shown in *Hansard* of that date, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, I have a statement regarding changes in the operations of the Post Office.

Our studies have indicated that several services are no longer required to the same extent as in the past. Business firms generally are operating on shorter hours and on a five day week. There is not, therefore, the same need to provide postal service on week ends when most businesses are closed.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion may I say that the former Postmaster General did not realize that the Post Office is a public service, while the new minister appreciates the fact that the Post Office may have deficits but remains a public service. This is why we congratulate him warmly and encourage him to change the orientation of his predecessor's policies so as to give the Post Office Department back to the population whereas before it belonged to one person only, the Postmaster General.

We want the Post Office Department to be the department of the Canadian people and not only that of a minister. We believe that the present minister is the man for the job and he is off to a good start. We hope that in the new year the minister will continue in this right direction.