

Supply—Post Office

tion with passengers, but the fact remains that the question of transporting the mails is a very complicated one in some parts of the country.

The minister said that business concerns were getting three deliveries a day in certain areas. I would remind him there are business people in parts of my constituency who, if they get an exchange of correspondence in three weeks, are doing as well as it is possible to do under the existing arrangements for the transportation of the mails. I am referring to people who live no further apart than 25 miles as the crow flies, and therefore I urge the minister to assume a somewhat different role from that undertaken by any previous postmaster general.

I think he will agree with me that by and large the Post Office Department runs itself. In other words, if the minister went off on a six months round the world tour, the mails would continue to be delivered quite adequately, because the people who are in charge of the administration of the department are very highly qualified.

Mr. Nicholson: One of my officials here said he would not agree with the hon. member's suggestion related to my going away for six months.

Mr. Barnett: Well, I will just say in reply that my remarks were made entirely out of my own observations and my assessment of the capabilities of some of the people the hon. gentleman is fortunate enough to have in his department. The point I am trying to make is that in my opinion the Postmaster General can assume a very useful role at the point where administration ends and policy begins, because in addition to being the head of his department the Postmaster General is also a member of the government, and my plea is that aside from his particular duties as Postmaster General he should take a particular interest in the development of transportation policy and transportation facilities in this country. This is a job which the officials of his department at various levels—and I have discussed this with them—quite rightly cannot enter upon. I feel that if there is a cabinet committee which has a particular responsibility for the development of transportation policy the Postmaster General should certainly be a member of that committee. This should be a matter of government policy so that the Postmaster General can put in his oar in an area which is so important to the improvement of mail services in this country.

I suppose all of us in this house tend to consider the postal service in relation to the type of constituency we represent. This is because the service provided by the post office is so varied that it is tailored to meet the needs of those who live in densely populated urban communities, or in rural areas or even along the coast of British Columbia in small communities almost isolated from each other. I know the minister cannot work miracles in this field but I am sure if he raises this matter with some of the officials in his department he will learn that the hon. member for Comox-Alberni has pursued this question over a considerable period of time in an effort to resolve some of the anomalies which do exist with respect to giving people a reasonable mail service in relation to their accessibility.

I think that will be sufficient as far as I am concerned in the discussion of the estimates at this time. I do not wish to repeat matters which have been dealt with by other members. But in view of the approach—some members have referred to it as the business-like approach—which the present minister is taking toward the development and organization of the mail service I felt I should like to make this plea that he should take a special interest in the policy decisions made in an effort to improve the transportation by which the mail is carried.

Mr. Watson (Assiniboia): I should like to say a few words on the estimates of the Post Office Department. My remarks will concern the smaller post office in the rural communities. I feel that over the years postal accommodation in these small towns has been neglected. I notice in the 1964-65 estimates that the total figure of \$25,298,000 shows a decline of approximately \$500,000 spent on accommodation compared with the estimates of the previous year.

I have always believed that large projects, including dams, seaways, and so on, take up so much of our attention that the smaller works, the smaller buildings, are neglected as a result. I am not thinking only of the post office, but of all departments of government. I could refer to an item which appeared in the newspaper the other day with respect to a defence establishment no longer required; the assets were being sold for a trifling sum compared with the original cost. I know it is always said that finances are the problem when it comes to building these small post offices. I intend to refer to small post offices which have revenue of, possibly, \$3,000 up