

Post Office Act

class mail to the recalcitrant members of the Liberal caucus. As for the rest, the guillotine of the Post Office Department is to work to the full.

In spite of everything, the question remains open. The minister is impatient to see this bill passed, but if he wants a quicker solution, let him refer the bill as soon as possible to a committee in order to get some good suggestions.

I must first point out the brutality of the suggested increase in rates for second class mail, and particularly for the dailies and the weeklies sent from here and elsewhere in Canada.

Regardless of any other consideration, that increase, by its size alone, is unreasonable. I might be allowed to mention that, if this new rate is enforced, contrary to our demands, it will mean a further expenditure of \$75,000 a year for one daily alone. Up to now, postal charges accounted for about 2.9 per cent of the whole management budget of a newspaper; in the future, they will account for more than 6.4 per cent. This has been decided without previous warning, without any awareness of it nor the least consideration for contract commitments which, in some cases, bind the newspapers for a period of time overlapping the coming into force of the new postal rates. We cannot remember of any economic sector being hit as brutally as this one, these last few years, by a government. We cannot remember of any Canadian government which has behaved in such an inconsiderate manner towards the daily press and which resorted to similar means to express its opinions. Even the size of the additional charges which the Postmaster General and his colleagues are about to impose on some newspapers shows the rash contempt for the role of those communication media.

I am now quoting from a brief under date of October 17, sent to the hon. Minister by *Les Quotidiens de Québec Inc.*

In a democratic system, the citizen has a right to be informed. It is the role of the press—and in particular the written press—to collect and circulate information.

But the net result of the measures now contemplated by your department to solve an administrative problem is to interfere with that right of the citizen to be informed and with the freedom of the press to publish the news.

We therefore submit that those reforms must be postponed so that a more exhaustive study can be made of the problem which makes them necessary and the advisability and terms of the possible application of efficient and fair corrective measures.

That a government should dare to increase so much in a single year the rates for such a vital service as this one is in itself a real scandal that can never be deplored enough. The Postmaster General is trying to justify his bill by mentioning the disastrous deficits that the mailing of newspapers entails each year.

In that regard, I would like to say three things. First of all, I question seriously the calculations on which the Postmaster General's argument is based. He said recently, at a meeting with newspapers editors, that shipment by mail of a daily newspaper like *Le Devoir* or *La Tribune* of Sherbrooke, for example, was costing the government \$385,000 a year, for a total of about six million copies.

Evidently, those figures do not stand up. Furthermore, the member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. McCutcheon) gave to the house the example of the London *Free Press* to place this vital question in its true context. The minister's officials established arbitrary averages which do not take into account all the operations involved in the administration of a newspaper as, for example *Le Devoir*, or *La Tribune* of Sherbrooke, averages which are misleading and unfair, in fact.

Let us take the example of the many thousand copies of Quebec newspapers distributed every day which are carried to Quebec City at the expense of their editors, whether they are for mail delivery by mail or by newsboys, or for newstands sales.

At the point of arrival, some are deposited at the post office, for delivery by the Post Office Department services, some are either directed to the depository or delivered at their destination by carrier. In these last two cases, the cost per copy is averaging 25c.

How can the Postmaster General reach a cost of 65c. per copy in his calculations, when his services are in most cases doing less work than the newspapers to ensure delivery to other categories of subscribers or readers in the same area? The hon. member for Lambton-Kent said in the house that the averages put forward by the Postmaster General seemed suspicious to him, and I agree with him.

Liberal members have the duty to inquire further, instead of admitting with closed eyes that the averages put forward by the minister are correct. He has handed out to the members a lengthy document full of figures to support his argument. This document gives comparative figures on the first and third