

Postal Service

services to be operated at a profit like a private business venture. The essence of government and its chief purpose for being is to provide services for citizens which must be provided centrally and universally. That is why people pay taxes to government. They need and seek certain services and are willing to pay for them through taxation.

If the minister's theories of departmental self-sufficiency were carried to a logical conclusion, we would turn our armed forces into a crown corporation and expect it to show an annual profit. What municipality in this country expects its fire and police services to show a profit? The whole concept is absurd. This might be an interesting point for discussion in a class of first year university students but it can hardly be taken seriously by anyone with maturity or experience in the operations of government.

It is my belief that the minister has constituted a national disaster, and the damage he has already done to our postal services may render them beyond restoration. He might well be replaced by a competent man charged with the task of restoring public confidence in our postal service, bringing postal rates more in line with the realities of the general usage of such a public service, and generally making the Post Office Department tick with its old effectiveness.

I would have no objection if the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) allowed the present minister to stay on in some communications role. He might be quite happy if he were left with his satellites and his computers. But I urge most strongly upon the government that something be done quickly to make our postal services once again reliable, efficient and satisfying to the vast majority of Canadians who are today disgruntled, dissatisfied and despairing of the present Post Office regime of the hon. member for Duvernay (Mr. Kierans).

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey): Mr. Speaker, in rising to say a few words on this question I should like to say immediately that today's discussion on the regrettable state of our postal services is most timely. It is true that the rate of unemployment in the country is now over 5 per cent. It is true that our national air line is grounded. It is true that our passport office is inadequate in the light of modern demands. It is true that the cost of living has increased by a very substantial 1.1 per cent in the past month. With all these troubles it seems to me that the government inadequacy which has probably had the most annoying

effect on the greatest number of Canadians has been caused by the policy of the Postmaster General.

Under the present minister we have seen an increase in the cost to consumers for postal services. He has even put out during his brief time in office an unsatisfactory stamp, one which resists perforation. He has admitted that it is poorly perforated. This probably adds to the cost of the consumer because one is apt to tear off one and a half stamps in trying to get one stamp. This may add somewhat to postal revenue, but at what cost in patience to the letter writer?

In my opinion there was no need to increase ordinary first class rates from five cents to six cents. For many years this service paid its way whereas other services have not.

The greatest public complaint has naturally centred on the substandard quality of delivery service. It has been said that we now have in Canada a five-day delivery service. It takes five days to deliver a letter almost anywhere. Let me quote briefly from one or two publications in reference to our present postal service. I quote first from the *Winnipeg Free Press* which carried an article referring to "the scandal of the century". This is stronger language than I would use because, like other hon. members, I am aware of the fact that there are legitimate difficulties involved in the changeover the minister has attempted to make. Nevertheless let me quote from this article which appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. After stating that present postal services represent the scandal of the century; the article continued:

• (5:20 p.m.)

Since Mr. Kierans' reforms, it has become almost impossible to send a letter within Canada's main centres and have it delivered the following day. Where periodicals are concerned, it's nothing but disaster. Second-class mail is obviously left to accumulate.

I ask the house to take particular note of this passage:

One is almost back in the days of Jalna, when a month's supply of the *Times* arrived by the mail boat to be read at breakfast each day, with exactly one month's delay.

I should like to quote briefly from an article which appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* of May 12:

There has been a limit to how long Canadians and Canadian businesses could put up with the sort of Post Office service they have been receiving. That limit has been reached. While many have complained, they have been hoping that the dislocation, the delays and the losses of mail were