

Post Office

soon afterwards he became an expert on the subject, and now suddenly he is carrying the can for management. There is another problem as well which the Postmaster General has identified. It seems to me that it amounts to a miscalculation on the part of the Post Office Department. For example, they have admitted that the electronic funds transfer is undergoing an embryonic growth, as hon. members can see for themselves when they do business at their local branches, they have all the high-priced help in the Post Office Department, all the economists and planners needed, yet they do not look down the road to see that electronic funds transfers will be introduced and will affect the department.

The Postmaster General admits that there has been a miscalculation in the volume of mail in the Post Office. What are we paying our bureaucrats \$40,000, \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year for? It is a waste of the taxpayers' money if they cannot do better forecasting than that. The minister admits all this. He says, "We have miscalculated" and, "We have a human problem in the Post Office". But what do we get? He announces an increase in the first-class mail rate from 12 cents to 14 cents. I suspect that one cent out of the two cents is for sending mail to the RCMP headquarters so they do not have to go to the Post Office Department to open it.

The minister increased the first-class mail rates by 17 per cent: I worked it out. It seems to me that by doing this he has exceeded the guidelines that we have set for the workers. We have a 17 per cent increase on first-class mail, but what is the increase on junk mail? The minister says: "... there will be appropriate increases in other postal classes and services. Details of the new rates will be spelled out in a news release from my department to be issued today. Postmasters will be given details of the rate revisions."

That is also one of the problems. We are carrying a lot of these newspapers, junk mail, catalogues and the rest of it. The taxpayers are subsidizing all this. Again, the little people are being asked to pick up the 2 cents increase on first-class mail. The Post Office Department officials have miscalculated their revenues, and it is very convenient now for the minister to run to the House and announce an increase in the first-class mail rate. This increase is totally unacceptable to the NDP because, in effect, we are bailing out the Post Office Department.

The people are aware of the fact that there is a problem. The postal workers have called for the establishment of a royal commission to look into the department. Every commission that has studied the Post Office in the past, and every previous postmaster general, has recommended the transformation of the Post Office Department into a Crown corporation. An indication of the state of affairs in the department is that there have been five postmasters general in the last seven years. That is certainly an indictment of the department and an indication that it is topsy-turvy.

If ever there was a need to streamline the Post Office Department by making it into a Crown corporation which would be accountable to parliament, it is now. Now, is the time to do it. Every time the Postmaster General comes here and grabs two cents more on first-class mail, or makes any other

increase in mail rates, we avoid making the tough decision and taking a close look at the way in which the Post Office is run, making recommendations and following them through to ensure that the Canadian people get the best possible service for the price they pay.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat surprised to hear the speech of the Postmaster General (Mr. Blais). I did receive a copy of his speech in both official languages delivered by hand, not by mail, before coming to the House, and I thank him for it; that is probably why I received it and the representatives of the New Democratic Party did not. But, on the other hand, as usual the Post Office is mixed up and consequently the paper was sent to the office of my colleague, the hon. member for Villeneuve, rather than mine although it was addressed to me.

We see once again—and the minister explains it clearly in his mini-speech—that the Post Office is not administered on a businesslike basis. The minister can say that it should be administered that way but he then goes on to prove that it is not being actually administered on a businesslike basis. We knew, and the minister said, that in 1972-73 the deficit stood at \$90.9 million. Logically speaking, a businesslike attitude would have meant trying to reduce the deficit, not passing on the cost of the lack of administrative capability of the minister and his predecessor. And in 1976-77 we have a deficit of \$568.8 million—and that is the minister's figure. He thinks the department is being well administered, administered intelligently, and so it will not look too bad this year because the anticipated deficit is \$717 million. They say they are going to reduce this 1978-79 deficit by increasing first class rates once again from 12 cents to 14 cents hoping to go and get an additional \$126 million.

On the other hand, the same paper says that an increase in mail volume had actually been anticipated which did not materialize. That is quite understandable. This cannot happen with the service offered by the Post Office when it takes a week to send a letter from Ottawa to Rouyn in the riding of Témiscamingue; in many cases, it takes a week and a half to send a letter from a parish in Témiscamingue to Ottawa. They can complain that prices went up, that gas went up, that it costs more to send mail by train than by plane. Now we realize that generally speaking the department is not trying to solve the problem. We do not get the kind of service we were used to in the fifties when we could expect a letter mailed in Montreal for Ottawa to arrive at destination the next day or the day after that. But today we can hardly rely on the postal service. It is so bad that, as some members have indicated, for urgent matters it is better to forget about the postal service and turn to private enterprise instead.

The minister says that the department is trying to reduce the deficit and is still investing money and he talks about sound management; I can give him an example of sound management on the part of his department. Last year the government decided to increase—as it plans to do this year—the postage cost for a letter sent first class mail. This became