

*Postal Service*

There is much I can record: the increase in the cost of stamps, mail boxes, keys, money orders and all the rest. A wholesale closing of smaller post offices and a drastic increase in newspaper subscription rates have also taken place. Even the Easter Seals' campaign for crippled children and the War Amputees service have been hurt, perhaps mortally. There are wickets at which you cannot buy stamps on Saturday even though a clerk stands behind the counter; vending machines that take only old quarters; cheques issued to the employees not written up correctly; zone books, as the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt) pointed out, not in stock yet although the advertisements are in the newspapers. What a litany one can recite!

One of the most recent is the contribution of the minister's department to the great passport hold-up, or should I say hang-up? For weeks after the new forms and the new \$10 charge were imposed, many Canadians were receiving the old forms at post office wickets. These were sent, more slowly and at greater cost, to Ottawa. Delays, new forms back from Ottawa, new \$10 money orders to Ottawa again—no wonder there is a little congestion. What the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) planted, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) watered and the Postmaster General helped to flourish. If I wished to be biblical I would say, "What a Trinity".

I do not believe that this is administrative fallout from certain disagreements between the Postmaster General and the Secretary of State for External Affairs on certain external policies. I would not be so cynical as to believe that. Rather I am convinced it was a case of some faithful postal employee conscientiously following the ministerial edict. The Post Office must pay its way, it must go into the black. Would it not be uneconomical to get in new passport forms before all the old ones were used? A bit far-fetched? Perhaps. But possibly I am reading too many of the minister's speeches. By his futuristic word-painting of telephones in the sky, wired cities, waves of the future he seeks to throw stardust in the eyes of those who look at the mail service. I ask simply that his department do the elementary job of getting the mail of the Canadian people to its destination efficiently, speedily and surely.

● (3:30 p.m.)

I am sure that before the day is over we will see the minister's expertise in skywriting. We will hear of the many studies he has

under way. But, Mr. Speaker, studied inefficiency is still inefficiency. Task forces, consulting firms and study groups may all have their place, but surely it requires no elaborate sophisticated apparatus of investigation to know that things are bad and are getting worse. To misquote Goldsmith, "The mail accumulates and morale decays."

I say in candour, Mr. Speaker, that personally I have the greatest respect for the minister. He has achieved great things in scholarship, in business, in provincial administration, and he still speaks well. I enjoy his addresses, but whether or not the Secretary of State for External Affairs and the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Cadieux) do, I cannot say.

But the time has come for the minister, excellent talker though he is, to act and not to talk. I wish I could express confidence in his willingness to take meaningful action. But I must conclude from what he has said in this house in recent months, in the committee, and on the many and varied platforms from which he has spoken on so many subjects that today we will hear the same tired catalogue of excuses that he has accumulated to counter charges of inefficiency in the Post Office.

The first of these famous excuses is that the major part of the mail continues to go through, that complaints represent a small and insignificant proportion of the mail carried. This excuse is not acceptable. This excuse is becoming paler and paler as complaints pour in from every corner of the country. That 70 per cent or 80 per cent of the mail goes through is small comfort if it is your letter, your key document, your business form that has gone astray or arrived too late to serve a useful function.

Another of the minister's favourites, which I have no doubt he will trot out today, is that only since he became Postmaster General have people started to watch and look at whether their mail arrives in time. It would be strange indeed if people had not counted the time from date of postage to receipt even before he was minister. The regrettable fact is that Canadians everywhere know that the mail service is just not what it was and what it should be, and as a result they are making the Postmaster General the butt of their jokes and the object of their anger.

No doubt the minister will later speak glowingly of the numerous reports he is commissioning. Had I spent a quarter of a million dollars on reports, one of which was a report on which further reports I should buy, I too