

Post Office Act

I had the honour to be the chairman of the public accounts committee some years ago when Mr. Wilson was the deputy postmaster general. He appeared before that committee and gave an excellent exposition of the facts. At that time we dealt with this particular subject. We questioned him for several hours during which he went into statistics dealing with first, second, third and other classes of mail. I think he convinced the members of that committee of those facts, and this was reflected in the report which was filed and became part of the records of this house. Mr. Wilson in effect said that from time immemorial the policy of the Post Office Department regarding first, second, third and other types of mail had been such and such. He dealt with the question of subsidies, which the minister has now refined. He calls it a subsidy and we accept that, but we refer to it as indirect taxation.

In any event, when a custom is changed it has been traditional to grant an opportunity to be heard to those people who will be affected. In other words, they should have their day in court to make their views known. The minister has said he has received briefs. We have all received briefs and representations. I like to challenge a man who has made a statement by asking him to give the basis on which he has made the statement.

I read the Glassco commission report regarding the post office. That commission gave high marks to the Post Office Department in respect of its method of selecting statistics in relation to costing. That commission had some doubts about the entire situation and these doubts were expressed in that report. The report suggested that this whole question should have been more carefully studied and that it might have been possible to obtain more precise information. If I remember correctly the report suggested this in respect of second class mail.

The hon. member for Calgary North related this matter to railway costing. In parts of North America railway experts are deeply involved in costing techniques. They are trying to decide how to allocate costs as between main and branch lines and different types of services. This is precisely the same problem which faces the Post Office Department and which it is, within the limits of its capacity, attempting to solve. This department is trying to allocate costs in relation to first, second, and third class mail. I think it has done a pretty good job, but I would like the opportunity, as would many other members on this

[Mr. Baldwin.]

side, of asking these officials about the techniques they use.

Are the techniques used by the Post Office Department of a similar nature to those used in other parts of the world or are they better? These are the things we would like to find out. It might well be that we would come away from the committee hearings quite satisfied with the methods used by the department in working out these costing statistics. That being the case we would then be faced only with a simple issue, namely, is the government right in changing these longstanding practices and introducing other practices?

Let me say as convincingly as I can that if this procedure had been followed this debate would have been concluded a week ago, the farm bills would have been passed, and we would now be deeply engaged in the budget debate. There are areas where it is essential that we conduct an inquisition in the form of a question and answer session. Certain things cannot be accomplished in any other way.

It is my suggestion that if the principle I have attempted to outline were adopted on both sides of the house the business of the government would be expedited. Let me leave the matter at that point. I think everything else has been said which could usefully be said during this debate. I did want to put those remarks on the record before the conclusion of this debate.

Mr. Kierans: Mr. Chairman, I think there is one other speaker. Following him I should like to conclude this debate.

Mr. Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): I should like to ask a question for the purpose of clarification. I understood the Postmaster General to say that bi-weekly and tri-weekly newspapers have always been classed as dailies. I just phoned Mr. Irwin McIntosh, the president of the Canadian Weekly Newspaper Association, and this is not his understanding. He thought the decision was made on the basis of content rather than the number of times each week a newspaper was published. I should like the minister to clear up this point. Are the daily newspapers facing a 400 per cent increase in rates?

Mr. Kierans: What I said in connection with bi-weeklies and tri-weeklies is that they have never had pre-zoning privileges and therefore these privileges were not being taken away. For purposes of definition we are in a sense classing newspapers which are published more than once a week as daily