

Post Office Act

I am not critical of the Postmaster General for trying to create confidence in his department but I do suggest that members of the government should use tact and wisdom when applying their powers, when those powers affect the lives of individuals and the enterprises in which they are engaged. I should like to refer in particular to one sector of the economy which is affected by these proposed increases in postal rates, the weekly newspapers. I have been told by the president of a weekly newspaper association in Canada that he knew nothing at all about details of this bill until he got a copy of it from myself.

Did the government not consider that these associations were important enough to be informed in advance of what was happening, or was it an attempt to outmanoeuvre those who would be expected to object to an increase in rates? It is obvious that the Postmaster General did not consult with the newspaper associations. I should like to point out that many of the newspapers in Canada are in financial difficulties. Recently we saw the *Family Herald* fold up; the *Western Producer* has been in financial trouble for a long time. Competition for advertising is hard, and these papers are not in a good position to compete for advertising with television and the larger dailies.

Specifically I object to the arbitrary decision by the department to class as dailies newspapers put out in towns or cities whose population exceeds 10,000. There are at least 79 such papers in Canada—almost as many weeklies as there are daily papers, so this is an important section of our newspaper production. The suggestion has been made to me that a 400 per cent increase in rates is being imposed in connection with these papers. In the case of one paper alone it means an increase of about \$1,800 in postal rates.

These people should have the opportunity to express their views and explain how the provisions of the bill would affect them. I am not a newspaperman; I am a farmer. Some members of this house may have worked on newspapers, but I do not think there are many here have had the experience of running a newspaper. I wonder whether we are qualified to judge whether the minister's proposals are desirable on the basis of the facts we have before us. That is why I think it is only fair we should refer this bill to a committee where those affected could make representations or where, for that matter, anyone who objected to these increases could explain his case. As I say, I do not feel competent to assess this situation and I have

[Mr. Thomson.]

the feeling that many other hon. members are not competent to do so, either. I find myself wondering whether the department has considered all the angles in this field. In these circumstances the first thing to do would be to refer this subject to a committee, hear representations, and go on from there.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West):

Like my hon. friend from Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) I spent the week end looking at the so-called white paper or the financial statement detailing the proposed rate adjustments, along with other documentation put out by the minister in support of Bill C-116. While we can understand the tables and so forth which have been put forward, none of it is backed up by evidence to show that the tables are right.

I put it to the minister. He is the one who is asking for the change, and the burden of proof is upon him. I maintain that having regard to the paucity of information given us in connection with many of the changes which are proposed, this bill must go to committee, as my hon. friend suggests, in order that we may get at the root of these financial difficulties and ascertain why money is being lost at certain levels.

We ought not to rely merely on the fact that the minister says so. The word of the minister is not necessarily the truth of the matter. After all, my hon. friend did show that somebody's computer, or the hand that was guiding it, was way out of line as between six months ago and the present time. All sorts of figures have been put forward as to what might be the results of the operations of the Post Office Department.

No doubt the minister does face a certain problem in connection with the operation, but I am wondering whether he has chosen the correct remedies. On the one hand they propose to reduce services and on the other to increase the cost to the public. Frankly I think that is the bankrupt way of running a business. What should be done is sell the services, increase the volume and make the operation more efficient.

● (9:00 p.m.)

With respect to efficiency, I quite appreciate that some of the government members here feel that the gospel has suddenly descended from the minister, and that what the minister proposes is the absolute truth. It is said that every effort has been made to improve the efficiency of the department. I happen to know postal employees and I can