

Post Office Act

I believe I pay \$18 a year for a subscription to a local daily paper. With the proposed change it will now cost me \$35. I know there are other people in the area who buy the same newspaper. Let me give the house an illustration. There is a small community which has been served by the railroad but this branch line is now being closed. The post office there is having some difficulty in providing mail service to the community. If the people there are lucky they will have mail delivery twice a week. However, before their mail reaches them there is a delay of perhaps three or four days. If anyone reads a newspaper in that area it will be a week or a week and a half old before he gets it. I believe the newspapers will find a great curtailment in subscriptions from that rural area.

Many changes should take place in the Post Office Department. Over the years I have been pleased to see that there has been a change in patronage in the operation of post offices and I think the Conservatives may be given some credit for it. I know this practice will continue but it is not as flagrant as it used to be. Post office officials are becoming more and more aware of their responsibility in recommending who should be appointed to be in charge of local post offices, who should get contracts and whether or not tenders are sufficiently high to sustain the required service. Formerly the tender system, particularly with regard to rural mail, was notorious in that a person could make a bid which would be accepted by the Post Office Department although it was well known that the bidder could not deliver mail with a horse and buggy at the price at which he bid. In many cases the local offices are now assisting people in their bids so that this problem does not exist to such an extent. We are also not running into the problem of a change in local post offices after an election which puts a new government in office.

I am still concerned about the number of requests that have come across my desk from people in my area asking for a new post office. I find that one has to go through the procedure of asking for a survey to be made to ascertain whether or not a post office in that area would bring revenue and whether premises should be rented or built. It seems to me that the officials in the Post Office Department are sufficiently well trained and able so that a member of parliament should not have to go through the process of asking for a survey to be made but should be able to write and ask them for a copy of the survey

[Mr. Peters.]

which they have made. This information should be brought up to date continually if the department is to be run in a businesslike way.

One person writes to me periodically asking that a count be made for the establishment of a postman's route for house delivery. Of course, sometimes this is a shady business. The mayor of the town may be opposed to a postal route in that area because he thinks that if people received their mail at home they would not walk by his store and he might be out of business. This is a pretty old-fashioned philosophy but the mayor may make so much fuss that the Post Office Department does not wish to oppose him after he has appeared on television and explained his point of view. These are the things which the minister should consider changing if he wishes to bring the act up to date.

I believe that the department should operate separately as a crown corporation or as a separate agency which would report periodically to parliament. I do not wish to become involved in the operation of the Post Office Department any more than I have to, and I hope other hon. members also feel that way. All we would have to do then would be to decide to what extent we want to subsidize such an agency, and instructions would be given by parliament toward that end.

I believe that referring this matter to a committee will assist the minister in deciding on the over-all direction which the Post Office Department should take. Judging from the remarks which the minister has made since he has been appointed Postmaster General and, even more important, before he came to this place, it is apparent at least to me that he has a business sense and wants to run the department in a businesslike way. If that is so, parliament should have the opportunity to decide on what kind of department we want before we give the Postmaster General the task of developing it. Therefore I hope the bill will be referred to a committee. I support the amendment.

● (4:40 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Dumont (Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) and his government, in spite of all the representations made to them, are determined to keep to the main lines of Bill No. C-116. As everyone can see, they will only concede some points with regard to second