

Postal Service

get back a few paltry tax dollars which in all probability will only be squandered by some other department of government.

I would be quite willing to see some other minister have responsibility for the proposed communications satellite if I had any reason to believe that by relieving the present minister of this heavy burden he would be in a position to devote his full time to the very real need to restore our postal services to respectability and reliability. The present minister, however, cannot do it. He has lost the respect of his department and of the people of Canada. He has proven himself to be completely incompetent to cope with the details of effectively running the Post Office Department.

Mr. Smerchanski: That is your opinion.

Mr. McCutcheon: It is the opinion of the bulk of Canadians, I believe. It was a little thing to him, but it was big in the eyes of Post Office boxholders in January this year when he tried to collect rent a second time even though people and firms had valid receipts for paid-up box rents.

• (5:10 p.m.)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. McCutcheon: Mr. Speaker, I have just one paragraph left.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement to allow the hon. member to carry on?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. McCutcheon: Mr. Speaker, it was not until the justice department handed down an opinion stating that proper Post Office receipts constituted a contract that he backed down. His attitude was: If I can get away with it, never mind the ethics. This was a small item with not much money involved but it was enough to destroy the minister's credibility. One would not buy a used car from a man like that.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak during this debate I should like to say that Canadians have never paid more for and received less from postal services than today. The residents of my own province of Manitoba might as well be living in the Rupert's Land of Hudson's Bay Company days when mail at best came half yearly by sailing ship and canoe.

[Mr. McCutcheon.]

In my opinion, the sad decline in convenient and reliable service by the Canadian Post Office and the steep increase in cost to ordinary Canadians is attributable to only one man, the new Minister of Communications (Mr. Kierans).

He alone can take credit for the fact that in Canada today private mail pick-up and delivery services are preferred by many people to the service provided by his department. He alone must bear the responsibility for doubling the ordinary postage rates, for no other reason than to raise a quick buck for his free-spending cabinet colleagues and to create a reputation for himself as a great innovator and reorganizer. He may well have come perilously close to innovating and reorganizing the postal service right out of existence.

Without experience in postal matters, without experience in federal administration and with nothing but far-out theories and an all-consuming desire to enhance his reputation as an artist of radical change, he took over the Post Office Department and proceeded to turn it upside down. He has done such a thorough job of disruption that by now there is little hope that a new minister could sort out the mess. He has reduced postal service to that of the days of the horse and the wind-jammer. In many ways a band of native runners carrying letters would be a more efficient way of handling the mail than the one he has instituted. Arbitrarily and without any adequate supporting evidence he has increased postal rates to burdensome proportions. By his heavyhanded and inept handling of Post Office employees he has all but destroyed departmental morale.

In a few short months the minister has successfully ruined a great public service which has operated for the benefit and to the satisfaction of Canadians since Confederation. Why has he brought about this havoc? In the name of what economist and business administrator has he acted? Apparently the only excuse for his actions has been his own opinion that all public services should pay their own way, that the postal service was running in the red and that he, the lone ranger of the Montreal Stock Exchange, must saddle up and ride to the rescue.

I for one do not believe there is any basis for the minister's contention that a public service of the nature of postal delivery should necessarily pay its way. I think every Canadian taxpayer would expect the department to be operated with economy and business efficiency. But I do not believe that the public of any nation would expect essential public